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1. Introduction

Literature has formed part of the human experience for millennia and is often associated with particular value and appreciation. The definition of what constitutes literature has varied greatly over time, sparking controversy and passionate discussions along the way. Much like the definition of literature itself, questions concerning literature's functions and its relationship with language and culture have captivated people's interest for a long time, and continue to do so to this day. Moreover, language learning is becoming more and more important in today's globalized world. One issue that has attracted particular attention is the role of literature in the teaching of foreign languages, which will be more closely examined in this thesis. After a history of shifting perceptions, it has attracted renewed and considerable attention in academia and among language teachers since the 1980s. Accordingly, literature is currently adopting "a higher profile" in language teaching contexts (Carter 10).

The potential of using literature in the language classroom is now increasingly being recognized, although it remains a controversial issue. The growing role of literature is based on the fact that it has been found to influence language learning positively. The most significant beneficial effects concern language acquisition per se, the students' personal development, intercultural understanding, as well as motivation and involvement (see Thaler, *Teaching* 23). However, in spite of these findings, literature remains a "marginalised resource in EFL classrooms" (Carter & Jones 69). As a consequence, the actual use of literature in language teaching does not reflect its potential. Reasons for this include teachers' concerns regarding literature as being time-consuming, difficult in terms of language and content, and irrelevant to many students' reasons for language learning (Carter & Jones 73-74). A central aim of this thesis therefore is the presentation of evidence of the value of literature in language teaching, in terms of both theoretical arguments and research results. At the same time, possible concerns and difficulties regarding this issue are examined. While the specific focus of this thesis lies on the teaching of English as a foreign language in Austrian secondary schools, much of the following will also apply to other contexts of language teaching.

There is a wealth of literary texts to choose from, and the selection of appropriate texts is one of the crucial factors in the successful incorporation of literature into language teaching. Alice Munro's short stories have been selected as the focus of this thesis, in

order to illustrate the potential of literature in the classroom through concrete examples. Short stories exhibit particular aptitude for the language classroom in terms of their brevity, narrative quality, accessibility, and variety (Thaler 78, Collie & Slater 196). Alice Munro is one of the most notable contemporary authors writing in English and has focused on writing short stories throughout her literary career. This literary career spans more than fifty years, fourteen collections of short stories and numerous awards, culminating in her 2013 win of the Nobel Prize in Literature. Munro's oeuvre has been studied from many different approaches, but until now there has been no coherent examination of how her short stories could be used to enrich the (high school) foreign language classroom. Those texts that address her stories in relation to educational purposes tend to refer to teaching literature in an English native speaker context, or at tertiary level (see for example Sterling, Cummins, Ngovo). The other main aim of this thesis therefore is to highlight the potential of Munro's stories for the foreign language classroom.

This potential for the language classroom lies in Munro's stories' literary and educational value, which is related to content as well as to form. Her fiction is renowned for its characteristic style, which is at the same time simple and skillfully crafted, as well as for its clear vision and empathy in portraying human behavior and motivations. Moreover, the themes that Munro explores, which include love, relationships and social class, for example, are relevant for the language learning classroom. This is particularly true for the Austrian context, where the high school leaving exam has just been extensively reorganized. For the new oral exam in English as a foreign language, a list of possible topics has been specified (see BMBF, *Themenpool*). Students' language proficiency will therefore also be measured by their ability to speak about these topics. Literature can be a valuable resource in advancing this ability, as will be exemplified by three selected stories by Munro in this thesis.

Nowadays, language learning plays an important role in many people's lives. A great amount of this language learning takes place in high school. In this context, literature is particularly relevant, as it can enrich language learning in various ways. This thesis combines the topic of literature in the language classroom with concrete examples from Alice Munro's fiction. The main aim of this thesis is thus twofold: to examine the value of literature as a resource in foreign language teaching, and to promote its use in the classroom. A critical survey of the current state of research on the subject, as well as the analysis of selected literary texts with regards to their potential for the language

classroom are intended to serve this purpose. This thesis therefore combines theoretical and practical considerations, and is meant to contribute to ongoing discussions of the subject, as well as to offer practical relevance for language teachers looking to advance their students' language proficiency.

In terms of organization, this thesis can be divided into two main parts: the first part (chapters 2-4) provides important background knowledge and contextualization regarding literature in the classroom and Alice Munro's writing, while the second part (chapter 5) consists in an analysis of selected short stories by Munro and their relevance for the classroom.

First of all, the issue of literature in foreign language teaching will be explored in more detail in chapter 2. In order to provide an overview, the historical development of literature in the language classroom will be explored before presenting an outline of its current situation. Then the fundamental arguments for using literature in language teaching will be introduced, with particular reference to empirical research and literature's role in the Common European Frame of Reference (CEFR) and Austrian school curricula. Literature's connection to the new Austrian Matura will be examined as well. After this, possible concerns and difficulties regarding the use of literature will be addressed, with particular attention to the selection of literary texts. The last part of chapter 2 will deal with different approaches to using literature in the classroom.

In chapter 3 the role of short stories in language teaching will be examined. For this purpose, the historical development of the genre will be outlined, followed by an exploration of the short story's definition, reception and current status. Subsequently, considerations regarding the use of short stories in the language classroom in general, and the use of Alice Munro's short stories in particular, will be presented.

Chapter 4 will then introduce relevant background information about Alice Munro. First, a biographical overview will be provided. Afterwards, the reception of her literary work will be analyzed, followed by a list of her published works. The final section of chapter 4 will focus on distinguishing features of Munro's writing style, which are also significant for the use of her stories in language teaching.

The next part, chapter 5, consists of the analysis of three selected stories by Munro. These stories, "Boys and Girls" (1964), "How I Met My Husband" (1974), and "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" (1999), will be studied in terms of their significant literary features as well as their relevance for the language classroom. For this purpose,

each story will be analyzed with regards to its essential features on the story level (plot, setting, characters, themes) and on the discourse level (narrative technique, structure, time, language and style). In terms of relevance for the language classroom, particular reference will be made to how the themes in each story relate to the themes presented in the *Themenpool* for the new Matura in Austria.

Through addressing these points in detail, this thesis is intended to contribute to ongoing discussions about the role of literature in language teaching. Due to the necessary limited scope of this thesis, a number of issues could not be explored in detail. Among others, these include assessment regarding literature in the language classroom, and a detailed analysis and presentation of practical activities for the use of literature in the language classroom. While these issues are certainly important, they could be better addressed in a different setting. This thesis can therefore not claim to offer an exhaustive account of the issues under consideration. Rather, it provides a partial account organized around the particular focus of how literature in general, and Alice Munro's stories in particular, can be used in the EFL classroom.

2. Literature in Foreign Language Teaching

Definitions of literature have varied considerably over time, and are also closely connected to different perceptions of literature's role in language teaching. In the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, literature is defined as follows:

A body of written works related by subject-matter (e.g. the literature of computing), by language or place of origin (e.g. Russian literature), or by prevailing cultural standards of merit. [...] Since the 19th century, the broader sense of literature as a totality of written or printed works has given way to more exclusive definitions based on criteria of imaginative, creative, or artistic value, usually related to a work's absence of factual or practical reference (see autotelic). Even more restrictive has been the academic concentration upon poetry, drama, and fiction. Until the mid-20th century, many kinds of non-fictional writing—in philosophy, history, biography, criticism, topography, science, and politics—were counted as literature; implicit in this broader usage is a definition of literature as that body of works which—for whatever reason—deserves to be preserved as part of the current reproduction of meanings within a given culture (unlike yesterday's newspaper, which belongs in the disposable category of ephemera). This sense seems more tenable than the later attempts to divide literature—as creative, imaginative, fictional, or non-practical—from factual writings or practically effective works of propaganda, rhetoric, or didactic writing. (189)

This definition gives some insight into the evolving classifications of texts as “literature”. In the following, the historical development of the role of literature in the

foreign language classroom will be explored alongside that of changing definitions of literature.

2.1 Historical Development

The role of literature in language teaching has long been the subject of intense debate, and as such has experienced major changes and reconsiderations over the past century.

At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, literature formed an integral part of language learning. The prevailing didactic approach until the late nineteenth century was the grammar translation method. Derived from the traditional study of Greek and Latin, it was based on the study of a foreign language's underlying system of grammatical rules and the two-way translation of sentences using the learners' first language (Thornbury 94). Literature featured prominently in this approach, to the point where learning a foreign language essentially meant "a close study of the canonical literature in that language" (Carter 6). Texts were restricted to those considered to be "classics" or "Literature with a capital 'L'" (McRae vii), and methodology was limited to grammatical analysis, translation and traditional literary criticism. The main objective of using literature was the transfer of those aspects of cultural heritage that were considered most valuable. Literature was seen as capturing the essence of culture, in the sense of "the best which had been thought and said" (Arnold viii), and was thus believed to form character and intellect in a way of "mental training" (Parkinson & Reid 9). Its study was further meant to provide students with a model of "good writing" for appropriation and imitation (Parkinson & Reid 9). This extensive reliance on literature began to decrease with the rise of the direct method around the turn of the century. At the core of this method were the exclusive use of the target language and a focus on spoken language, accompanied by the rejection of translation and metalanguage in the classroom (Thornbury 66). Literature's importance continued to decline sharply during the emergence of more functional models of language learning between the 1940s and 1960s (Carter 6). These models were the result of a structuralist shift in the understanding of language, focusing on its formal properties (Duff & Maley 3) and following a desire for more direct applicability of the language being learned to contexts outside of the classroom. Their proponents saw no use for literature, for it was deemed too far removed from everyday communicative needs and seen as rather elitist (Carter 6, Widdowson, *Talking Shop* 34). Furthermore,

the then popular audiolingual method heavily relied on spoken language and repetition. As a consequence, literature disappeared from foreign language classrooms almost completely during this time (Carter 6). To a large extent, these views persisted until the 1970s and 1980s, when the general shift towards communicative language teaching brought a reconsideration of the role and the potential of literature in foreign language learning (Carter 6). With communicative competence as the overall goal, authenticity of materials gained importance, as did the learners' proficiency in all four language skills (reading, listening, speaking, writing) (Thornbury 36-37). Literature became the subject of considerable interest and research efforts among teachers and the scientific community, with numerous benefits of its use being identified. These developments resulted in literature's gradual reintroduction into the language classroom, which is still underway today.

2.2 Current Situation and Issues of Interest

The interest in literature has continued into more recent years, with new issues being investigated alongside persisting fundamental questions (see Paran for an overview of recent developments). For example, increased attention as to how people read and make sense of texts has led to new insights about reading processes and how they work in different languages (see Grabe). At the same time, the role of the reader has been reconsidered: once merely seen as a passive recipient, the reader is now widely regarded as an active participant in the construction of meaning (Hedge 188). On a more general level, language learners are increasingly being recognized as agents of their own learning and reading. One popular approach to literature that is based on these ideas of active involvement is reader response, which has already been adopted by many teachers of foreign languages (Parkinson & Reid 4). Other current hot topics include the relationship between literature and culture, stylistics and its application in the language classroom, and the ways in which the special status of English as a global language of communication influences the EFL classroom in general and the teaching of literature in particular. Another related area of fairly recent interest is that of diversity in literature teaching. Increased awareness regarding the complexity of issues like culture and representation has led to discussions of how these concepts relate to literature, and what this means for the language classroom. For example, the controversy surrounding literary canons and text selection has been further stimulated by the growing acknowledgement of world Englishes and the widespread use of English as a Lingua

Franca (Carter 6). Many people see the traditional focus on famous works by “dead white men” as reductive and as not accurately reflecting the reality of today’s world. This has brought about calls for the inclusion of more diverse literary texts in the classroom, both in terms of authors and narrated contexts. The question of whether (and how) working with literature can increase intercultural competence has also been at the forefront of recent debates (Thaler, *Teaching* 70).

However, despite avid interest in the topic of literature in the foreign language classroom, empirical research remains relatively scarce. This has been pointed out by several scholars in the field (e.g. Carter 11, Paran 469), and is something both proponents and opponents of using literature agree on (see Paran 469, e.g. Hanauer, Edmondson). Several factors play a role in this lack of research, for example the rather complicated accessibility of school classrooms to researchers and the frequent dismissal of teachers’ accounts of their classroom practice with literature. Paran argues that this “practitioner evidence” should be taken into account as well, since it can provide valuable insights into what is actually happening in the classroom and into what has and has not worked before, often documenting experiences over extended periods of time (470). Moreover, these papers can be of particular relevance to other language teachers, as they directly address the issues that arise from the practical application of literature in language teaching. Nonetheless, while these accounts are of evident value, they cannot substitute further empirical studies into the effectiveness of literature and the issues surrounding it (e.g. classroom procedures, teacher and learner roles, classroom interaction, literature’s effect on language proficiency). The research that does exist, albeit small in number, provides important support for the use of literature in foreign language teaching (see Section 4.2 for an overview). It therefore is to be hoped that in the future, more research will focus on examining these issues and consequently provide the empirical data necessary for further critical discussion on the topic. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that not all of the relevant issues can be resolved by empirical research, as some depend on the conceptual understanding of issues involved in language learning. These include the conception of the basic roles of learners and teachers and the purpose of language learning as well as the definition of literature. For this reason, both theoretical and empirical aspects will be explored further in this chapter.

Literature is gradually assuming a more prominent position in language learning than it held some years ago (Carter 10). However, despite growing acceptance of literature’s

potential, its actual use as a resource in language teaching continues to be fairly restricted (Thornbury 125, Carter & Jones 69). Thus there still seems to be a need for highlighting the benefits of using literature in language teaching, as well as for addressing possible concerns and difficulties and suggesting ways of overcoming them. Sections 4 and 5 will therefore examine these issues in more detail.

2.3 Why Literature?

2.3.1 Benefits

A number of benefits of the use of literature in foreign language teaching have been identified by notable scholars. For example, Collie and Slater already brought forward some of the fundamental arguments for literature in 1987. They illustrate that literature constitutes “valuable authentic material”, that it can contribute to students’ “cultural enrichment” as well as “language enrichment”, and that it offers unique possibilities for “personal involvement” (3-6).

Meanwhile, Carter and Long summarize reasons for using literature in EFL in three main points: “the cultural model” (literature as “accumulated wisdom” of a certain culture, helping students to understand different notions of literature and culture as characteristics of the human existence), “the language model” (literature as a valuable instrument in advancing language acquisition) and “the personal growth model” (literature as supporting students’ personal development) (2-3). These three models are meant to illustrate teachers’ distinct approaches to teaching literature, but are not mutually exclusive in practice.

Lazar’s line of reasoning coincides with that of Carter and Long, but is organized differently. She lists six main arguments for the use of literature in language learning: literature equals “motivating material”, it can provide students with “access to cultural background”, it plays an important role in “encouraging language acquisition” and “expanding students’ language awareness”, and provides opportunities for “developing students’ interpretative abilities” and “educating the whole person” (15-19).

Duff and Maley in turn present “three types of justification” for literature: “linguistic” (literary texts are interesting language-wise because they “offer genuine samples of a very wide range of styles, registers, and text-types at many levels of difficulty”), “methodological” (literary texts are inherently “open to multiple interpretations” and therefore offer an “opinion gap” which encourages “genuine interaction”), and

“motivational” (literary texts differ from many other classroom material due to being “non-trivial”, which makes them more likely to engage students) (6).

In the most recent of these accounts, Thaler lists six central reasons for literature that have been brought forward repeatedly: “language development”, “intercultural learning”, “personal enrichment”, “motivational value”, “interpretational openness” and “social prestige” (*Teaching* 23).

Examining the arguments presented by these authors, the main benefits of using literature can therefore be summarized as:

1. supporting language acquisition
2. encouraging personal development
3. fostering (inter-)cultural understanding
4. motivating and engaging students

These will be explored in more detail in the following paragraphs.

The first argument for literature focuses on the various ways in which it can help language acquisition. One essential feature to consider is that literary texts constitute authentic input, offering a wide variety of language forms in meaningful context (Duff & Maley 6, Collie & Slater 3). Dealing with this kind of input can help to further students’ understanding and awareness of language. While the “difficult” and “deviant” language of literary texts is a rather common concern among teachers, the fact that language is used differently in literature than in everyday life can actually help students become more conscious of the rules of target language use (see Widdowson, *Stylistics*). Another aspect is that as texts which often address “fundamental human issues” (Collie & Slater 3) and which were not specifically designed for educational purposes, literary texts differ significantly from the texts commonly found in language teaching textbooks. Literature also tends to be different from other types of texts being utilized in the classroom (e.g. brochures, advertisements, articles, e-mails), in terms of its narrative quality, linguistic diversity and thematic content. For these reasons, literature is often more interesting and engaging than other texts, and can provide a particularly stimulating basis for students’ language learning. Moreover, literature lends itself to practicing the four skills (reading, listening, speaking, writing) and consequently to enhancing students’ overall language proficiency. It seems fairly self-evident that students can improve their reading ability through working with literature. Literary texts can be used for both intensive and extensive reading activities, as well as for practicing

different reading skills. As mentioned above, literature might be more engaging than other texts and, therefore, provide particularly valuable reading practice (Carter & Long 6). In terms of using literary texts to work on listening, a simple example is the teacher reading a text out aloud, or students reading it to each other. Nowadays, there is also an ever-growing body of literature being made available in audio formats, which offers interesting possibilities for listening exercises. In addition, the use of literature provides natural opportunities for students to express their opinions and emotions, and as such is a great starting point for meaningful discussions and group work in which students can practice speaking. With regards to writing, the reading of literary texts can be combined with a variety of different writing tasks. Going beyond the traditional interpretation and commentary, literature can be analyzed as an illustration of successful writing in the foreign language that students could learn from, or serve as an inspiration and point of departure for students' own creative writing. Another option is for learners to rewrite part of a story or to rewrite it completely, for example to suit a different genre. All these items illustrate that literature is a valuable resource in terms of encouraging language learning.

The second argument refers to literature's potential for fostering students' personal development. One way in which literature encourages personal growth is by offering students a genuine opportunity to reflect on their own feelings, ideas and opinions in the light of a literary text (Collie & Slater 6, Carter & Long 3). Collie and Slater refer to "the delight of encountering one's own thoughts or situations encapsulated vividly in a work of art" and "the other, equal delight of finding those same thoughts or situations illuminated by a totally new, unexpected light or perspective" (6-7) as special incentives in working with literature. This can help students to better understand how they think and feel, and how this relates to the thoughts and emotions of others. It can also stimulate the questioning of one's own and other people's assumptions. An important benefit of engaging with literature can therefore be the enhancement of critical thinking skills. Moreover, in working with literature, students can develop and expand their interpretive ability, enabling them to critically examine a variety of cultural products (Carter & Long 3). This is particularly important since the ability "to infer meaning and to make interpretations" is relevant for and transferable to virtually all situations of language learning (Lazar 19). In terms of lifelong learning, a further beneficial aspect is that students might discover pleasure in reading and carry an appreciation of literature

and a desire to keep reading into their lives beyond the classroom (Carter & Long 3). Students can thus substantially benefit from working with literature on a personal level.

The third argument asserts that literature can increase cultural understanding. While the definition of the concept of culture is controversial, there is little doubt that it plays a significant role in both everyday life and in language learning. However, due to its multifaceted character, culture is difficult to convey in the classroom. Literature can help in overcoming this problem. For example, one literary text can illustrate different ways of living within a society, or various texts can be examined and compared in terms of their depiction of aspects of culture. This can lead to a better understanding of other cultures as well as of students' own culture(s). Engaging with literary texts and the ideas and ways of life presented in them can help students in comprehending the way society works and what their own role in it could be (Carter & Long 3). Literature can also illustrate other cultures and traditions and make them more accessible to students. As Collie and Slater point out:

It is true of course that the 'world' of a novel, play, or short story is a created one, yet it offers a full and vivid context in which characters from many social backgrounds can be depicted. A reader can discover their thoughts, feelings, customs, possessions; what they buy, believe in, fear, enjoy; how they speak and behave behind closed doors. This vivid imagined world can quickly give the foreign reader a feel for the codes and preoccupations that structure a real society. (4)

This plays a special role in language learning as language is closely related to culture and society and students often want to find out more about the "culture" of the language they are learning. Literature can contribute to a positive attitude towards other cultures by increasing awareness for and understanding of difference as the basis for tolerance and acceptance. At the same time, literature can be a unifying force through its inclusion of universal themes and can illustrate which aspects of life are shared across cultures. Literature can therefore contribute to a more profound understanding of different cultures in various ways.

The fourth argument is based on literature's capacity of promoting engagement and motivation. This is particularly important since students' motivation and personal involvement have proven to be crucial factors in language learning (Thornbury 137-138). Consequently, if literature can help to increase motivation and engagement, this will have positive effects on students' overall language learning. The interesting and meaningful contents at the heart of most literary texts play an important role in this

respect. The basic notion is that if students are interested in a text, they are more likely to learn from it (Collie & Slater 6). As has been mentioned above, literature can often be more interesting and engaging than other texts. Literature, “which speaks to the heart as much as to the mind” (Collie & Slater 2) is more likely to relate to students’ lives and thus arguably in a better position to provoke a genuine response (Carter & Jones 79). Working with literary texts can also provide students with a sense of achievement, especially if reading literature is seen as a prestigious activity in their social environment (Lazar 15). Moreover, literature facilitates catering to students’ different preferences and learning styles by offering diverse content and opportunities for methodological variation. In terms of variation, “engaging imaginatively with literature” can also provide a counterbalance to working on “more mechanical aspects of the foreign language system” (Collie & Slater 5). For example, if students become involved with a literary text and want to find out what happens next, language concerns can become secondary (as long as there is no extensive comprehension failure), creating a situation of active engagement in the target language without conscious focus on language. For these reasons, literature’s motivating and engaging qualities are important features in the foreign language classroom.

The four arguments that have just been presented are related in different ways. It is therefore recommendable not to view them as completely separate from each other. For example, while “cultural understanding” in itself is a valuable benefit of working with literature, it can also be seen as an aspect contributing to students’ “personal development”. Overall, the various ways in which students can profit from working with literary texts complement and reinforce each other. Together they form the basis of the argument for the inclusion of literature in the language classroom. The effects of literature on language teaching have also been examined through research. The following section will provide an overview of noteworthy findings.

2.3.2 Research

First of all, it must be noted that research examining the role of literature in foreign language teaching has been surprisingly limited. Nonetheless, for Paran, the “move to data-based discussion” is “[p]ossibly the most important development in the field of literature in the language classroom in recent years” (470), supplementing theoretical debate and practitioner exploration. Even though empirical studies examining the use of literature are still quite few in numbers, those studies that have been done offer valuable

insights and empirical support for theoretical arguments.

For example, Kim analyzed the effects that using literature had on a class of university students in the US who were enrolled in an Intensive English program (147). She focused in particular on the method of literary circles, and found that they generated meaningful interaction among students, which differed significantly from the “more limited IRE (Initiation-Response-Evaluation) patterns found in many language lessons” (Paran 472). Her findings indicate that students “emotionally and intellectually participated in the text” by actively negotiating “literal comprehension, personal connections, cross-cultural themes, interpretation, and evaluation” (151). Moreover, Kim highlights students’ engagement in such “lively social interactions” as significantly contributing to the improvement of their language skills (159). This supports the theoretical claim that working with literature provides important opportunities for classroom interaction between students, as well as showing that students did in fact engage with literary texts on both cognitive and personal levels. Furthermore, it emphasizes literature’s potential for improving language proficiency through encouraging meaningful discussions.

In two different studies (*Reading: Science Fiction*), Yang adopted a comparative approach by examining groups of language learners working with literature alongside corresponding groups studying language without using literature. The results showed that the literature groups’ improvements in terms of language proficiency exceeded the achievements by those groups not using literature. This further supports the idea that literature plays a significant role in helping to increase overall language proficiency.

Lao and Krashen also compared a group of language students using literary texts to a group not using them. According to the authors, their study provides “additional support for the power of reading”, as the students using literature exhibited notable progress in terms of their language skills as opposed to their colleagues working without literature. However, these results might not be directly applicable to contexts of utilizing literature in high school foreign language teaching, as the study was conducted at university level and the course organization corresponded more to extensive reading than to incorporating literature into “traditional” language teaching.

Several surveys have analyzed teachers’ and students’ views regarding literature in language teaching. While learners have been found to be skeptical towards literature in general inquiries, their doubts are likely related to the way literature is often taught

(Paran 477). Interestingly, those students who actually participated in language courses making use of literature tend to exhibit significantly more positive attitudes towards literature (see Paran 478-480). In one study, Khatib and Askari even found that using literature in university General English classes improved students' overall attitudes towards English and second language learning. Other studies have looked at foreign language students' attitudes towards different types of literature and how this could affect the selection of classroom texts and students' involvement and progress (Tseng, Yilmaz).

Certain parallels can be drawn between students' and teachers' opinions concerning literature: while many teachers believe literature to be a valuable resource, they often express doubts about its classroom applicability (Carter & Jones, Thaler, *Teaching* 27). It is important to note here that most foreign language teachers were never trained in the use of literature, which might explain their insecurities regarding methodology and cause them to "fall back on the way they were taught, perpetuating teacher-centered approaches" (Paran 480). Fortunately, this seems to be changing: as literature's role in language teaching is gaining importance, courses are being implemented to train (future) teachers in its use. A case in point is the "Literature and Culture in the EFL Classroom" course for prospective teachers at the department of English at the University of Vienna.

Generally speaking, a significant amount of the criticism concerning literature in language teaching has been related to methodological concerns. The results of studies examining classroom interaction in language classes involving literature can shed some light on the reasons for such criticism. Several studies have illustrated the tendency for language classes involving literature to be teacher-centered and offer little opportunity for student production and interaction (including Mantero, Donato & Brooks and Weist – see Paran 473-475 for a summary of the results). While these studies covered different levels of language proficiency, they were all conducted in university contexts. The use of display questions was found to be a common feature in such classes, presumably due to the fact that teachers believed the literary texts they worked with had "an intrinsic meaning" (Paran 473) that they were trying to guide students towards. Other notable trends were that interactions between teachers and students were predominantly restricted to a "clear IRE pattern" (Paran 473), and that teacher talk took up most of the lessons, leaving little room for student talk. Teachers thus tended to dominate these classes in a way that seemed to hinder active participation by students. However,

teacher involvement has also been shown to have positive effects, particularly when the teacher was responsive to students' input and promoted student talk (Boyd & Maloof). Another aspect which research has found to be of critical importance in lessons involving language and literature is that of task design (Paran 475). Overall, it is clear that changes are desirable in terms of classroom interaction in lessons combining language and literature teaching. The focus should be shifted from teachers as "imparting information" (Collie & Slater 7) on students as active learners, providing them with opportunities to practice the target language. Suggestions for how this can be achieved in teaching practice will be presented later on in this paper.

In terms of research, it is worth noting that all studies cited above were carried out at universities. The lack of studies investigating literature use in high school language teaching contexts is surprising, given the importance of this sector in overall numbers of language learners. This is an area in urgent need of empirical examination, both by researchers based in universities and by (language) teachers working at these schools.

2.3.3 CEFR and Curricula

The use of literary texts in the language classroom is further supported through the explicit recognition of literature's potential in the Common European Frame of Reference (CEFR) and many language curricula. Several of the benefits outlined in section 4.1 have already been recognized and recorded in language teaching curricula around the world. Since the focus of this thesis is on English teaching in Austria, the CEFR and Austrian secondary school curricula will be referred to in order to illustrate this point.

2.3.3.1 CEFR

The value of literature in language teaching is emphasized in the Common European Frame of Reference. On a general level, using literature is characterized as beneficial due to its role in supporting language acquisition and in helping "to develop socio-cultural knowledge and aesthetic enjoyment of language" (Carter & Long 70). Literature is described as a crucial tool for language learners to discover "[a]esthetic uses of language", which are "important both educationally and in their own right" (Council of Europe 56). At the same time, the CEFR emphasizes that "[l]iterary studies serve many more educational purposes – intellectual, moral and emotional, linguistic and cultural – than the purely aesthetic" (Council of Europe 56). On a more specific level, literature is also explicitly linked to several of the outcomes listed in the CEFR.

For example, the reading descriptor at B2 level reads “I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.” (Council of Europe 27). This is directly relevant for Austrian high school students, as the target level of English language proficiency required for the Matura (school leaving exam) is B2. The CEFR also includes literature in the reading descriptors for level C1 (“I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style”) and level C2 (“I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works”) (Council of Europe 27). The ability to read literature is thus seen as an important feature of proficiency in a language.

Literature’s relevance is, however, not restricted to reading skills, but also closely associated with other skills, such as speaking and writing. Illustrative examples for speaking at B1 proficiency level include “[c]an relate the plot of a book or film and describe his/her reactions”, “[c]an describe events, real or imagined” and “[c]an narrate a story” (Council of Europe 59). “Can narrate a story” is also given as an example for writing at level B1 (Council of Europe 62). Examples for writing at level B2 include “[c]an write clear, detailed descriptions of real or imaginary events and experiences” and “[c]an write a review of a film, book or play” (Council of Europe 62).

The CEFR thus clearly advocates the use of literature for language learning. As the majority of current European curricula and textbooks for teaching English are based on the CEFR, the fact that literature is still a rather neglected resource in language teaching is particularly surprising. Jones and Carter highlight this fact in their 2011 article and consequently point out that “if we are to judge a learner’s competence against the CEFR, literature should play a much less marginalised role in the classroom” (70). This is certainly an interesting observation for language teachers to consider. Overall, the CEFR’s explicit support of literature is a further argument for using literary texts in the language classroom.

2.3.3.2 Austrian Curricula

Austria has quite a diverse secondary school system, with each school type following its own curriculum. However, these curricula share several important points with regards to English language teaching and the use of literature. This agreement is partly due to the fact that the CEFR has been adopted as the basis for language curricula in Austria,

following its publication in 2001. The levels of proficiency specified in the CEFR now form part of the various curricula, which means that the descriptors listed in section 4.3.1 are equally applicable. There are further similarities between the arguments for literature stated in the CEFR and in Austrian curricula. For example, literature is repeatedly referred to as a valuable resource in furthering language proficiency. This is illustrated in the AHS Oberstufe curriculum, which states that “[z]ur Erlangung eines möglichst umfassenden lexikalischen Repertoires sind verschiedenste Themenbereiche zu bearbeiten“, and cites “Kunst in ihren Ausdrucksformen Literatur, Musik, bildende Künste“ as an example (Lehrplan AHS-Oberstufe 4). Moreover, it specifies that these different topic areas should be developed through “möglichst vielfältige Textsorten“, including, for example “Geschichten“, “Märchen” and “Gedichte” (Lehrplan AHS-Oberstufe 4).

A further important argument for literature is the possibility of using it to introduce students to different ideas, perspectives and cultures. Similar to the points regarding “fostering (inter-)cultural understanding” outlined in section 4.1, literature is seen as a resource facilitating the creation of awareness, tolerance and acceptance. The importance of this aspect with regard to European and international contexts is highlighted in several curricula (Lehrplan AHS-Oberstufe 1, Lehrplan BAKIP 39, Lehrplan HLT 8). The BAKIP curriculum states:

Die Schülerinnen und Schüler sollen [...] über die Fremdsprache soziale und kulturelle Gegebenheiten anderer Länder kennen lernen, um deren Kulturen und Wertsysteme auf der Basis von gegenseitiger Toleranz und Wertschätzung zu respektieren und eine kritische Distanz zur eigenen Weltsicht zu erwerben. Darauf aufbauend sollen sie zur Mitarbeit an der europäischen Integration sowie zu internationaler Verständigung bereit und fähig sein (Lehrplan BAKIP 39)

In addition, the use of literary texts is advocated explicitly in different curricula. The AHS Oberstufe curriculum reads: “Im Sinne einer humanistisch orientierten Allgemeinbildung ist bei der thematischen Auswahl fremdsprachiger Texte auch literarischen Werken ein entsprechender Stellenwert einzuräumen“ (Lehrplan AHS-Oberstufe 4). Similarly, the BAKIP curriculum specifies that “[b]ei der Auswahl der Textsorten haben literarische Texte gleichberechtigt neben Gebrauchstexten Verwendung zu finden“ (Lehrplan BAKIP 40).

2.3.4 Matura Reform: “Neue kompetenzorientierte Reifeprüfung“

Another reason for the use of literature in the English language classroom is the list of topic areas that form part of the new Austrian Matura. The final high school leaving

exam in Austria, called Matura, has recently undergone major structural changes. In an attempt to ensure consistent high quality and to achieve more fairness, objectivity and comparability, the Matura exam has been standardized and organized around testable skills (BMBF, *Die neue AHS-Reifeprüfung*). This new exam format has taken effect in the 2014/2015 school year for AHS, and will do so for BHS in the upcoming 2015/2016 school year (BMBF, *Die neue AHS-Reifeprüfung*). The new Matura format is based on three main components: a pre-academic paper (“vorwissenschaftliche Arbeit”), written exams, and oral exams (BMBF, *Matura Neu*). Students can choose whether they want to take three written exams and three oral exams, or four written exams and two oral exams. German, Mathematics and one modern foreign language are obligatory subjects for the written exams. For the oral exams, students are free to select from the eligible subjects according to their preferences. The written exams are fully standardized for all main subjects, and the format and topics for the oral exams are also predetermined (BMBF, *Standardisierte kompetenzorientierte Reifeprüfung an AHS*).

This has far-reaching implications for the EFL classroom. First of all, there are now clearly defined standards of language proficiency which all students need to achieve in order to pass the Matura. These standards are based on the levels of proficiency outlined in the CEFR. While the CEFR thus constitutes the main frame of reference, some adaptations have been made. For example, the Austrian Ministry for Education and Women (BMBF) has released a list of possible topics for the oral exam in all foreign languages, called *Themenpool*. This list constitutes a selection from the topics featured in the CEFR (48-49, 51-53). The 24 topics specified in the *Themenpool* are thus the topics that students need to be able to talk about at the target level of B2 proficiency for the Austrian Matura. Language teachers are required to assure that these topics are treated in the classroom throughout students’ time at high school. The list of 24 topics for B2 proficiency level (BMBF, *Themenpool* 13) is reproduced in Table 1.

While it certainly makes sense to have such a list of topics, it can be challenging for teachers to find meaningful ways of addressing all of these topics in class. This is where literature can be of great help. First of all, literature presents these topics in meaningful context, providing background information and concrete examples of the issues at hand. This can help students to better understand these issues, and introduce them to a range of factors to take into consideration, thus enhancing their ability to talk about the topics in a substantial way. Secondly, literature can function as a catalyst for discussion of these topics on a broader level. It is generally easier and more profitable to discuss such

issues departing from concrete examples, rather than approaching them out of context. Students can then talk about their reactions to the literary text and the issues presented in it, as well as compare them to their own experiences. In a further step, the relevance of these issues with regards to broader societal frameworks can be the subject of analysis and debate. Literature can thus help students to acquire solid abilities in discussing the topics included in the *Themenpool* from a variety of angles.

1.	Beziehungen und soziale Netzwerke	13.	Kunst und Kultur
2.	Wohnen und Umgebung	14.	Medien
3.	Mode und Trends	15.	Kommunikation
4.	Ernährung, Gesundheit und soziale Absicherung	16.	Natur und Umwelt
5.	Sport (inkl. gesellschaftspolitische und wirtschaftliche Dimensionen)	17.	Moderne Technologien
6.	Schule und Bildung	18.	Persönliche Zukunft / Pläne
7.	Arbeitswelt (inkl. übernationale und globale Aspekte)	19.	Interkulturelle Aspekte
8.	Freizeitverhalten	20.	Erwachsenwerden und Identitätsfindung (inkl. Rollen und Vorbilder, nationale Identität...)
9.	Konsumgesellschaft	21.	Politik und Institutionen des öffentlichen Lebens
10.	Tradition und Wandel	22.	Die globalisierte Welt
11.	Transport und Tourismus	23.	Gesellschaftliche Gruppierungen (Minderheiten, Randgruppen...)
12.	Landeskundliche Aspekte	24.	Regeln, Vorschriften, Gesetze (Jugendkriminalität, persönliche Freiheit...)

Table 1: *Themenpool B2*

2.3.5 Recapitulation

In summary, the strongest and most universally accepted argument for using literature in the EFL classroom is literature's role in advancing language acquisition. However, arguments regarding students' personal growth, students' motivation and the development of intercultural competence should not be disregarded. This is particularly true if our goal as teachers and as a society at large is the education of "mündige Bürger" (mature citizens). Such education must by definition be based on a holistic approach, targeting not only formal competence in the foreign language, but also personal development of students as learners and active members of society. Therefore, it can be argued that the use of literature in the EFL classroom is valuable both as a facilitative resource in language learning per se, and as a means of fostering holistic

learning and personal growth. Having outlined these advantages, we will now move on to examining possible concerns and difficulties regarding the use of literature in language teaching.

2.4 Concerns and Possible Difficulties

In spite of the numerous benefits associated with incorporating literature into foreign language education, many teachers are still reluctant towards using literature in their classrooms. Common issues of concern include the amount of time needed to work with literature and the alleged difficulty of literary texts. Some teachers also do not feel confident enough about their own knowledge of literature to teach it to their students or are unsure of how to use literary texts effectively. Carter and Jones examined teachers' opinions regarding the use of literature in language teaching, and found several prevalent concerns. Even though their survey was restricted to a small sample of university teachers of English (teaching EFL and EAP classes), it is reasonable to assume that many language teachers struggle with similar issues. These teachers' main concerns were students' (negative) reaction to literature, literature's (lack of) relevance to students' learning objectives, insufficient classroom time for reading and working with literature, the time and effort needed to prepare literature work, and the linguistic and cultural difficulty of literary texts (Carter & Jones 73-74). Collie and Slater also cite similar recurring teacher questions regarding literature; namely how to reconcile text length and classroom time, how to select texts and passages, how to organize reading (of longer texts), how to accommodate students different reading speeds, and how to deal with the linguistic difficulty of literary texts (11-14). Similar points are further mentioned by Parkinson and Reid (11-12) and on the British Council's introductory website regarding literature in ELT. The most common difficulties associated with the use of literature in the language classroom are summarized in Table 2 below:

Text	language difficulty
	cultural difficulty
	selection
	length
Classroom	time (reading & classroom work)
	time (preparation)
	productive activities
Learners	relevance to learners' goals
	individual differences (abilities & preferences)
	attitude and motivation

Table 2: *Possible Difficulties of Using Literature*

Different ways of addressing these difficulties have been suggested. For instance, Carter and Jones introduce a teaching framework based on the three “guiding principles” of “access”, “activity” and “awareness” (74). Teachers are encouraged to use this framework as a basis for their literature teaching in order to avoid the aforementioned difficulties. In the following, Carter and Jones’ three principles will be explained in connection to the difficulties they can help to avoid. The first principle (“access”) aims at making a text’s difficulty in terms of language and culture more manageable and at engaging students from the beginning. For this purpose, Carter and Jones recommend that the texts selected for classroom work should have “an access point for learners” and not “require extensive explanation of cultural reference points before students can begin” to work on them (75). Before introducing a literary text, “access tasks” can help to activate background knowledge and catch students’ interest (76). The second principle (“activity”) emphasizes students’ active role in working with a literary text. Involving students should positively influence their attitude and motivation and make activities more productive. Moreover, this allows for catering to students’ individual differences and should increase their motivation in overcoming any difficulties caused by language or culture. To achieve this, Carter and Jones advocate setting tasks that provide students with opportunities for active involvement (76). The third principle (“awareness”) is organized around the idea that language awareness can be increased through working with literature. Carter and Jones encourage teachers to make use of “language awareness tasks” to release this potential. At the same time, these tasks present a way of addressing the reasons for linguistic difficulty explicitly and thus helping students to overcome such difficulty, while simultaneously building their overall language proficiency. In addition to these three principles, Carter and Jones highlight the “need for a pay-off” in working with literature and propose direct links to the desired outcomes for language learning as stated in the CEFR (74). They argue that this can improve students’ acceptance of and motivation in working with literature, since it is made clear how this work helps them in achieving specific language proficiency goals (80). The problem of literature’s relevance to students can thus be resolved by connecting literary work to their overall goals and pointing out its beneficial effects.

Following the list of common difficulties in Table 2, further solutions can be proposed. Language and cultural difficulty can usually be overcome through preparation of the reading and additional tasks addressing difficult aspects. The selection of appropriate

texts for a certain target group of language learners is a crucial feature of avoiding difficulties regarding language and culture. As mentioned above, the selection of texts that offer some kind of “access point” to learners can help to reduce cultural difficulties. Text selection can be facilitated by taking learners’ needs and preferences into account, and by following a set of criteria for selection. Since the selection of a literary text crucially affects all subsequent decisions, this question will be addressed in more detail in the following section. It seems rather futile to suggest any separate solutions for text length concerns, as they are so closely associated with other questions of selection, as well as with questions of available time. Issues regarding time constraints can be resolved through careful planning and organization. For example, some of the reading can be done as a home assignment, or shorter texts can be chosen to be read in class if the time available is very limited. It is also worth considering the positive effects that spending additional time and effort on working with literature can have on students and their language learning. The challenge of setting profitable activities can be eased by consulting suggestions in the available literature (e.g. Collie & Slater, Ur, McRae, McRae & Vethamani, Thaler *Teaching*) and where necessary, adapting these to the situation at hand. It might also be helpful to consider the objectives behind working with a particular literary text and then adjust activities to better suit these objectives. Literature’s relevance to students’ goals can be addressed by discussing this issue with students and explicitly relating literary work to their goals. Highlighting how students can benefit from working with literature might provide additional motivation. Students’ individual differences should be taken into account in the selection of texts and the setting of tasks. If possible, offering students several choices (of texts or tasks) is a good way of catering for individual needs. Moreover, the literary texts used in the classroom should preferably cover different topics and styles in order to appeal to a larger number of students. Further problems with students’ attitudes and motivation can be avoided by careful selection of texts and thoughtful design and organization of tasks. The selection of texts and tasks is thus a key factor in avoiding and overcoming possible difficulties. This issue of text selection will be explored in more detail in the following section.

2.4.1 Selection of Literary Texts

The importance of the careful selection of literary texts has been emphasized by various authors (see for example Carter 5, Lazar 48, Collie & Slater 6, Thaler *Teaching* 18). Thaler claims that

[w]hen reading literature in class, the first and foremost task is to select a suitable work of literature for one's learners. The students' motivation and the efficiency of the learning process depend to a large extent on the right choice of literature. (*Teaching* 18)

He then goes on to point out “the three C’s - catalogue, canon, criteria” as helpful points of departure (*Teaching* 18). He states that while publisher’s catalogues can provide a good overview of what is out there, a canon of literature in a certain language can offer orientation regarding which books and authors are generally regarded as “classics”. However, canons are often seen as problematic due to their “prescriptive, imperative quality” (Thaler, *Teaching* 19) and, especially in language teaching, the linguistic difficulty of the texts they contain. Following these initial considerations, Thaler presents a list of criteria to be taken into consideration for text selection (*Teaching* 20). This list reproduced here as Table 3, as it seems to be a useful basis for decisions of selection, covering all central issues.

Collie and Slater also state that a text’s suitability depends on students’ “needs, interests, cultural background and language level”, but to them, the essential question is whether a text can stimulate “personal involvement” (6). They agree that linguistic difficulty should be taken into account, but emphasize that “[i]nterest, appeal and relevance are all more important” (6). They argue that if students engage with a text on a personal level, they will be much more likely to overcome “the linguistic obstacles that might be considered too great in less involving material” (7). For this reason, the selection of texts is very important and sufficient time should be reserved for it. They suggest that teachers should try to find out what students like, for example through “questionnaires on tastes and interests” (7), or that teachers let students choose from a number of suggested texts.

Criteria for selection	
school	• type of school • level (primary, secondary)
learner	• age • level of proficiency • subjective valence (<i>Betroffenheit</i>) • interests • background
teacher	• personal favorites • study background • competences
text	• availability of text • linguistic difficulty • thematic complexity • literary genre • curricular conformity • length • aesthetic quality • topicality • popularity • methodological material (lesson plans, worksheets, analyses) • text-related media (film adaptations, audio books, websites) • exploitability for language learning (skills, competences)

Table 3: *Criteria for Text Selection (Thaler)*

Summarizing the points brought forward by these authors, the main criteria to base text selection on are:

Learner:

- age
- proficiency
- background
- interests

Text:

- availability
- difficulty (linguistic and thematic)
- length
- exploitability
- relation to curriculum

Additionally, the type of school or language course and the teacher's formation and preferences should be taken into account as well. Thinking about these criteria of selection before choosing a text can contribute significantly to a profitable experience of using literature in the EFL classroom.

2.5 Approaches to Using Literature

As has been observed earlier, the way in which literature is used in language teaching greatly influences outcomes as well as perceptions by students and teachers. Over the years, an array of different approaches to literature has been employed around the world. Many researchers and teachers writing about the use of literature in the foreign language classroom consequently distinguish between more “traditional” and more “modern” approaches (Parker & Reid 26-39, Collie & Slater 7-10). Traditional approaches have been widely criticized and held responsible for many teachers’ and students’ overall rejection of literature (Edmondson 47). However, it should be noted that many “modern” approaches include elements of “traditional” ones, and that new does not automatically mean better. The effectiveness of any one approach depends in large part on the specific parameters involved in a given situation. While there thus is no inherently “good” or “bad” approach, it is nonetheless useful to examine different approaches in terms of their underlying ideas and their implications. For the purpose of providing an overview, some “traditional” approaches to using literature will be outlined in the following, before presenting some more recent and innovative ways of approaching literature in EFL.

The focus of traditional approaches to literature teaching was most often on reading a famous literary work and acquiring extensive background information about it in order to interpret it. Problematic aspects of this approach include the passive role of the learner and the likely perpetuation of established interpretations of a narrowly defined canon of “high” literature. If the treatment of literature is reduced to “rote learning and summary of content” (Parker & Reid 26) and “reworking of secondary literature” (Parker & Reid 29), student interest and motivation are also likely to be low. Moreover, an exclusive focus on established literary criticism, paired with the extensive use of metalanguage, is likely to “distance learners from their own response and cause them to undervalue it” (Collie & Slater 7-8). Additionally, students often get the feeling “that the teacher is slowly but surely edging them to particular answers that he or she has in mind” (Collie & Slater 8). The type of question being asked (open-ended versus display questions) is important in this respect. The fact that learners learn better when they are personally engaged in an activity is not accounted for in this approach. Another point of criticism is that literature’s potential for advancing language acquisition is not being exploited sufficiently in such a narrow approach. Further aspects of criticism include the lack of students’ personal involvement, the lack of creativity, and the lack of

independent thinking and interpretation. If the objective underlying language teaching is to help students in becoming independent critical thinkers, as is clearly stated in the Austrian AHS curriculum (Allgemeiner Teil 1), for example, it seems counterintuitive to just present them with ready-made interpretations or urge them to reach certain conclusions that are endorsed by the teacher. This also extends to the aim of fostering students' creativity, which is not being encouraged through an approach whose main focus is on remembering factual knowledge.

However, in certain contexts, this approach might still be considered appropriate. It continues to be used in language teaching, for example in literature courses within university language programs. While the strict form of this approach has been heavily criticized and is less common nowadays, more moderate forms are more accepted and have informed a number of other, more recent approaches. For example, Parker and Reid (30) refer to "practical criticism" as an umbrella term for those activities that they locate in between traditional and modern approaches. At this "intermediate" stage, students are encouraged to respond to a text on a personal level; however, at the same time there is "an aesthetic and 'literary' bias that distinguishes the approach" from the modern ones (Parker & Reid 30). Parker and Reid highlight that depending on the way practical criticism is implemented in a particular situation, it can either be a frustratingly narrow or an interesting and valuable way of approaching literature.

Parker and Reid's distinction between traditional (26-30) and newer approaches (30-39) includes the following elements:

Traditional approaches:

- rote learning and summary of content
- reading aloud
- translation
- reworking of secondary literature

What else can be done with literature?

- reading for pleasure (including extensive reading schemes)
- reading for content
- reading solely as foreign-language practice
- linguistic analysis
- personal response
- games and 'fun' activities
- prediction and related guessing activities
- performing literary work
- creating one's own text

Other authors have also analyzed different approaches to teaching literature in the foreign language classroom. Carter and Long distinguish between the “study of literature” and the “use of literature as a resource” in language teaching (3). The former refers to what has been described as a traditional approach relying on “critical concepts, literary conventions and metalanguage”. The latter means the use of literature as a resource for language development and personal development, with literary texts being seen as offering special opportunities for motivation and engagement. Regarding the “study of literature”, Carter and Long caution that “[k]nowledge *about* literature” can “easily become knowledge for its own sake and does not automatically lead to a more responsive reading or to a fuller interpretation of a text” (4). Meanwhile, they advocate the “use of literature as a resource”, which targets active student involvement and response. The objective is for students to develop “knowledge *of* literature”, which means a “kind of emotional and experiential involvement”, and an enjoyment of reading literary texts (4).

Lazar (23-24) presents three approaches to reading in a foreign language: “language-based”, “literature as content” and “literature for personal enrichment”. “Literature as content” equals the traditional approach described above, or Carter and Long’s “study of literature”. “Language-based” highlights how literary texts can help language learning through a close analysis of the language being used in a text. “Literature for personal enrichment” targets learners’ active involvement and motivation, both of which can then help language acquisition.

McRae and Vethamani point out that traditional work on literature tended to focus exclusively on aspects of “plot, character, setting”, “intention”, “meaning” and “criticism” (xiv). While most modern approaches do not disregard these elements, they adopt a more inclusive perspective, leaving room for looking at literature from different angles and for students’ reactions and opinions. In McRae and Vethamani’s words, “[t]eachers are increasingly aware that the teaching of literature is undergoing a change: the focus is more on *processes* than on *facts*, on students’ interaction with texts, on opinions and interpretation rather than received opinion” (xiv).

Carter and Long’s “use of literature as a resource” concept and Lazar’s “language-based” and “literature for personal enrichment” notions can be classified as “modern” approaches, which form part of the change McRae and Vethamani refer to. Another “modern” approach that has been widely implemented is reader response (Paran 481).

Here, the primary focus is on the reader's experience of and reaction to a literary text. The reader is seen as an active agent in the construction of a text's meaning. Compared to other more traditional approaches, which were often wary of individual interpretations, here the reader's personal response is seen as important and valuable, and as an integral part of working with literature. Proponents of reader response theory argue that readers can benefit from engaging with literary texts on a personal level: in terms of their personal development (insights into their own situation through identification with literary characters, leading to a better understanding of their own life) and the development of their "kognitiven, affektiven und evaluativen Fähigkeiten" (Bredella 50). Engaging with literary texts can therefore also help learners to understand others and how they feel. Activities commonly associated with this approach include "role plays, group discussions, reader's journals and projects" (Paran 482).

A different development has manifested itself in language-based approaches to literature. These tend to be "less concerned with the literary text as a product" and "more concerned with processes of reading" (Carter & Long 7) and specific language aspects of a text. While a "strong" language-based approach would view literature as merely another text to use in the classroom, "weaker" forms reject the notion of literature as a "sacrosanct object for reverential study" (Carter & Long 7), but emphasize at the same time that "literary texts are special and bestow special enjoyment and fulfillment" (Carter & Long 8). The use of literary texts for the building of language skills is now a widely accepted practice. Many teachers choose to combine aspects of language-based and reader-response approaches in working with literature.

A further "modern" approach is stylistics, the analysis of literary texts with regards to style. Stylistics can also be classified as a different type of language-based approach. Its proponents, including important scholars writing about literature in the language classroom (for example Widdowson, Carter & Long, McRae), argue that language learners can benefit from examining how language is being used in a text to achieve certain effects. While most teachers agree with this argument, there are certain difficulties with the practical application of this approach in the language classroom. Stylistics has been repeatedly criticized for being too remote from the concerns of actual language learning practice (Paran 486). As Paran points out, "a great deal of stylistic analysis does not address issues of dealing with the language learner", but rather on "issues in stylistic analysis" (486). Therefore, in order for stylistics to unfold its

potential in the classroom, more work that takes foreign language students' needs into account is necessary.

Another widely discussed issue concerning approaches is that of intensive versus extensive reading. Carter and Long (4-5) call this the “depth” versus “breadth” question. The depth argument holds that reading a text closely will help a reader develop important reading skills, which can then be applied to other texts. The breadth argument maintains that an experience of a wide variety of texts is what makes a learner a fluent reader of literature. Carter and Long ultimately suggest combining the two approaches in order to train both accuracy (through reading in depth) and fluency (through reading in breadth).

The inclusion of “new technologies” into the language and literature classroom is also a topic of recent interest. Given the rapid development in this area, the definition of what constitutes “new technologies” is constantly evolving (Paran 482). Generally speaking, it is the use of “electronic media and electronic means of communication” (Paran 482), which is becoming a regular feature of most language teaching classes. An example for such language teaching activities involving technology is the use of email or similar forms of written electronic communication to connect learners with students from different countries (native speakers of that language or learners of the same language), or possibly even with the author of the texts being treated in class (Paran 483). Another, fairly obvious, example is using the internet for accessing additional information. Online corpora and webquests can also be profitable resources for the language classroom. These activities and resources can enrich the use of literature in the language classroom in different ways. Examples for the combined use of technology and literature include searching websites for background information on a book, listening to stories online, writing a book review for a literature blog, and written or spoken online discussions.

3. Short Stories in the Foreign Language Classroom

3.1 History of the Short Story

In discussing short stories, it is interesting to first consider how they developed historically. The renowned short story anthologist Ann Charters highlights that “[t]he history of storytelling extends far back to a time long before the invention of the printing press” (1545). She traces the evolution of the short story genre, from orally

delivered tribal tales and “creation myths”, over “beast fables”, “religious parable[s]”, Roman and Greek “brief tales”, “stories [...] from Oriental cultures”, medieval “short narratives” in verse, fourteenth century “secular tales in both prose and verse” (including works by Boccaccio and Chaucer), and Renaissance stories organized around “a structure of moral and religious values”, to eighteenth century secularized “closer relations of modern stories” (1545-1547). Around this time, the European romantic period’s high estimation of “originality and imagination” in literature was an important factor in the rise of short stories, as was the spread of periodicals providing opportunities for publication (1547). The actual birth of the short story is then usually associated with the 19th century, when “a different kind of short fictional narrative emerged, an original prose work in which every word chosen in the structure of the plot, and every detail of description and characterization, contributes to a unified impression” (Charters 1547-1548). Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Ludwig Tieck, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Heinrich von Kleist and the brothers Grimm worked on early forms of short stories in Germany, whereas Washington Irving is usually considered as the first US-American author to write short stories (Charters 1548). With the work of Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne, the short story first reached importance as a genre. Poe was also one of the first people to write about short stories from a theoretical point of view: his proposition of “unity of effect” as the central characteristic of a short story remains influential to this day. The short story continued to evolve throughout the literary periods of romanticism, realism, and modernism. Chekhov proved to be the most influential writer for the following generations of short story writers. His realistic portrayal of the “particular here-and-now quality of ordinary human existence” (Charters 1550) and the subordination of plot to the “sympathetic dramatization of the characters’ psychology and mood” (Charters 1551) were both innovative and inspiring to many writers. The concept of “interiorized plot”, which was developed in relation to Chekhov’s work, and the concept of “epiphany”, which was first introduced by Joyce, remain crucial in contemporary short story writing and analysis (Charters 1551). Overall, however, contemporary short story writing is so diverse and lively that confining it to tightly delineated categories has proven to be very difficult.

3.2 Definition of the Short Story

Defining what actually constitutes a short story turns out to be harder than expected. As Shaw points out, “[t]here are so many different kinds of short stories that the genre as a whole seems constantly to resist universal definition” (vi). Attempts have been made to

designate brevity, Poe's "unity of effect", or focus on a single episode as essential components of a short story – however, many texts classified as short stories do not comply with one or several of these conditions. While an all-encompassing definition of the short story genre thus seems virtually impossible to reach, it is nonetheless useful to look at some frequently cited characteristics of this genre. Thaler refers to the short story as "this fictitious narrative in prose which is shorter and less complex than a novel" and lists several distinguishing features (91, drawing on Wehrlich, Thaler's highlights):

- centered around one *incident*, which is often revealed as an unusual one
- simple *plot*, focusing on a single turning point or a surprising reversal
- limited number of *characters*, often revealing their state of mind at some single moment of crisis and presenting a clash of characters
- often confined to one *setting*, covering in detail only a short period of time
- told in *language* highly charged with meaning and suggestion, enhanced by the repetition of key words and leitmotifs
- builds up *suspense* towards the end (denouement)

This list of aspects common in short stories can fulfill an orienting function. However, there will also be many stories that deviate from these. In fact, nowadays it is often the atypical qualities that certain short stories or authors are known for. For example, Alice Munro is known for having "revolutionized the architecture of short stories, often beginning a story in an unexpected place then moving backward or forward in time" (Bosman). This would go against the "covering in detail only a short period of time" aspect cited by Thaler. Another questionable defining feature is Thaler's "less complex than a novel" point. While short stories are typically shorter than novels, they are not automatically less complex. For example, Munro's short stories have repeatedly been described as similar to novels in terms of their complexity, "profundity, and structural elaborateness" (Duncan 3). Moreover, some of her longer stories even seem to challenge the tradition of qualifying short stories according to page count. Yet Alice Munro is one of the most famous contemporary short story writers. This illustrates some of the difficulties associated with defining the short story genre. For this thesis, the theoretical discussions regarding genre definitions are of secondary relevance. The short story's relative brevity and concentrated style seem to be the most widely accepted defining features of the short story. Accepting their tentative quality, the guiding

principles outlined so far will therefore provide a sufficient basis for the purposes of this thesis.

3.3 Reception and Status of the Short Story

The short story is a genre that has been notoriously neglected by the literary establishment as well as the reading public (see May for possible reasons). Alice Munro has repeatedly commented on the fact that for quite a while, she herself shared the belief that writing short stories was a way of practicing for writing a novel, which was seen as a more substantial and respectable undertaking (see Hancock 190, Bosman).

This view has been affecting the short story's reputation for a long time, as Lohafer outlines:

For Poe, the short story was nearly at the top of the pantheon of genres. [...] However, Poe's theories and practice were co-opted by the hacks of later decades when the short story was too often seen as a formula-driven genre for slick magazines. Long inaccurate, the stigma lingered in the air of condescension with which stories were viewed as apprenticeship for the novel. (ix)

Shaw also comments on “[t]he widespread notion that unless it can be seen as a useful apprentice work for budding novelists, short-storywriting must be a compromise of some sort” (2). These quotes clearly show the difficulties that short stories have faced over time. In recent years, however, the short story genre has gained in reputation and popularity. In 2013, Alice Munro was the first exclusive writer of short stories to be awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. In her first reaction, Munro stressed that this was “a wonderful thing for the short story” (Smith). It appears as though both readers and academics have found a new appreciation for the short story.

3.4 Teaching Short Stories

The short story as a literary genre distinguishes itself through its brevity and its stylistic concentration. This means that the storytelling elements are boiled down to their utmost essentials, creating a very particular, intensive narrative experience. Due to this literary condensation, short stories have often been described as encompassing the depth of a novel in spite of their shortness. Alice Munro's stories are particularly renowned for their novel-like qualities. Short stories thus offer distinct potential for the foreign language classroom. Thaler aptly summarizes this potential by explaining that, “[t]o state the obvious, short narrative forms are good teaching material because they are short and narrative” (78). Each of these two aspects implicates a set of advantages.

Firstly, the short stories' brevity allows for more flexibility in using them in the language classroom. It also renders possible the use of literature in spite of limited available classroom time, and makes texts more manageable and less intimidating for students. In addition, it enhances variety, as several different short stories can be used in a course. This enables teachers to cater to student's diverse interests and preferences, which can in turn increase students' motivation, active participation and overall profit from the experience.

Secondly, the short stories' narrative quality is important due to its significant role in human life and interaction as such. Storytelling forms part of humans' everyday life, fulfilling "anthropological, psychological and social needs" as well as "moral, pedagogic, and methodological functions" (Thaler 78). This means that language learners are likely familiar with some form of storytelling, which makes it easier to understand and relate to a narrative text. This also increases the likelihood of students actively engaging with a text. Moreover, focusing on a text's narrative aspects can be a welcome emphasis on meaning in the light of more form-focused language learning activities.

As far as using literature in the language classroom is concerned, short stories have been quite a popular genre (Thaler 91). Due to the qualities outlined above, short stories are suitable as an introduction to literature in the target language. Thaler states that they are often used "as a bridge between simpler coursebook texts and full-length literature with a capital L masterpieces" (91). While the notion of reading such "full-length literature with a capital L masterpieces" as a kind of ultimate goal in foreign language learning remains questionable, this does not affect the short stories' benefits. Short stories are valuable resources in their own right, but they can also help to facilitate the use of further literature in the classroom (Collie & Slater 169). Using a shorter text to illustrate the significance of narrator, character description, or stylistic choices, for example, can be helpful to both students and teachers. Moreover, compared to other literary genres, a short story can be more approachable: in terms of its length (compared to a novel) or in terms of its language (compared to a poem).

Collie and Slater also highlight several "immediate and striking advantages" (196) of using short stories in the language classroom, which are similar to the arguments presented above. They, too, point out the short stories' "practical length", meaning that even for slightly longer stories, reading and working on them can be "completed in a

few lessons” (196). Another important benefit for Collie and Slater is that short stories are “less daunting for a foreign reader to tackle”, with the additional perk of offering a faster way for students to experience “that feeling of achievement at having come to the end of a whole work” (196). The third major advantage of short stories is that “they offer greater variety than longer texts” (196). Overall, it is clear that short stories have a lot to offer for the foreign language classroom.

3.5 Teaching Alice Munro’s Short Stories

As has already been illustrated, the selection of literary texts to be used in language teaching is an issue of crucial importance. Carter argues that questions of literary and educational value should form the basis of any such selection (7, 12). An examination of Alice Munro’s work with regard to these two criteria reveals that it meets both of them. The literary value of Munro’s work is widely accepted and has most recently been recognized through the awarding of the 2013 Nobel Prize in Literature (Svenska Akademien, Mendelsohn 159). Munro’s exceptional talent for the use of language, for unconventional storytelling and for observation, as well as her sensitivity, empathy and curiosity regarding her subject matter have been widely praised (Coldwell, Mendelsohn 161). While these qualities characterize Munro’s stories and assert their literary value, they also account for her stories’ educational value. Carter highlights, in reference to one of his fellow leading scholars in the field of literature and language teaching, that the crucial quality of literature in education is to offer learners a connection to different perspectives and experiences: “For Chris Brumfit the most valuable literature enabled students to define themselves ‘through contact with others’ experience’, and the task of the educator was fundamentally to create conditions that enabled this contact in the best possible ways“ (7). Providing insight into other peoples’ experiences is arguably one of Munro’s greatest strengths as a writer (Mendelsohn 160, Coldwell 777). Therefore, her literature would seem to be a particularly promising choice for the language classroom.

There are further, more specific reasons for including Munro’s stories into the English language classroom. First of all, there is a strong argument for studying Munro as a noteworthy female author, and one of only thirteen women to have been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for her body of work (see Nischik 360). Munro’s writing illustrates the “lives of girls and women” with great sensitivity, and can offer insights into a variety of female experiences and perspectives. This is particularly relevant since women’s writing has historically been disregarded and women’s role in society has long

been a disadvantaged one. Consequently, Munro's stories can also serve as a gateway to discussing pressing social issues regarding gender roles and gender equality. Secondly, while the majority of those literary works that have been used in EFL have traditionally originated from the UK or USA, Munro's Canadian heritage and her writing's close association with it sheds an interesting light on a different context of literature in English. Canadian literature has gained international recognition only fairly recently, and Alice Munro is one of the most notable contemporary Canadian writers. Thirdly, Munro's stories offer a great variety of insight into the human condition. While her work and its characters are largely restricted to a rural Canadian context which does not exhibit much "diversity" in itself, one of the great strengths of her writing is showing the diversity of human experience in the world. Understanding that people see and experience things differently is arguably the first crucial step towards empathy and tolerance, which are important objectives in teaching. Therefore, it can be argued that even though Munro's work does not depict too much diversity in terms of people or stories from different backgrounds, her writing offers insight into different peoples' experiences and the human condition as such.

Munro skillfully sheds light on the highs and lows of human existence in the course of her stories: she writes credible descriptions of love and friendship, attraction and loyalty, generosity and empathy, as well as of envy, competition, small-mindedness, vanity, condescension, or hate (see Proulx xii). The wide array of human behavior and emotions found in Munro's work can constitute a point of departure for interesting discussions in the language classroom. On the one hand, these issues are relevant to students in their everyday life, and therefore often interesting and accessible. On the other hand, being able to talk about these topics in the foreign language forms an important part of language proficiency.

Munro's earlier stories are arguably closer to students' everyday life, as they deal with younger characters who are coming of age and, therefore, touch upon a variety of issues that concern students directly. Her later stories focus more on older characters, in quite a natural development of perspective reflecting her own changing experience of life. These stories are still interesting and could provide valuable insights into the concerns of older people, which teenagers might not think about too often. When choosing a story for a particular class of students, their interests should be taken into account, as well as their language proficiency.

4. Alice Munro

4.1 Biography

Alice Munro was born Alice Ann Laidlaw on July 10, 1931 in Wingham, Ontario in Canada. She grew up on a rural farm where her father, Robert Eric Laidlaw, raised foxes. Her mother, Ann Laidlaw, was a teacher and housewife. Munro has said that she kept making up stories even as a child, but did not start writing short stories until she was in high school (Horwood 1026-1027). When she was a teenager, her mother developed Parkinson's disease. As the eldest daughter, Munro subsequently took care of the household. Her relationship with her mother, as well as her mother's illness, have been recurring concerns in her writing.

Starting in 1949, Munro studied English and journalism for two years at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario on a scholarship. During this time, she published her first stories in the university's literary magazine. In 1951, she married fellow student James Munro and they moved to British Columbia. In the following years, they had three daughters: Sheila (born 1953), Jenny (born 1957) and Andrea (1966). They had another daughter, Catherine, in 1955, who died shortly after birth. In Victoria, the couple opened a bookstore called "Munro's books", which is still in operation today. During this time, Munro was a housewife and mother, writing in whatever spare time she could find. She published some short stories in various Canadian literary journals such as *Tamarack Review* and *Canadian Forum*. In 1968, her first collection of short stories, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, was published to high acclaim. It earned her the 1968 Governor General's Award for Fiction, one of Canada's highest literary awards. Alice and James Munro divorced in 1972, and she subsequently moved back to Ontario. There she reconnected with Gerald Fremlin, whom she had previously met at university, and who became her second husband in 1976. They lived together in Clinton, Ontario until his death in April of 2013 (CBC News, *Munro is 1st Canadian*).

Since her breakout achievement with *Dance of the Happy Shades*, Munro has published numerous short stories and collections. Her work has appeared in magazines such as *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Paris Review*, and *Harper's Magazine*. Since 1968, she has published at least one short story collection every four years, resulting in a total of 14 collections to this day. Many of her stories have been inspired by personal experiences and events in her life, although she has pointed out that "[s]ome

of these stories are closer to my own life than others are, but not one of them is as close as people seem to think" (Thacker, *Alice Munro* 412). Her only openly autobiographical stories are the last four stories in her latest collection, *Dear Life*, which she has called "the first and last – and the closest – things I have to say about my own life" (Munro, *Dear Life* 255). For a detailed and captivating account of Alice Munro's life and its relation to her writing, see Robert Thacker's biography called *Alice Munro: A Life in Words*. After the publication of *Dear Life* in 2012, Munro announced her retirement from writing (see Bosman).

4.2 Reception

Munro has repeatedly been dubbed "Canada's Chekhov" (Proulx xv), and "is considered by many to be the finest short story writer now working in English" (Hunter 165). Her fellow Canadian writer and friend Margaret Atwood has emphasized that "[t]he road to the Nobel wasn't an easy one for Munro" (*Munro's road*). Against the odds of succeeding as a writer, given her rural Canadian background, the time of her upbringing, her subject matter and her focus on writing short stories, Munro has achieved extensive success and recognition. While fame outside of Canada had eluded her for quite a while, nowadays she has readers and admirers from around the world. In addition, she is popular with readers as well as with academics: "Munro is a rare thing among writers of short fiction, an international bestseller. She is also widely acclaimed in the academy" (Hunter 165). Munro's work has been studied since the 1970s. It has been the subject of several monographs of literary criticism, as well as numerous articles and reviews. Several journals have dedicated special issues to Munro's writing, including *Open Letter* in 2003/2004, *The Journal of the Short Story* in 2010, and *Narrative* in 2012.

Throughout her career, Munro has won numerous literary awards and honors, including three Governor General's Awards (1968, 1978, 1986), two Giller prizes (1998, 2004), and the Man Booker International Prize for her body of work in fiction (2009). In 2013, Munro was honored with the Nobel Prize for Literature for her achievements as a "master of the contemporary short story" (Svenska Akademien). She was the thirteenth woman and the first Canadian writer to receive the prize (Saul Bellow, 1976 Nobel laureate, was born in Canada but has spent most of his life in the US and is generally considered a US-American writer) (CBC News, *Munro is 1st Canadian*). The announcement of her victory was met with widespread enthusiasm, making her one of

the most popular Nobel laureates so far (CBC News, *Munro Proud*). In her first reactions, Munro expressed her joy and her hopes that this would increase the standing of the short story and Canadian literature around the world (Bosman).

4.3 List of Published Works

In the years between 1968 and 2012 Alice Munro has published fourteen original short story collections. Munro's stories have also appeared in numerous magazines and have been published in different combinations in various short story compilations. While her second book, *Lives of Girls and Women*, was originally published as a novel, it is now more often referred to as a collection of interrelated short stories (see Howells 33, Gurr).

Munro's original short story collections, in order of their publication, are:

- *Dance of the Happy Shades* – 1968
- *Lives of Girls and Women* – 1971
- *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* – 1974
- *Who Do You Think You Are?* – 1978 (also published as *The Beggar Maid*)
- *The Moons of Jupiter* – 1982
- *The Progress of Love* – 1986
- *Friend of My Youth* – 1990
- *Open Secrets* – 1994
- *The Love of a Good Woman* – 1998
- *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* – 2001
- *Runaway* – 2004
- *The View from Castle Rock* – 2006
- *Too Much Happiness* – 2009
- *Dear Life* – 2012

4.4 Writing Style

Alice Munro is recognized for exploring the complexities of human experiences while using a distinctly simple prose style. Her stories have repeatedly been likened to novels in terms of their depth and complexity. Her characters are complex and nuanced, often constituting “an off-kilter assortment of negatives and positives that change during the story as the story itself metamorphoses” (Proulx xii). She is known for her choice of “common people” as characters of her stories, and for finding the extraordinary in ordinary people's lives. Munro's writing is realistic, and her detailed, vivid and insightful descriptions are characteristic of her stories (see Coldwell 778). Critics as

well as Munro herself have observed that her skills as a writer have developed over the years (see Franzen, Hunter, Mendelsohn, for example). These skills are particularly evident in Munro's latest stories, which pair increasing length and complexity (Duncan 3) with masterful use of language. Part of Munro's ingenuity is that her fiction tends to have a "deceptively simple" appearance (Duffy), while it is in fact artfully crafted.

Her stories are often set in the area where she grew up: in the rural area of Huron County in Ontario, Canada. One of the distinguishing features of Munro's writing is her authentic and precise portrait of small-town life and its effects on her characters. Dennis Duffy highlights "Munro's mastery of the cultural and vocal tones of a region" as well as "her acuteness in delineating social class". For example, she skillfully illustrates the pressures and the constraints that her characters face, which frequently result from social norms and conventions. At the same time, she shows "how the corset of small-town life not only constricts but anchors – its tight grasp comforts, lets the characters get through their small lives with a sense of purpose" (Proulx xi). While Munro has occasionally been criticized for her repetitive use of the physical and thematic location of her fiction (see Lorentzen), this concentrated focus is in fact often regarded as one of her strengths (Proulx x, Struthers 291). Within the particular setting of her stories, she manages to portray a wide array of decidedly human concerns and behaviors.

In her introduction to *Dance of the Happy Shades*, fellow author Annie Proulx claims that Munro's stories are "indivisible from place" (x) in the sense that they are so intimately related to the area around Lake Huron and a particularly English Canadian way of life that they cannot be "easily overlaid to other cultures" (xi). However, there is also a strong argument to be made for the universal quality of Munro's stories. While it is obvious that her stories are closely connected to the country and area where she grew up, many of her characters and stories are something people around the world can relate to and identify with. For example, Dennis Duffy points out that "[Munro's] international audience finds its own uncertainties and concerns paralleled in those that shape her characters' experiences". Even Proulx herself highlights further along that "[i]t is the commonality of the small stuff familiar to everyone alive that makes Munro's stories resonate as aching but intimate truths" (xii). Moreover, the themes that Munro explores and revisits throughout her oeuvre are positively universal, including "relationships between the sexes and among families" (Coldwell 777), love, friendship, loyalty, disappointment, betrayal, embarrassment, aspirations, restrictions, as well as

“marriage, motherhood, sex, accidents, sickness, [and] small-town society“ (Mendelsohn 176).

A further distinguishing feature of Munro’s writing is her great sensitivity and perceptiveness. Mendelsohn foregrounds “Munro’s sensibility and subject matter, her radiant lack of narcissism and deep empathy and curiosity” as crucial elements of her ability as a writer (xx). Similarly, Proulx emphasizes Munro’s extraordinary “visual and verbal sensitivity” and her resulting descriptions of “minute facets of place and behavior” (x). Coldwell observes that in Munro’s writing, “[r]eality is heightened with such clarity of remembered detail that it is, in Munro’s words, ‘not real but true’” (778). It is these detailed descriptions that often spark readers’ recognition of themselves and their world in Munro’s stories, and that enable them to see things in a new light (see McLaren). Proulx sees this recognition as a result of the concatenation of tiny nuances she uses – gestures, tones of voice, choice of words, all of these glancing off memory – that compromise the characters’ lives as they do our own” (xii). In addition, Coldwell highlights that “[b]y a careful focus on the telling action or statement, Munro excels at revealing the surprising depth and complexity in the emotional lives of ordinary people” (777). Even though Munro exhibits great sensitivity and empathy in the treatment of her characters, there is a notable absence of sentimentality in her writing.

A common theme throughout her work is the female experience, highlighting women’s concerns and problems. Family, traditions, customs, duty, time, and small towns are some of the ubiquitous issues her protagonists often face in her stories. Munro focuses on the ambiguities and concessions of life, painting portraits of females struggling among uncertainties to find their place in the world. As Jane Mendelsohn puts it in her review of Munro’s work: “female heroism, as it manifests itself in ordinary lives, is her great subject“ (160). Beverly J. Rasporich and Magdalene Redekop have each published a book focused on Munro’s literary treatment of women. Munro’s subject matter has evolved along with her own maturing as a person and as a writer: whereas young girls coming of age are common protagonists in her earlier stories, her later stories feature married women and mothers, and her most recent stories increasingly include aging characters and older women in particular.

Apart from her characteristic themes and her talent for observation, Munro is renowned for her technical skills as a writer (see MacKendrick 1). Mendelsohn highlights that Munro’s “gifts for structure, compression, language, observation, and playing with time

make it possible for her to communicate a wisdom and vision without which all her knowledge of a region, all her artistry in describing it, would not be enough to make her the kind of writer she is” (161). Munro is known for having “revolutionized the architecture of short stories, often beginning a story in an unexpected place then moving backward or forward in time” (Bosman). Stephen Regan lists Munro’s “most impressive formal ploys” as “the subtle modulation of tense, the collusion of memory and history, the unsettling shifts in perspective, and the sustained effects of overlapping and multi-layered narratives” (127). A further decisive point is Munro’s skillful use of narrative technique. In his essay “‘Clear Jelly’: Alice Munro’s Narrative Dialectics”, which was published in 1983, Robert Thacker already emphasizes the crucial role of narrative technique in Munro’s writing. In her more recent book focusing on *Alice Munro’s Narrative Art*, Isla Duncan lists “[a]ppositeness and coherence of voice, intricacy of structure, networks of connections, density of layering” as important elements of this narrative art (2).

Overall, it is clear that Alice Munro is a widely respected and accomplished writer. Her stories contain a wealth of themes and demonstrations of technical ability. This makes them interesting to study, as well as valuable resources for the language teaching classroom.

5. Analysis of Selected Stories by Munro

In the following, three selected short stories by Alice Munro will be presented through a literary analysis of their most important features. This is intended to offer an overview of these stories’ characteristics and qualities, and to facilitate their use in the classroom. These stories, “Boys and Girls” (1964), “How I Met My Husband” (1974) and “The Bear Came Over the Mountain” (1999), have been selected to demonstrate how different stories by Alice Munro can be valuable resources in the English language classroom. In the selection process, the themes that are addressed in the stories have been taken into account, aiming to show how different topics can be addressed through the use of Munro’s short stories. Particular attention has been paid to the topics included in the Austrian *Themenpool* for the oral Matura in English (BMBF, *Themenpool*). While this highlights these stories’ particular suitability for the Austrian EFL classroom, these topics are of general relevance in foreign language learning, and therefore also apply to contexts outside of Austria. Moreover, the selected stories exhibit interesting features on a literary and a technical level, providing ample opportunities for further classroom

work and discussion. To further illustrate the variety of Munro's stories, the selected three differ in length and relative complexity in terms of language and structure. Depending on the accompanying tasks, all three stories should be manageable for students at an advanced B1 proficiency level according to the CEFR, while working towards B2 level. This equals Austrian upper secondary students in grades 10-12 for AHS (6.-8. Klasse) and grades 10-13 for BHS (2.-5.Klasse), who would usually be between 15 and 19 years old.

In order to assure accessibility, the analysis has been restricted to those features deemed essential and most relevant for the context of the foreign language classroom. Accordingly, each story's analysis consists of aspects concerning the story level (plot, setting, characters, themes) and aspects concerning the discourse level (narrative technique, structure, time, language and style). Information regarding each story's background and contextualization is provided as well. Moreover, each story's relevance for the classroom will be discussed in a section following the literary analysis.

5.1 “Boys and Girls” (1964)

“Boys and Girls” is one of Alice Munro's earliest short stories. It was first published in *The Montrealer* in 1964 (Thacker 163) and was subsequently included in Munro's first collection of short stories, which was called *Dance of the Happy Shades* and was first published in 1968 (Thacker 187). In the Penguin Modern Classics edition of *Dance of the Happy Shades*, which has been used for this analysis, the story runs fourteen pages. The issue at the center of “Boys and Girls” is the socially constructed difference between men and women. The story illustrates the separation between “male” and “female” activities in everyday life, and the differences in how these are perceived. From the point of view of the young daughter, the story offers insights into the experience of a maturing girl struggling with rigid traditional gender roles. “Boys and Girls” was adapted into a short film by Don McBreaarty in 1983, which won an Academy Award for “Best Short Film” in 1984 (see “Boys and Girls” at IMDb).

5.1.1 Story Level

5.1.1.1 Plot

The story depicts the life of a young girl who lives on a farm with her parents and her younger brother. Her father is a fox farmer and sustains the family by selling the foxes' pelts. The girl prefers helping her father with the farm work, which seems more serious and important, to helping her mother with the housework, which she sees as boring and

dispiriting. However, as a girl, she is supposed to assist her mother more and meet society's narrowly defined expectations for women doing "women's work". Nonetheless, she identifies more with her father and tries to outperform her brother in doing "men's work". Her close identification with her father and his work is only challenged when she sees her father kill one of their horses for the first time. When the other horse is supposed to be killed and tries to flee, she does not obey her father's command to shut the gate, letting the horse escape even though she knows it cannot be saved. When her little brother eventually reveals what she has done, her father seems to lose his estimation of her and says that after all, she is "just a girl".

5.1.1.2 Setting

The story is set on a rural farm. The first paragraph indicates that it is located in Canada: the father sells pelts to the "Hudson's Bay Company" and the "Montreal Fur Traders". This also assures the family a constant supply of calendars depicting "plumed adventurers plant[ing] the flags of England or France" against backdrops "of cold blue sky and black pine forests and treacherous northern rivers" (100)¹. These features clearly point towards Canada as the setting of the story, as the "Hudson's Bay Company" is one of Canada's oldest and most famous companies. It has its origins in the fur trade, and still exists today, although in a different form. The rivaling "Montreal Fur Traders" also form an important part of Canadian history (Krueger). Moreover, Montreal is an important Canadian city known for its French-Canadian culture, and the combination of English and French heritage is a distinguishing feature of Canada as a country.

The farm and its surroundings are described in some detail: there is a house with a kitchen and a workplace in the cellar, and an unfinished upper floor, where the children sleep. In addition, there is a barn, a stable and an area for the fox pens. All this is surrounded by fields and close to a swamp. The closest landmarks that are mentioned are the town of Jubilee and the county jail. Such references to the world outside of the farm are only made in passing, with the main focus of the story clearly being the life on the farm. For example, the passage about the foxes' names mentions that the girl's brother, Laird, named one of them "Harold after a boy at school" (103). School is casually mentioned two more times (106, 111), but no account of life at school is given.

¹ All page numbers for quotes from "Boys and Girls" refer to the Penguin Modern Classics edition of Munro's *Dance of the Happy Shades*, the collection in which it was first published. The full details can be found in the bibliography.

Another glimpse is offered when the girl wants to distract her brother after watching the shooting of the horse, and takes him to see a show in town: “I got some money I had saved and that afternoon we went into Jubilee and saw a show, with Judy Canova, at which we both laughed a great deal” (111).

The organization of life on the farm gives some indication regarding the temporal setting of the story. The narrator states that farmers are increasingly acquiring tractors, for which reason horses are becoming obsolete (106). This indicates the 1940s as the most likely time period for the story to be set in, as this decade is generally associated with the shift from horses to tractors in farming in North America (Ganzel). This placement is also consistent with the author’s biography: Alice Munro grew up on a fox farm in rural Canada during the 1940s. This is therefore a period of time she knows intimately and in great detail, which would facilitate a realistic portrayal of that era.

5.1.1.3 Characters

The characters are introduced through their relation with the narrator: “my father”, “my mother”, and “my brother Laird” all appear on the first page of the story. Laird, the girl-narrator’s younger brother, and Henry Bailey, “the hired man”, are the only two characters whose names are revealed. Interestingly enough, the animals in the story also have names. Even though each character has certain distinguishing attributes, overall, their universal quality is emphasized. Therefore, they function more as character types (see Prince 13). In particular, they illustrate the roles of men and women in society.

Throughout the story, both direct and indirect characterization is used (see Prince 13). The narrator describes the other characters explicitly, focusing on their psychological traits more than on their appearance. For example, the reader learns that the father is innovative (“my father was tirelessly inventive” (103)), reserved (“Whatever thoughts and stories my father had were private (104)), and hard-working (“my father who worked hard enough already” (113)), and that the mother is more communicative (“my mother, who, if she was feeling cheerful, would tell me all sorts of things” (104)), friendlier and more gullible (“She was kinder than my father and more easily fooled” (106)), but less reliable (“My mother, I felt, was not to be trusted” (106)). Meanwhile, physical traits such as figure, hair or eye color, clothes are hardly addressed in the story. Only Henry Bailey’s face and eyes are referred to in the description of his medical condition (101). The father’s “stiff bloody” working apron and the mother’s apron, “damp across the stomach from the supper dishes” are just mentioned in passing (104).

This lack of attention to their physical constitution focuses the attention on their differences in terms of thoughts, feelings and actions, as well as their perception by others. Over the course of the story, the narrator also explains each character's common activities and responsibilities. These less direct aspects contribute significantly to their characterization.

The relationships between the characters (father-daughter, mother-daughter, brother-daughter) reveal important aspects of the story's themes. For example, the girl craves the approval of her father and wants to be like him. Apart from the fact that such dynamics are common in father-daughter relationships, this illustrates her desire for a position of equality, allowing her to do the same things a man could do. Her relationship with her mother is more complicated, because even though she is closer to her in many ways, the daughter does not want to end up like her. Her mother personifies the life that lies ahead of her, which she outright rejects as a child. It is not until she grows older that she gradually becomes more accepting of the fact that as a woman, she is expected to fulfill the same role as her mother. The girl's relationship with her younger brother is important because he is the only male person she can exercise control over. She is puzzled and frustrated by how everyone around her sees her little brother, because it does not match her own perception of him. Her realistic perception of his current abilities (lack of strength and intellectual capacity) stands in contrast to her parents' confident anticipation of his future capacities. For example, when the mother suggests to the father that Laird will soon be a "real help", the girl is bewildered: "What did she mean about Laird? He was no help to anybody. Where was he now? Swinging himself sick on the swing, going around in circles, or trying to catch caterpillars. He never once stayed with me till I was finished." (105). The girl is surprised by her brother's increasing strength, and angered by everyone else's prediction of his upcoming superiority. When Henry sees them fight, he tellingly observes: "Oh, that there Laird's gonna show you, one of these days!" (107). The girl's frustration and defiance show in her subsequent comment: "Laird was getting a lot bigger. But I was getting bigger too." (107).

5.1.1.3.1 The Girl

The girl is the central character of the story. She is shown as being torn between the male sphere she wants to belong to, and the female sphere she is urged towards by the people around her. She takes pride in being able to help her father with his work, and his trust in her. She is most satisfied when she is seen as equal to a man:

“One time a salesman came down into the pens to talk to him and my father said, ‘Like to have you meet my new hired man.’ I turned away and raked furiously, red in the face with pleasure.” Tellingly, the salesman’s reply to this is “Could of fooled me, [...] I thought it was only a girl.” (104)

In addition, her reliability and ability to help with the farm work is contrasted with her little brother’s apparent weakness and unreliability:

He [the father] had fitted a tin drum on a wheelbarrow, for bringing water down to the pens. This was my job in summer, when the foxes had to have water twice a day. [...] Laird came too, with his little cream and green gardening can, filled too full and knocking against his legs and slopping water on his canvas shoes. I had the real watering can, my father’s, though I could only carry it three-quarters full. (103)

When the girl is alone in bed at night, she makes up stories centered around herself as the courageous hero, riding, shooting, and saving everyone else: “These stories were about myself, when I had grown a little older; they took place in a world that was recognizably mine, yet one that presented opportunities for courage, boldness, and self-sacrifice, as mine never did.” (102). However, as she grows older these stories change, and she becomes the one who is being saved by someone else. Significantly, this is always a male figure, and there is an increased focus on her looks instead of her actions in the dreams (113). This is a compelling illustration of her disillusionment and increasing adaptation to her role as a woman in a traditionally organized society.

The girl is therefore the character who undergoes the most pronounced development over the course of the story. At the beginning, her main concern seems to be her father’s recognition, the struggle for being seen as equally capable as a boy, as well as preserving her freedom of behaving in a similar manner as the men in the family. She consequently rebels against the restrictions imposed on her, rejecting her grandmother’s rules of what a girl can or cannot do, and fleeing from the house and its domestic confinement whenever she can. Later on, however, she has not only discarded some of her dreams of independence and heroism, but has also adopted some habits typically regarded as “female”, such as worrying about her looks or trying to decorate her part of the room (113). At the end of the story, she consciously disobeys her father, going against their previous close association. When he subsequently dismisses her as “just a girl”, she does not fight his verdict, thinking that “[m]aybe it was true” (114).

5.1.1.3.2 The Father

The father is portrayed as a hard worker as well as a good husband and father in the eyes of society at the time. He seems to be a man of few words, serious and focused on the work that needs to be done. The girl-narrator illustrates: “My father did not talk to me unless it was about the job we were doing” (104), emphasizing that “[w]hatever thoughts and stories my father had were private, and I was shy of him and would never ask him questions” (104). The father does the “dirty work” around the farm and thus is indifferent to dirt, grime, blood, or pungent smells. As opposed to the mother, he is not responsible for any of the domestic work in the house. He takes care of the foxes and is the only one to enter their pens. He kills and butchers the horses to feed their meat to the foxes. The pelting of the foxes is another one of his main tasks. All of these aspects emphasize his masculinity in a traditional sense. Overall, he is the one in power, controlling the life on the farm. Apart from seeming quite reserved, the story does not offer much insight into his thoughts and feelings. At first, he seems to be more accepting of his daughter’s ventures into the male sphere of life, as he trusts her and values her help. However, at the end of the story, his comment shows that he shares the traditional views of male and female roles and limitations, and that he never really expected his daughter to do anything but follow in her mother’s footsteps.

5.1.1.3.3 The Mother

The mother is predominantly described with reference to the housework she is always busy doing. She is responsible for everything related to food and cleanliness, and consequently spends most of her time cooking and cleaning. She does not seem to enjoy this work, and wants her daughter to assist her more. Her desire for support in her work and her relative loneliness seem to be the main reasons for which she disapproves of the girl’s preference for the “male” work, which keeps her away from the house. The mother is further depicted as “dislik[ing] the whole pelting operation [...] and wish[ing] it did not have to take place in the house” (100). She strongly dislikes the smell and the dirt that come with it, as well as the essential coarseness of the task itself. Compared to the other characters, the mother seems quite emotional. For example, when she is in a good mood, she shares sentimental memories of her past with her daughter (104). Another example is her crying when her young son is rescued from the top of the ladder (110). Her relationship with her daughter seems to be quite close on an emotional level, but complicated by their conflicting opinions and desires. The girl-narrator describes why she thinks her mother “was not to be trusted”: “She was kinder than my father and

more easily fooled, but you could not depend on her, and the real reasons for the things she said and did were not to be known. [...] She was always plotting.” (106).

5.1.1.3.4 The Brother

The brother is the only family member to be introduced by name. His name, Laird, is quite significant: being of Scottish origin, it is an early form of “lord” and means “landed proprietor” or landowner (see “Laird”). This emphasizes his privileged status as a boy. His privilege features in the story quite prominently, despite the fact that it is not mentioned explicitly. Given that the story is narrated from the girl’s point of view, Laird is mostly described in comparison to his sister, with a particular focus on the things that he cannot yet do. Nonetheless, the adults seem unconcerned by this, and focus more on everything that he will be one day. The juxtaposition of his actual abilities and everyone’s ambitious expectations for his future exposes their bias towards him. He is the son, and as such he is seen as the natural successor of his father as the head of the family. At the beginning of the story, he does not seem to understand this, and is quite happy to obey his older sister, in a common arrangement for siblings of different ages. However, as he grows older and stronger, he becomes less susceptible to orders from his sister and it seems like he wants to be “one of the men”. At the end of the story, he exposes what his sister has done. This leads to the girl being dismissed by the father, and presumably enhances the brother’s own position in the family.

5.1.1.3.5 Henry Bailey

Henry Bailey is the hired man working on the family’s farm. His constant presence almost makes him seem like another family member. He appears to be a fairly simple-minded man who is satisfied with his job. He is portrayed as the father’s coarser, more talkative and more good-humored counterpart and assistant. His openly displayed bodily noises (he suffers from bronchial troubles), and crude jokes amuse and impress the children. For example, he once swings the bag full of dead foxes at the girl, saying “Christmas present!” (100), or habitually shows off his chewing gum: “Henry pasted his chewing-gum on the end of his fork, the way he always did; when he took it off he would have us admire the pattern” (114). He does not appear to have any particular opinion on the girl’s activities, but he accepts things as they are and follows the established traditions.

5.1.1.3.6 The Animals

The foxes and the horses also function as characters in the story. While the foxes are not discussed as individuals, the ones that are kept as part of the breeding stock do receive names. However, as the narrator specifically points out, “[n]aming them did not make pets out of them, or anything like it” (104). The foxes are valuable because they are what the family makes their living with. They are described as beautiful, but hostile. Their lives are mainly controlled by the father, who builds and supervises their cages, as well as their care. He is also the one who decides which foxes to kill and skin and which ones to keep for breeding.

In contrast to the foxes, the two horses are given more attention as individuals in the story. They stay with the family throughout the winter when the girl is eleven years old, in order to be slaughtered for fox food in the spring. Significantly, there is a male horse, called Mack, and a female horse, called Flora. Mack is old and calm, not making any trouble: “Mack was an old black workhorse, sooty and indifferent” (107). Flora is old too, however, she is more nervous and resisting, and therefore more complicated to deal with:

On Saturdays we went down to the stable and as soon as we opened the door on its cosy, animal-smelling darkness Flora threw up her head, rolled her eyes whinnied despairingly and pulled herself through a crisis of nerves on the spot. It was not safe to go into her stall; she would kick (107).

Flora is a sorrel mare; her striking color thus appears to reflect her wild and flamboyant nature. She seems to reject any human control, and actively rebels against it whenever she gets the chance. Flora’s disobedience and resistance can be compared to those of the girl in the story. Moreover, Flora plays an important role, as she tries to escape and the girl lets her do so. Even though the girl knows that Flora will eventually be caught, she feels sorry for the horse and cannot get herself to stop it. This results in the girl being dismissed by her father in the crucial final scene of the story.

5.1.1.4 Themes

5.1.1.4.1 Traditional Gender Roles

The title of the story already highlights its main theme: “Boys and Girls” and their different perceptions and opportunities in society. The story portrays traditional gender roles as clearly delineated, predetermined categories. The characters are not free to choose, it is clear what is expected from them and what their future will be like, based on their gender. The story highlights how gender roles are learned, as opposed to being

something that comes naturally to children (see Goldman 62)². For women, their female role is linked to a number of restrictions that do not apply to men. The theme of traditional gender roles is expressed in various ways throughout the story.

For example, the stereotypical attributes that each gender is associated with feature prominently in the narrative. They are mostly exemplified by the mother and the father, who function as representatives of men and women on a more general level. An analysis of these two characters' representation therefore reveals significant gender-related stereotypes. Men are presented as being strong, bold and self-confident, whereas women are shown to be more feeble, cautious and insecure. Men's serious, analytical, grounded attitude with a focus on logic and getting things done is contrasted with women's emotional, nervous and complicated approach to things. Men are portrayed as being task-focused and serious, avoiding distractions and unnecessary talking: "My father did not talk to me unless it was about the job we were doing" (104). Therefore, when the mother is talking to the father, the daughter observes his polite disinterest: "I was pleased by the way he stood listening, politely as he would to a salesman or a stranger, but with an air of wanting to get on with his real work" (105). Meanwhile, women are presented as chatty and more easily distracted: the mother tells her daughter about her past experiences, going into detail about the events and her feelings (104). Women's supposedly more sensitive nature is emphasized and contrasted with men's more thick-skinned and less impressionable disposition. While men are shown to be more reserved, they are also presented as more reliable. In contrast, the message conveyed about women is that they may be nicer and more approachable, but at the same time, they cannot be relied on, because the motives behind their actions are "not to be known" (106).

The different assessment of work done by men and women is particularly important with regards to gender roles. In the story, male work is portrayed as important and respectable, with its value, monetary and otherwise, being openly acknowledged by everyone. While it is rough and messy, it also seems more exciting and meaningful. For example, the father's work involves a certain degree of danger: "Nobody but my father went into the pens, and he had twice had blood-poisoning from bites" (103). It also requires him to deal with killing the foxes and skinning their dead bodies, in addition to killing the horses whose meat is used to feed the foxes. All these aspects feed into the

² For an analysis of "Boys and Girls" that is more closely based on Marxist and Freudian theories, see Marlene Goldman's article "Penning the Bodies: The Construction of Gendered Subjects in Alice Munro's Boys and Girls".

image of the strong, tough man he needs to be in order to complete these tasks. At the same time, his work with the foxes allows him to make use of his creativity in practical ways: “Everything was tidy and ingenious; my father was tirelessly inventive and his favourite book in the world was Robinson Crusoe” (103). In contrast, female work is presented as dull and time-consuming, but of little actual relevance. The mother is responsible for cooking, cleaning, washing, and everything else that needs to be done in the house. The sheer amount of repetitive tasks wears her out: “My mother was too tired and preoccupied to talk to me, she had no heart to tell about the Normal School Graduation Dance; sweat trickled over her face and she was always counting under her breath, pointing at jars, dumping cups of sugar” (105). Her work does not offer opportunities for showing courage or creativity. The girl aptly summarizes these sentiments: “It seemed to me that work in the house was endless, dreary and peculiarly depressing; work done out of doors, and in my father’s service, was ritualistically important” (105). In general, the completion of domestic chores is seen as a given, whereas the execution of farm business is regarded as more of an achievement. While the father’s work seems to be aimed at clear goals, rational and physically demanding, the mother’s work seems to be more closely associated to her emotions. Her work seems taxing, but more so in an emotional sense. While the father’s work is portrayed as hard, he seems up to it and does not complain, fulfilling his tasks dutifully and unperturbedly. The mother, by contrast, seems almost unable to cope with her work, which affects her emotionally and physically. She complains about the amount and time-consuming nature of her work and laments her daughter’s lack of assistance.

The character’s degree of agency is important as well. Throughout the story, the father is more active and the mother is more passive. This is clearly illustrated by the verbs they are associated with: the father “raised”, “killed”, “skinned”, “sold”, “worked”, “removed”, “scraped away” (100), “made” (102), “cut”, “took”, “threw” (104), “shot and butchered” (106), “shouted” (112); while the mother “thought that was not funny”, “disliked the whole pelting operation”, “wished it did not have to take place in the house” (100), “was feeling”, “did not come out of the house” (104), “was too tired and preoccupied”, was “counting”, “pointing”, “dumping” (105), “began to cry” (110), and “had to heat dinner up all over again” (114). The father thus appears to be in control of his own role and actions, whereas the mother seems to be mostly reacting to what happens around her, and trying to get by. In this context, it is particularly interesting to observe the development of the character of the girl. In her dreams at the outset of the

story, she is the active one: “I rescued people”, “I shot two rabid wolves”, “I rode a fine horse” (102). In contrast, in the later dreams, she takes on a more passive role: “instead, somebody would be rescuing me” (113). This demonstrates her development from being more independent and rebellious, and associating more with “male” roles and activities, to being more submissive and compliant, accepting her association with “female” roles and tasks.

Differences between men and women in terms of body and appearance are also touched upon in the story. Whereas men’s bodily functions and noises are already described in detail on the second page of the story, this would be unthinkable for women. It is crucial for women to behave properly and to be presentable at any time. If this is not the case, there needs to be an excuse, as in the following example referring to the mother: “Her hair was tied up in a kerchief, wisps of it falling out. She would tie her hair up like this in the morning, saying she did not have time to do it properly, and it would stay tied up all day. It was true, too; she really did not have time.” (104). As long as men do their work, their appearance does not really matter. For women, however, their appearance is supposed to reflect their character. They are expected to put effort into how they look, in order to present themselves in the best possible way.

Overall, men are presented in a decidedly more favorable light than women. Men are independent and in control of things, actively shaping their surroundings to suit them, whereas women are dependent on men and mostly adapt to the circumstances they find themselves in. Even the word “girl” already carries negative connotations, as the girl in the story is surprised to realize:

This winter I also began to hear a great deal more on the theme my mother had sounded when she had been talking in front of the barn. I no longer felt safe. It seemed that in the minds of the people around me, there was a steady undercurrent of thought, not to be deflected, on this one subject. The word *girl* had formerly seemed to me innocent and unburdened, like the word *child*; now it appeared that it was no such thing. A girl was not, as I had supposed, simply what I was; it was what I had to become. It was a definition, always touched with emphasis, with reproach and disappointment. Also it was a joke on me. (107)

With the significant exception of the girl, all the characters in the story seem to subscribe to the traditional views and conventions regarding life in general and gender roles in particular. The visiting grandmother is the most vocal purveyor of such views, constantly reminding her granddaughter that “[g]irls don’t slam doors like that”, “[g]irls keep their knees together when they sit down”, or “[t]hat’s none of girl’s business”

(107). Further emphasis of these convictions can be found in statements by the mother (“And then I can use her more in the house, [...] I just get my back turned and she runs off. It’s not like I had a girl in the family at all.” (105)), and the father (“She’s only a girl” (114)).

The father and the mother embody quite stereotypical versions of male and female characters. The girl has a position in between these two “extremes”, and is consequently a more complex character. At the beginning of the story, she is too young to be considered a woman, and thus enjoys more freedom of being able to move in and out of each of the two domains. As she grows older, however, she is more and more pushed towards the female role she is meant to adopt. This also results in considerable loss of freedom, as women’s traditional role is linked to a number of severe restrictions. The girl’s struggle of finding her place also includes a rebellion against these restrictions imposed on women by a patriarchal society. However, her rebellion appears to be only temporary, as at the end of the story, she seems to accept her fate of complying with a traditionally constructed female role as almost inevitable. In a turn quite typical for Munro, the story thus does not have a “happy ending”, evading a resolution of the conflict at the heart of it.

5.1.1.4.2 Freedom Versus Confinement

The second important theme of the story is the dichotomy between freedom and confinement. The main sources of confinement are the traditional assumptions about gender roles, which stand at the center of the narrative. These severely limit women’s abilities to shape their life according to their own ideas and preferences, by confining them to a rigidly defined, predetermined role. These restrictions also have physical consequences: women are bound to the house, and the kitchen in particular. This is seen as “their place”, and they are expected to accept this and spend the vast majority of their daily life there. This can have a suffocating and depressing effect on women. In the story, the daughter feels and rejects the oppressive confinement of the kitchen: “I hated the hot dark kitchen in summer, the green blinds and the flypapers, the same old oilcloth table and wavy mirror and bumpy linoleum” (105). In addition, the mother is negatively affected by working almost exclusively in the house, both emotionally and physically: the seclusion probably makes her feel lonely (105), and is visibly marked by her white skin, resulting from her lack of exposure to the sun (104).

The theme of confinement is omnipresent in the story: the animals' physical imprisonment reflects the restrictions women face on a physical and intellectual level (see Goldman). The foxes are kept in pens and the horses in stalls. These barriers are made and controlled by men and offer no opportunity to escape: "Alive, the foxes inhabited a world my father made for them. It was surrounded by a high guard fence, like a medieval town, with a gate that was padlocked at night." (102). Figuratively, the same is true of women. Although their confinement is not the result of obvious physical imprisonment, they still cannot escape it. Being the result of established traditions and assumptions, it is not immediately visible, and thus harder to pinpoint. In the story, women's latent confinement is therefore visualized through the confinement of the animals.

With regards to confinement, the distinction between male and female space is crucial. Throughout the story, there is an important separation between "inside" and "outside": the house is portrayed as the private, female sphere, whereas the barn and the outside part of the farm functions as the public, male sphere³. The father is usually shown working outside or in the barn, whereas the mother spends most of her time inside the house performing domestic duties. This separation is explicitly referred to by the girl in the story:

"It was an odd thing to see my mother down at the barn. She did not often come out of the house unless it was to do something – hang out the wash or dig potatoes in the garden. She looked out of place, with her bare lumpy legs, not touched by the sun, her apron still on and damp across the stomach from the supper dishes." (104)

The girl disapproves of her mother's unusual presence at the barn, in what seems to be an act of defiance against the intrusion into the territory she shares with her father: "I felt my mother had no business down here and I wanted him to feel the same way" (105).

The mother is thus not only restricted to her role as housewife in terms of her activities, but also in terms of her physical range of movement. In contrast, the father seems to casually move in and out of the house as he pleases, while spending most of his time outside and at the barn. Meanwhile, the young girl still has access to both of these

³ The terminology of male versus female sphere goes back to Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969), a key text of feminism. In it, Millett describes Victorian society's sharp separation of male and female domains and activities. Her analysis and terms remain a useful basis for examining more recent expressions of restrictions concerning gender roles.

spheres and moves around in between them. She prefers the male domain centered on the outside, but as she gets older it becomes increasingly clear that her “designated place” as a woman is the female domain focused on the inside and the house in particular. In the story, this idea is expressed by the mother, who emphasizes that once their son is a bit older, her husband will have “a real help” and she will in turn be able to “use her [daughter] more in the house” (105). The girl’s future therefore seems to hold confinement similar to the one her mother is currently experiencing.

5.1.2 Discourse Level

5.1.2.1 Narrative Technique

The story is told by a first-person narrator, who can be identified as the girl. The narrator is thus homodiegetic, as she takes part in the story as a protagonist (see Prince 40-41). Throughout the story, the focalization is internal⁴, tied to the perception of the girl’s character. The story is narrated retrospectively from a later point in time. Indications for this are the past tense in which the story is told and expressions such as “The winter I was eleven years old” (107). The logical conclusion is that the narrator is in fact an older version of the girl in the story, providing an account of a particular period of her childhood. The narrator’s increased knowledge and different view on things allow her to examine her younger self’s behavior critically. This becomes clear when looking at the following quote, where the narrator evaluates her younger self’s reaction to the mother’s desire to keep her inside the house more:

She was plotting now to get me to stay in the house more, although she knew I hated it (*because* she knew I hated it) and keep me from working for my father. It seemed to me that she would do this simply out of perversity, and to try her power. It did not occur to me that she could be lonely, or jealous. (106)

From the narrator’s later position in time, she can identify other possible reasons for her mother’s behavior than the ones she could see at the time she was experiencing the situation as a young girl. Throughout the story, the perceived distance between the narrator and the character of the girl fluctuates. There are situations that seem to be narrated from a more removed point of view (like the one mentioned above, involving the mother), and others where there seems to be no “distance of narration” between the “narrating self” and the “experiencing self” at all (for example when the girl’s feelings

⁴ In Baldick’s *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, focalization is defined as “[t]he term used in modern narratology for ‘point of view’; that is, for the kind of perspective from which the events of a story are witnessed. [...] The nature of a given narrative’s focalization is to be distinguished from its narrative ‘voice’, as seeing is from speaking.” (131)

and thoughts are described)⁵. The shifts between these two types of perspectives are smooth and hardly noticeable.

The act of narration itself is also addressed in the story: “I have forgotten to say what the foxes were fed. My father’s bloody apron reminded me. They were fed horsemeat.” (106). The narrator is thus reminded of a further detail she wants to mention in the story by something she narrated in the previous section. This kind of commentary on a meta level removes the reader from the events of the story for a moment, serving as a reminder of the story’s quality as a fictional account of events.

It is quite common for Munro to have young, sensitive women narrate her stories. In “Boys and Girls”, the girl’s young age and perceptiveness allow her to provide a fresh view on things. This involves noticing and questioning aspects of life that are seen as natural by the adults in the story, such as the different behavior which is expected from men and women.

5.1.2.2 Structure

With regards to structure, the story is divided into three distinct sections. The first section introduces the setting, the characters, and foreshadows the main theme by presenting the contrast between the girl’s dreams and the limited opportunities available to her in real life. The second section offers a detailed description of fox farming and the work associated with it. Farm work and domestic work are compared in terms of their division between men and women as well as in terms of their perceived significance. While the first two sections run three pages each, the third section is the longest with eight pages. Overall, the story runs 14 pages. The third segment introduces the horses and discusses their shooting. In addition, it presents the girl’s act of disobedience, which ultimately results in her being dismissed as “just a girl” by her father.

The story is organized as a retrospective, covering different events in the childhood of the girl. Overall, these events are presented in a chronological fashion. However, they are not only organized as a linear sequence of events, but also by way of association. Episodes providing further details are added when they match a topic mentioned in a previous section. A good example for this is the mention in passing of the father’s bloody apron on page 104, when he is talking to his wife. This detail is then used to

⁵ These terms were introduced by Stanzel (99), in particular reference to first person narration. They can be helpful in describing narrative situations that might at first seem ambiguous.

introduce the next section two pages later: “I have forgotten to say what the foxes were fed. My father’s bloody apron reminded me. They were fed horsemeat.” (106). As has been pointed out above, this section also functions as a reminder of the narrator’s presence in telling the story. There is one notable flashback, interrupting the chronological order of presentation, which is also evoked by association: “Laird jumped. He seemed young and obedient again. Suddenly I remembered how, when he was little, I had brought him into the barn and told him to climb the ladder to the top beam.” (110). In it, the girl remembers a time when her brother was still young enough to do what she said, and feels slightly guilty at having abused this fact.

5.1.2.3 Time

In terms of time, the story appears to cover a period of about one and a half years. Overall, the story time therefore significantly exceeds the discourse time (see Pierce 98). As mentioned above, the events in the story are presented in a predominantly chronological order. Summary is used in phrases like “After the grass was cut, it seemed suddenly much later in the year” (104) or “When spring came” (107) to advance the story.

The main evidence for the time covered is the description of the seasons, as well as the aging of the two children and the changes they undergo. The story starts out in winter, with a description of the pelting that takes place before Christmas. Four pages into the story, it switches to summer within the explanation of taking care of the foxes, and moves on to fall with the cutting of the long grass on the following page. Two pages later, another winter is mentioned. The transition to spring is outlined on the next page, and the rest of the story plays out in spring. In terms of the children’s development, only the girl’s age is mentioned: the second winter is defined as “[t]he winter I was eleven years old” by her (107). Judging from his behavior, Laird seems to be at least three years younger than his sister. At the beginning of the story, they are still afraid of the dark side of the room at night and sing themselves to sleep, whereas at the end of the story, they are no longer afraid and have also stopped singing.

5.1.2.4 Language and Style

In terms of language, Munro’s style is quite simple and straightforward, avoiding any superfluous words and adornments. In its simplicity, her writing is astonishingly accurate and manages to convey much more than is explicitly stated. Her prose reflects her sensitivity as a writer and often causes “pangs of recognition” in the reader (Proulx

ix). It is precisely this understated style and economy with words which characterizes Munro and which has given rise to some of the most beautiful and touching moments of her prose.

In this story, the expression “only a girl” is crucial, appearing twice in the text. It highlights the perception of women and girls as inferior to men. Although it is only explicitly expressed twice, this view informs everything that happens in the story. It first appears as a casual comment by a salesman, in reaction to the father’s joking presentation of his daughter as “my new hired man”: “‘Could of fooled me,’ said the salesman. ‘I thought it was only a girl.’” (104). The second time it is used by the father at the end of the story, reacting to the girl’s disobedience. This repetition in the final paragraph of the story is crucial, as the father’s remark seals the fate of the girl. The girl qualifies the expression as “the words which absolved and dismissed me for good” (114). By saying, “Never mind, [...] [s]he’s only a girl” (114), the father denies the girl’s equality to men, classifying her as inferior and using her sex as an explanation for what he interprets as absurd behavior.

5.1.2.5 Symbolism

In terms of symbolism, it is interesting to examine the relationship between the main character and the female horse. In a significant way, the girl’s struggle is paralleled by the struggle of Flora. The girl’s rebellion against the restrictions that society is imposing on her is reflected in Flora’s revolt against human control and in her attempt to escape from it. On a certain level, the girl feels a kinship with the horse, which compels her to open the gate and let the horse get out at the critical moment. However, it is clear in advance that the horse cannot really be saved. The girl is aware that her father will find, catch, and butcher it; nonetheless, she is unable to react in any other way: “I was on Flora’s side, and that made me no use to anybody, not even to her. Just the same, I did not regret it; when she came running at me and I held the gate open, that was the only thing I could do.” (113). The horse’s hopeless situation and predetermined fate resembles that of the girl: she, too, is shown to be unable to escape her destiny at the end of the story.

In a similar element of symbolism, the foxes’ confinement reflects that of women in society. Their narrow pens are controlled by male force, as is women’s limiting exclusive role as housewives and their relegation to the house.

5.1.3 Background and Contextualization

Taking the context of Munro's oeuvre into account, several observations can be made regarding "Boys and Girls".

The first thing to note is that this story constitutes an example of Munro's early fiction, which is more straightforward in presenting an idea or message. In an interview, talking about her first story collection in retrospect, Munro observed that the main idea was stated quite explicitly at the end of each story:

I've never been an innovator or an experimental writer. I'm not very clever that way. I'm never ahead of what's being done at the time. So in those stories in *Dance of the Happy Shades* there's an awful lot of meaningful final sentences. There's an awful lot of very, very important words in each last little paragraph. And that's something that I felt was necessary at the time for the stories to work. It was the way I felt that you made a story most effective. And now, I would go back, if I could, rewrite most of those stories, and I would chop out a lot of those words and final sentences. And I would just let each story stand without bothering to do the summing up, because that's really what it amounts to. (Struthers 9)

The meaning of Munro's comment becomes clear when looking at the last paragraph of "Boys and Girls":

"Never mind," my father said. He spoke with resignation, even good humour, the words which absolved and dismissed me for good. "She's only a girl," he said. I didn't protest that, even in my heart. Maybe it was true. (114)

These last words really drive home the meaning of the story. It is precisely this "summing up" that Munro has said she tried to avoid in later stories. Hunter observes that Munro's writing underwent "a major shift [...] in the early 1980s", "from impressionism" to what Coral Ann Howells has termed the "art of indeterminacy" (Hunter 166). There is thus a marked difference between Munro's earlier and later stories.

The second aspect worth noting is Munro's use of narrative technique in "Boys and Girls", which has become a characteristic feature of her writing. In his essay "'Clear Jelly': Alice Munro's Narrative Dialectics", Robert Thacker discusses Munro's use of retrospective first person narrators in detail. Tracing her development of this narrative technique from her first stories, which were published at university, to *Dance of the Happy Shades*, Thacker observes that "[b]y the time her first collection appeared, Munro had perfected a distinctive, retrospective narrative approach that she has used throughout her subsequent work" (37). Thacker outlines how this technique allows for a

combination of the “immediacy” of the remembered events with a “detached understanding” of them (45): “The remembering narrator in ‘At the Other Place’ recreates the immediate reality of the story while, at the same time, she is able to infuse the narrative with the incident’s subjective importance, realized only as she matures.” (41). This observation would be equally applicable to “Boys and Girls”, which Thacker classifies as one of “those stories [in] *Dance of the Happy Shades* in which Munro’s retrospective narration is most refined” (*Clear Jelly* 46).

Thacker highlights Munro’s narrative technique as “the catalytic factor in [her] substantial art” (37), pointing out that

Munro’s distinctive narrative technique [...] has enabled her to create a dialectic between present and past, between experience and understanding. This, in turn, has enabled her to transform commonplace, everyday experiences – like a girlhood acquaintanceship, a pick-up affair, or a first date – into finely wrought art. (Thacker, *Clear Jelly* 57-58)

He therefore sees Munro’s retrospective first person narrative technique, which she employs in both “Boys and Girls” and “How I Met My Husband”, as a significant component of her narrative art. Isla Duncan also explores the issue of Munro’s “first-person, confiding narrative” in the first chapter of her book on *Alice Munro’s Narrative Art*.

A further noteworthy aspect is the portrayal of women and their importance in the story. One of Munro’s central topics has been the life and the experiences of women, often illustrating the negative effects that a society dominated by men can have on these. “Boys and Girls” is a clear example of this. In another characteristic of Munro’s work, the story offers no simple resolution or relief, but rather emphasizes the far-reaching consequences of the presented conflict. In “Boys and Girls”, the girl eventually seems to give in to what is expected of her, and accept her role as a woman, with all the limitations this entails in the traditional society she lives in. As Annie Proulx observes:

Many of Munro’s stories deal with the interior thoughts and experiences of women, but those very stories often show independent, talented, intelligent, fresh-hearted young girls who, as they weather life’s common events and difficulties, finally succumb to familial, matrimonial, social, and cultural pressures, crouching into a status quo posture that allows them only to go on, to go on. No writer, including Chekhov, has so richly explored the feelings and lives of women in our time. (Proulx xvi)

If the story of the girl were continued, this could be her future, the only one allowed by her oppressive environment: to just go on.

5.1.4 Relevance for the Classroom

There are several reasons which make “Boys and Girls” a suitable text for the English language classroom in Austria. First of all, the story addresses the issue of traditional gender roles, and provides insights into how these affect and restrict women. The Austrian high school curricula list gender roles and gender equality as central topics to be treated in the classroom (see for example Lehrplan AHS Allgemeiner Teil 1-2, 3, Lehrplan HLT 5, Lehrplan HAK 7). These topics are approached from a female perspective in the story, highlighting the inequity that women face in everyday life. On the one hand, “Boys and Girls” can provide information by clearly illustrating the implications of traditional gender roles. On the other hand, it can serve as a point of departure for meaningful discussions about gender roles in the classroom. For example, these could include analyzing how things have changed in comparison to the conditions presented in the story in terms of politics and perceptions, or examining how the issues introduced in the story relate to the students’ own life and experiences.

Another reason for teaching “Boys and Girls” is the fact that it covers a range of topics that form part of the *Themenpool* for the new Austrian Matura (see section 2.3.4 of this thesis). These will be explored in more detail in the following. Each topic’s name is given in the German original, along with the topic’s number in the *Themenpool* document published by the Austrian Ministry for Education and Women (see BMBF, *Themenpool* 13). A further advantage of treating these topics against the backdrop of “Boys and Girls” is the sense of coherence and natural development that this allows for.

5.1.4.1 “Beziehungen und soziale Netzwerke” (Topic 1)

The relationships between the characters are of great importance in the story. It portrays family life in detail and offers insights into the characters’ relationships with each other. On the basis of the story, family relationships and their dynamics can thus be discussed from different angles. For example, it could be interesting for students to analyze the dynamics of the relationships between the different family members in the story, and how these affect each of the family members. Another opportunity for meaningful discussion would be the comparison of the relationships in the story to students’ personal experiences with their own families. As always, such personalized discussions should be managed sensitively by the teacher. If a closer focus on the story is desired, students could talk about the ways in which the relationships in the story are used to illustrate its themes.

The story also addresses the relationships between men and women on a more general level, including society's influence on these. This could be used as the foundation for a discussion of men's and women's roles in society, different perceptions of these, and how these affect (and are reflected in) relationships at a personal level. A possible follow-up task for students would be to discuss the influence of wider social networks on their personal relationships with other people.

5.1.4.2 “Wohnen und Umgebung” (Topic 2) and “Arbeitswelt” (Topic 7)

With its focus on farm life, the story illustrates a way of living that many students might not be familiar with anymore. The layout of the farm and the rural surroundings are described in some detail, offering insights in terms of accommodation as well as working environments. This offers opportunities for learning about a different lifestyle, and to then compare it to other ways and places of living. Possible options for discussion include comparisons of rural and urban living, the connection or separation of workplace and home, or the implications of living on a farm.

5.1.4.3 “Tradition und Wandel” (Topic 10)

The way of life that is portrayed in the story is linked to the past in many ways. For example, the way a typical farm was run then is significantly different from how a typical farm is run today. The hierarchical order of the family, and the strict separation of male and female domains presented in the story have also undergone critical developments in Western society. The comparison of living and working conditions, of the tools and technology available, and of the habits and beliefs portrayed in the story to current society can thus shed an interesting light on the topics of tradition and change. One issue which is treated in particular detail in the story, thus lending itself to discussion, is the organization of social life and gender roles.

5.1.4.4 “Landeskundliche Aspekte” (Topic 12)

The story also offers some insights into certain aspects of Canadian life. Students can gain an understanding of life on a rural Canadian farm in the 1940s, and learn something about Canadian and North American history. Here, it might be interesting to consider the similarities and differences not only in terms of time and historical development in Canada, but also with regards to life in different countries. This could also be connected to the topic of gender roles, in a comparison of developments of the legislation and public opinion regarding gender roles in different countries. For

example, Canada and Austria could be compared directly, or analyzed in a worldwide context.

5.1.4.5 “Natur und Umwelt” (Topic 16)

Nature and the environment are addressed in the story in various ways. First, they are closely connected to working and living on the farm. The change of the seasons and its reflection in nature is described throughout the story. Second, the story prominently features different animals, detailing their looks and behavior. The foxes and the horses’ realistic portrayal can contribute to students’ understanding of animals and nature, as well as familiarize them with some related vocabulary. Issues of nature and environment could also be discussed in connection to the points mentioned in “Wohnen und Umgebung” and “Arbeitswelt”.

5.1.4.6 “Persönliche Zukunft / Pläne” (Topic 18)

In the story, the girl’s future and her plans for it are presented by way of implication. Her rejection of the tightly delineated female role predetermined for her, and her pursuit of perception and rights equal to those of the men in the story imply that she seeks to achieve independence. However, the restricting factors in her life are also depicted, and in the end, it seems as though she bows to the expectations of the people around her. This controversial portrayal can provide a basis for fruitful discussion of the students’ own aspirations and plans for their future. The different factors influencing such decisions can also be addressed, as well as opportunities for agency and self-fulfillment. Another idea would be to discuss the opportunities that the girl from the story would have had in a different setting or time. This could also be done as an intermediate task between working on the text and discussing students’ personal future.

5.1.4.7 “Erwachsenwerden und Identitätsfindung” (Topic 20)

Growing up and the struggle to define one’s identity are central topics in “Boys and Girls”. The story illustrates some typical issues of coming of age, providing a valuable backdrop for discussion of these issues in class. The subject of roles and role models is particularly salient in the story, exemplified by the girl’s desire to be like her father, and her rejection of her mother as a role model. This can be used as a starting point for more general discussions on growing up, on the search for identity and on the significance of role models in a young person’s life. As has already been pointed out, the story also lends itself to serving as an introduction to more extensive discussion of male and female roles in society.

5.1.4.8 “Regeln, Vorschriften, Gesetze” (Topic 24)

The topic of rules, regulations and laws features in the story in a more implicit way. It is clear that these influence the characters in the story, even when they are not explicitly referred to. An interesting point for discussion would be the relationship between official rules and laws and the unofficial, but influential rules and restrictions resulting from dominant beliefs and assumptions in a society. Based on “Boys and Girls”, this could also be addressed in connection to men’s and women’s roles and their respective rights. An analysis and discussion of the historical development of legislation and societal opinions with regards to women’s rights might be a valuable addition. This could also lead to a more in-depth debate on rules, regulations and laws in the present, in Austria, Canada, and around the world.

5.2 “How I Met My Husband” (1974)

“How I Met My Husband” was first published in 1974, in the collection *Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You*. In the paperback edition of that collection, which has been used for this analysis, the story’s page count is 17. “How I Met My Husband” deals with love and romance, subverting the traditional romantic storyline with a surprising ending. The story focuses on the life of a teenage girl and her first encounters with love and sexuality. At the end, her situation as a grown-up, married woman is introduced as well. “How I Met My Husband” has been included in literary collections such as *The Longman Anthology of Short Fiction* or *An Introduction to Literature* of Barnet et al. and is a popular choice in English literary seminars at college and university (see Sterling, Neumann).

5.2.1 Story Level

5.2.1.1 Plot

The story portrays the life of a teenage girl called Edie, who comes from a family of farmers. At the age of fifteen, Edie is working as a maid in the house of the local veterinary and his family, the Peebles, who have recently moved to the country. She likes working there and enjoys the amenities that their house has to offer. One day, a plane lands close to their house. The pilot, Chris Watters, is a war veteran who now offers plane rides for a living. He sees Edie get dressed up in Mrs. Peebles’ clothes, but promises not to tell on her when she asks him to keep it a secret. He is charming and Edie is attracted to him. He comes over to the Peebles’ house every day to get water and they talk, but nothing else happens between them. A few weeks after Chris’ arrival, a

woman called Alice Kelling shows up claiming to be his fiancée. Chris does not seem very happy to see her. The next day, when Alice Kelling and Mrs. Peebles are away on a picnic, Edie brings Chris a cake and he tells her he is leaving. He starts kissing her in his tent. When they part, he tells her that he will send her a letter, in order for her to come to see him. When the women get back from the picnic, Chris is already gone. They ask Edie where he went, and she lies, indicating a town nearby. Alice Kelling is suspicious and they ask Edie if she has been “intimate” with Chris. She affirms, unaware of the actual implications of the word. The misunderstanding is discovered shortly afterwards, but the embarrassment endures. Nonetheless, Edie continues to wait for a letter from Chris for months and goes to meet the mailman every day. When she finally realizes that no letter is ever going to come and stops her daily wait at the mailbox, the mailman calls the Peebles asking for her. He invites her out and they start dating. At the end of the story they are married, and the mailman tells their children how Edie used to court him by waiting for the mail every day. She never corrects his version of what happened, saying that “naturally I laugh and let him, because I like for people to think what pleases them and makes them happy” (53).

5.2.1.2 Setting

The story is set in a rural area in southeastern Canada, in the province of Ontario near Lake Huron. The lake is mentioned in the text (47, 50), although not by name, and the towns of Bayfield (50) and Goderich (53), which lie on the shore of Lake Huron, are mentioned explicitly. Further Ontario towns that feature in the story are Centralia, where Chris was stationed when he met Alice (46), and Chesley, where Mrs. Peebles goes to the hairdresser (39).

Most of the action plays out at the farmhouse of Mr. and Mrs. Peebles, who have moved from the town to the countryside. In doing so, they form part of an upcoming trend: “It was just when the trend was starting of town people buying up old farms, not to work them but to live on them” (37). The surroundings of the house are described in the story, most notably the old fairground on the adjacent plot of land:

We watched the plane land across the road, where the fairgrounds used to be. It did make a good landing field, nice and level for the old race track, and the barns and display sheds torn down now for scrap lumber so there was nothing in the way. Even the old grandstand boys had burned. (37)

The Peebles’ house with its modern amenities and comfort is contrasted with Edie’s family’s more traditional and less well-equipped house. The comparison is conveyed

through Edie's description of the impressive features that the Peebles' house has, and that she is not used to from her family's house. For example, the Peebles have "an automatic washer and dryer" and a well-lit kitchen with a "double sink" (39), whereas at her family's house, Edie used to do dishes "in a dishpan with a rag-plugged hole on an oilcloth-covered table by light of a coal-oil lamp" (39-40). The Peebles' bathroom is also a source of amazement for Edie: "The basin and the tub and the toilet were all pink, and there were glass doors with flamingoes painted on them, to shut off the tub. The light had a rosy cast and the mat sank under your feet like snow, except that it was warm. The mirror was three-way." (40). Moreover, whereas the most common way for people to get water at the time was an outside pump, the Peebles have "piped water" (41).

The different locations, the Peebles' home and Edie's home, are closely connected to different ways of living. These are very separate, as Edie observes after describing the bathroom at the Peebles' house: "Sometimes I thought about the way we lived out at home and the way we lived here and how one way was so hard to imagine when you were living the other way" (40). The Peebles are so used to the devices that facilitate their everyday life that they cannot imagine doing without them, whereas Edie's family is so used to getting by without the help of any advanced amenities that the Peebles' way of life seems very foreign to them. When Edie tells her family about the work she does at the Peebles' house, they are amused by what to them seems to be a lack of difficulty (39).

A further significant element is the contrast between city and country. The story's descriptions focus on the circumstances of life in the countryside, as well as on the physical characteristics of the rural landscape. While city life is only referred to on a number of occasions, it constitutes the backdrop to which country life is contrasted with.

The reference to the Second World War is the clearest indication of the temporal setting of the story: "Cars were still in short supply then, after the war" (39). This suggests that most of the action takes place in the late 1940s to early 1950s. Another indication for this is the mentioning of the "radio news" (37): while the radio was still the main communication medium in the 1940s, it was increasingly replaced by the television in the 1950s. Further telling details include the plane, the household appliances, and the sunglasses.

5.2.1.3 Characters

In “How I Met My Husband”, the characters are described more broadly rather than in great detail. While each character has some distinctive features that make him or her identifiable and relatable, they can also be seen as character types, illustrating more general human tendencies (see Prince 13). For example, they personify typical ideas of “city” or “country people”, or represent different types of lovers. The character that is described in most detail is Edie, and it is from her perspective that the other characters are presented and characterized directly. She evaluates their looks and behavior, as well as commenting on her own teenage behavior from a more mature point of view. The reader also obtains insight into Edie’s thoughts and feelings. Sample instances of this include “I loved being left in the house alone, to do my work at leisure” (39) or “I didn’t know how to joke back then. I was too embarrassed” (41). Indirect characterization plays a significant role in the story as well. The characters’ actions and statements illustrate their main concerns and attitudes. A good example for this is Loretta Bird’s introduction of Alice Kelling, which shows her own desire for attention: “This is a lady looking for the man that flies the plane [...] I heard her inquire in the hotel coffee shop where I was having a Coke and I brought her out.” (45). This notion is further emphasized by Edie’s comment that Loretta Bird stepped out of the car “all importance” (45). The direct characterization through Edie’s comments and the indirect characterization thus mutually reinforce each other throughout the story.

The distinction between city and country is of particular relevance in “How I Met My Husband”. Someone’s place of origin is directly associated with their characteristics: for example, those characters who are from the country are portrayed as traditional, realistic and down-to-earth, hardworking, hospitable, friendly, very conscious of social etiquette and distinctions regarding social status. Meanwhile, those protagonists who are originally from the city are shown to be more progressive and somewhat idealistic, but less practical and less attuned to the subtle differences in behavior and social status that shape life in small-town communities. Moreover, they tend to have higher aspirations and to be dissatisfied with the restrictions that country life entails. This contrast also informs the characters’ opinions, statements and behavior. For example, after the landing of the plane, Mrs. Peebles says “Let’s go back in the house. Let’s not stand here gawking like a set of farmers” (37), apparently oblivious to the offensive quality of this statement. As Edie comments subsequently, “[s]he didn’t say that to hurt my feelings. It never occurred to her” (37). Another example are Edie’s and the Peebles’ differing

perceptions of Loretta Bird. The Peebles, coming from the city, cannot assess her social position accurately: “She lived on the next place and the Peebles thought she was a countrywoman, they didn’t know the difference” (37). Meanwhile, Edie has more information about Loretta’s low-class background, which seems to feed into her dislike of Loretta. As these examples illustrate, the relationships between the characters are meaningful as well. In addition to the city – country dichotomy, there is a clear hierarchy associated with social class, and age is also a factor. For example, while Edie is “only” the maid, who has a lower status than the Peebles, she is still an authoritative figure to their children, whom she is taking care of.

Moreover, the emphasis of the characters’ differences is important in terms of characterization and the story’s construction. The two main male characters, Chris and the mailman, are portrayed as opposites: whereas Chris is the exciting and attractive, but unreliable womanizer, the mailman is perfectly kind and reliable, but fails to stir Edie’s feelings in a passionate way (see Sutton, *Comfortably*). Their different characters are also expressed through their respective jobs. As a pilot, Chris is extraordinary, adventurous and intriguing and organizes his work however it suits him on any given day. Moreover, he is constantly on the move, both in terms of taking off and landing, and in terms of changing locations. This highlights his restlessness and unpredictability. In contrast, the mailman’s job is the very definition of continuity and dependability. It requires him to be at the same place every day at the same time. He fulfills his tasks dutifully, and, as opposed to Chris, has to organize his life around his stable job. This makes him the perfect candidate for a stable and durable marriage. With regards to the female characters, Edie and Alice Kelling are presented as opposites in several ways. While Edie is young and optimistic but realistic at the same time, Alice is older, more desperate and caught up in a pipe dream. Edie’s physical attractiveness is contrasted with Alice’s apparent worn out and unappealing looks. In terms of education, Alice is technically ahead of Edie. However, Edie seems to make up for this with confidence and common sense, whereas Alice’s education does not actually keep her from persisting in her futile pursuit of Chris.

5.2.1.3.1 Edie

During most of the story, Edie is portrayed as a fifteen-year-old girl, who is independent, practical, and down-to-earth, but also a bit naive. She knows about the hardships of life on a country farm and her upbringing has taught her how to work efficiently, particularly with regards to housework. Her family tried hard to enable her

to go to school for a year, but she “didn’t like it”, finding the people and the tasks intimidating, and only achieved low grades (38-39). After that one disappointing year, she never went back, but started working as a maid for the Peebles instead. She likes working for them because she feels that they treat her quite well, and because the work at their house does not seem very hard to her, in comparison to what she is used to. In comparison to Mrs. Peebles, Edie is a much more skilled housewife, and is also used to a different lifestyle, centered on hard work and little leisure. Being a teenager, Edie wonders and fantasizes about romance and sex. She is innocent and somewhat reckless at the same time, curious to try things out on her own. In spite of her age, she is quite strong and self-confident about her capabilities and her appearance. For example, she enjoys looking at her body in the bathroom mirror: “I stood up on the side of the tub and admired myself naked, from three directions” (40). Moreover, she is conscious of how she presents herself to other people, and for instance does not admit to being afraid of going up in the plane: “I was scared, but I never admitted that, especially in front of children I was taking care of” (38). A further example of her determination is that, even though she is embarrassed by the incident with Mrs. Peebles’ dress, she is the one to approach Chris. Furthermore, Edie is perceptive of what is going on around her, and particularly sensitive to the connotations and implications of what is being said and done. She adapts her behavior according to the situations she finds herself in. For example, she knows that she is not supposed to appear curious when working for the Peebles (42), and she analyzes Loretta’s behavior: “She hooked her legs around the chair rung and I knew we were in for a lengthy visit” (38). She conforms to the expectations as far as it suits her, but she still remains true to herself. For instance, when she is asked about her relation to Chris, she refuses to hide it or lie about it, even though there is a misunderstanding of the term “intimate” (51). Moreover, when she realizes later on that there will never be a letter from Chris, it saddens her, but she decides to move on with her life. She does not want to be one of those women who spend their whole lives waiting for a man: “If there were women all through life waiting, and women busy and not waiting, I knew which I had to be” (53).

Edie’s descriptions and judgments of other characters also reveal aspects of her own personality. For instance, Edie’s contempt for Loretta Bird shows her own aversion towards gossiping and exaggerated self-importance. At the same time, it shows Edie’s own susceptibility to the ideas of superiority and inferiority based on social class, which she rejects when they are directed at her. However, her comments about Loretta

Bird imply that at least part of her dislike for Loretta stems from that woman's lower social standing.

5.2.1.3.2 Mr. Peebles

Mr. Peebles is a veterinarian working in the rural area where he moved with his family. He is the breadwinner and the head of the family, but he does not seem very authoritative. Rather, he is presented as sensible and calm: "Dr. Peebles was only an animal doctor, but had a calming way of talking, like any doctor" (37). He seems to understand his wife's concerns and burdens, as well as Edie's. He is the one who suggests hiring Edie when he is at her home and the news about her poor scores in school are revealed. He also seems jovial, repeatedly being shown making jokes, which reveal and emphasize important aspects of the story. An example for this is his remark about Chris to Alice Kelling: "He's not in the habit of running out on you, taking a different name?" Dr. Peebles laughed" (45). Another one is when he questions Edie about Chris: "The Peebles asked me what kind of man he was. Young, middle-aged, short, tall? I couldn't say. 'Good-looking?' Dr. Peebles teased me" (42). Overall, Mr. Peebles is not given a lot of detail as a character, most of what can be known about him is presented indirectly, and his concerns and desires do not feature in the story.

5.2.1.3.3 Mrs. Peebles

Mrs. Peebles is a more modern and privileged woman than the other female characters. She can afford to have a maid to take care of her children and the household chores. Mrs. Peebles' lack of skills as a cook surprises Edie and is repeatedly mentioned (38, 39, 47). Mrs. Peebles does not seem at home in the country, both in terms of feeling different and not really fitting in. At one point, she states that "she wasn't brought up to living in the country" and that the move there was "all [her] husband's idea" (45). Despite her privileged status, she feels "tied down, with the two children, out in the country" (39). It seems like she expected something more from her life. She tries to make the best of it, getting a maid to help her, and taking advantage of the things that make her feel more cosmopolitan, like going out in town to show off her new hairdo (42).

On the one hand, Mrs. Peebles is portrayed as rather nervous and sensitive in terms of her temperament, as well as somewhat pretentious. She seems to get annoyed and overwhelmed easily. For example, the landing plane at the beginning of the story first frightens her, causing her to scream out loud. When it becomes clear that there is no

danger, she is annoyed and mildly distraught: “‘All right,’ said Mrs. Peebles, snappy as she always was when she got over her nerves. ‘Let’s go back in the house’” (37). Moreover, the discovery of Edie’s relation with Chris greatly affects Mrs. Peebles, and the ensuing discussion causes her to get a headache (51-52). On the other hand, she is fair to Edie, defending her against the other women and protecting her from harm when Edie is discovered to have been “intimate” with Chris. She is a more developed character than Mr. Peebles, and could be seen as representing common concerns for women of her background and social status at that time.

5.2.1.3.4 Loretta Bird

Loretta Bird is the stereotypical local gossip always on the lookout for scandals and rumors about other people. She tries to get attention and make herself look better through her alleged insider knowledge and by putting other people down. She is described as thriving on “other people’s troubles” (52), and Edie despises her for this. Loretta Bird has seven children and a husband with a reputation for drinking. Her family is at the bottom of the social ladder and disliked by the other locals, including Edie, who does not want to be associated with Loretta. Only the Peebles, being new to the area and unfamiliar with the local social hierarchy, “thought she was a countrywoman, they didn’t know the difference” (37). Consequently, Edie is appalled at having to attend to Loretta like any other guest of the house. Loretta’s personality and low social standing are emphasized through her remarks and her way of talking. She is arguably presented as the least likeable character, but she also serves a comedic purpose in the story, adding elements of rural flair.

5.2.1.3.5 Alice Kelling

Alice Kelling is engaged to Chris Watters and seems to follow him around quite desperately. This incessant pursuit is her most defining attribute. She is a nurse and met Chris when he was in the hospital due to appendicitis (46). She shows up at the Peebles house one day, looking for Chris. She is portrayed negatively from Edie’s perspective: “Her bust looked to me rather low and bumpy. [...] Nothing in the least pretty or even young-looking about her” (45). More attention seems to be paid to her looks than her thoughts, Edie only observes that “you could tell from the way she talked she was from the city, or educated, or both” (45). Her motivation for following Chris around is not explored directly. For example, it is unclear whether she does so out of enduring love and commitment to Chris, out of jealousy or disappointment, or out of a desperate need

to get married. She is furious when she thinks that Edie has slept with Chris. She insults Edie and starts to cry (51). This suggests at least some degree of jealousy. Overall, however, it is left to the reader to wonder about her motives and her background.

5.2.1.3.6 Chris

Chris is the attractive love interest in the story. He is presented as strong, audacious, handsome, mysterious, and interesting, which sets him apart from the other men in the story. His appeal is underlined by his job as a pilot, which is not as mundane as the other characters' occupations, and which requires courage and skill. He is a World War II veteran, and says that after the war "he couldn't settle down to a ordinary life" (45). He seems to be a ladies' man, to whom being charming comes naturally. This is exemplified in how he talks to Edie (e.g. "It's a good thing I'm used to shy ladies", 43) and his conversations with Mrs. Peebles (44-45). His relationship with Alice Kelling is not explained further than the fact that they are engaged, but it is clear that he does not want to marry her and is actually running away from her. Similar to Alice's reasons for following Chris, his motivations for fleeing from her are not stated directly. He appears to be interested in Edie, but once again, his motives are not clear. Ultimately, he is not held responsible for his careless lifestyle and his trivial and unreliable treatment of women.

5.2.1.3.7 The Mailman

The mailman is only introduced in the very last part of the story, and his actual name is never mentioned. He is only described as "a Carmichael", part of an extended family who are known in the area. He brings the mail every day and ends up thinking that Edie is waiting for him, when she really is waiting for a letter from Chris. He finally asks Edie out after she stops waiting for the mail, and they become a couple. At the end of the story, they have been married for a while with children. He is the "husband" mentioned in the title, but his character is not described in much detail. Edie only says that "he was a young man, shy, but good humored" when she met him (52). He is reliable and kind, but not as interesting or arresting as Chris. His side of the story is not given directly; the reader only knows the information that is provided by Edie with regards to this matter.

5.2.1.3.8 Secondary Characters

The secondary characters featured in the story include the Peebles' children, called Joey and Heather, Edie's family, most notably her mother and father, and Muriel Lowe,

Edie's childhood friend. Loretta Bird's children and the people taking plane rides are also mentioned briefly, as are Edie and the mailman's children.

5.2.1.4 Themes

5.2.1.4.1 Love and Romance

The central themes in "How I Met My Husband" are love and romance, and how they manifest themselves in different kinds of relationships. Edie's youthful passionate infatuation with Chris stands in contrast to her mature relationship with her husband, which is affectionate but less exciting. The story is unconventional as far as it shows that Edie is content in her marriage despite the fact that her husband is not a passionately desired love interest. This can be seen as a critique of common established romantic stories, which is achieved by exposing such stories' lack of correspondence to reality through a reversion of their typical story line.

The story juxtaposes dreamy fantasies and youthful romantic idealism with a more mature and realistic perspective of love and relationships. The different priorities associated with a teenage crush on the one hand, and marriage on the other hand become clear as the story develops. As a teenager, the excitement of dreaming about an older man and romanticizing a relationship are at the center of Edie's crush on Chris. As a grown-up woman, the lasting affection and stability that her marriage to the mailman provides are more important. Edie consciously decides against pursuing an unrealistic notion of idealized love, which is typically associated with teenagers: "Instead of chasing after romantic fantasy, she finds contentment with the ordinary and the attainable" (Sutton, *Comfortably*).

Other types of relationships are shown between Mr. and Mrs. Peebles, and Alice Kelling and Chris Watters. The Peebles appear to be in a conventional marriage, where, according to the customs at the time, the man works and the woman stays at home and takes care of the children and the household. As the Peebles are in a favorable financial situation, they can afford to hire a maid (Edie), who takes care of most of Mrs. Peebles' tasks. Mr. Peebles appears to be looking out for his wife, as he suggests hiring Edie to help Mrs. Peebles, who is feeling confined by their life in the country. The Peebles' emotional relationship is not explored in detail; it is not clear how they feel about each other. They seem to be reasonably content in their marriage, Mr. Peebles arguably more so than his wife. In a conversation with Chris, Mrs. Peebles reveals that she is actually

often bored and that she never wanted to live in the country, but only followed her husband's desire to move there (45).

As opposed to the Peebles, who are officially married, Alice Kelling and Chris Watters are only engaged. Their relationship is much more one-sided, with Alice following Chris around, while he appears to have no real interest in her. They seem to be engaged in an endless cycle of chase and flight. Whereas she wants to get married, he does not, and keeps running away from her. Alice Kelling personifies a more desperate and illusory concept of love. She is one of the women who are "doing this with their lives, all over" – "just waiting and waiting" (53). In contrast, Edie rejects this fate, realizing that "I was never made to go on like that" (53).

This feeds into another important aspect of romance that is explored in the story: the overwhelming power that love can have on people. While teenage love is often associated with such stunning impact, the story shows that older people, like Alice Kelling, can easily be blinded by love as well. Edie in turn exemplifies the fact that, given some distance and the will to face reality, such blindness can be overcome.

While these different forms of love can arguably apply to both genders, women's attitude towards love is explored in particular in the story. Similar to what critic Coral Ann Howells notes about Munro's stories "Bardon Bus" and "Accident", "How I Met My Husband" explores "women's disposition towards shaping their lives as romantic fantasy plots" (78). At first, Edie's dreams resemble such romantic fantasies too, but she eventually overcomes this "disposition" to romanticize and asserts her power to shape her own life.

5.2.1.4.2 Sexuality

Edie's budding sexuality is a significant topic in the story. Munro sensitively illustrates a teenage girl's growing interest in sex. This goes against the traditional notion of women as chaste and pure and lacking any interest in sex, painting a more realistic picture of the issue. In their fantasies, Edie and her friend try to reconcile strict societal expectations of chastity with their own desires, by conjuring up scenarios where sex would be inevitable:

Muriel Lowe and I used to sleep on her front verandah and watch her sister and her sister's boy friend saying good night. Afterwards we couldn't get to sleep, for longing for somebody to kiss us and rub up against us and we would talk about suppose you were out in a boat with a boy and he wouldn't bring you in to

shore unless you did it, or what if somebody got you trapped in a barn, you would have to, wouldn't you, it wouldn't be your fault. (47)

At the same time, Edie's inexperience is highlighted: "I had only kissed a boy on a dare before, and kissed my own arms for practice" (49). Her lack of concrete information about sex is related to the temporal setting of the story and the classification of sex as a taboo subject at the time. The actual sexual interaction between Edie and Chris in the story does not go much further than kissing. Societal expectations do not keep Edie from making out with Chris, or from admitting to it later on. However, the misunderstanding of the expression "to be intimate with someone" between Edie and the other women causes a temporary scandal.

5.2.1.4.3 Gender Roles and Relationships

The story offers an interesting treatment of gender roles and of the relationships between men and women, as well as of relationships among women. Different expectations apply to men and women in society, particularly in the rural and traditional environment that is portrayed in the story. Women are thus expected to take care of the house and the children once they are married. Moreover, they are supposed to remain virgins until marriage, and to then be exemplary wives. In contrast, men are traditionally expected to work and sustain the family, while having more power and freedom in their everyday lives. The social code of conduct is not as rigidly enforced on men as it is on women. With regards to love and courtship, women tend to be the passive ones, waiting to be approached by men. In the story, Edie undermines this tendency by showing initiative in pursuing Chris. In addition, she is unapologetic of her behavior despite the threat of public disapproval and shaming.

The aftermath of Chris and Edie's romantic encounter in his tent is a further example of the different views of men and women in society. Edie's behavior is termed "the cause of all this trouble" by Mrs. Peebles. Therefore, the responsibility of what happened is put on her, the woman, even though Chris, the man, would seem to be in a position of significantly more power and knowledge. It is noteworthy that neither Alice Kelling nor Mrs. Peebles seem to hold Chris responsible for the incident. Once she finds out that something happened between Chris and Edie, Alice Kelling states "I knew from the look of her as soon as I saw her" (50) and proceeds to insult Edie, calling her "loose little bitch" and "filthy little rag" (51). Loretta Bird expresses the likely reason for this interpretation when she says that "[m]en are all the same" (51): restraint and responsibility regarding sex and casual relationships cannot really be expected from

men, but are expected from women as a matter of course. Women who do not abide by these rules are subsequently classified as “loose” and “dirty”. For example, Alice Kelling likens Edie to the “[l]ittle country tramps” she sees at the hospital, who have babies at fourteen or fifteen. Moreover, a woman’s behavior is thought to be reflected in her offspring: “‘There was a bad woman here in town had a baby that pus was running out of its eyes,’ Loretta Bird put in.” (51). Women’s sexuality is thus associated with particular stigma.

On a different note, the story constitutes an interesting exploration of the dynamics of female relationships. These include friendship and solidarity, but also jealousy and hostility. Women are shown to be very critical of each other’s appearance and behavior, as is exemplified by Edie’s evaluation of Alice Kelling (45) or Loretta Bird (37-38). The other women’s immediate negative judgment of Edie’s encounter with Chris is another example for this. There is intense competition between women in everyday life, both in terms of their performance on domestic chores and in relation to men. Such rivalry can lead to a destructive atmosphere of trying to get ahead of each other at any cost. For example, when Edie lies about where Chris has gone, she adds retrospectively: “Women should stick together and not do things like that. I see that now, but I didn’t then. I never thought of myself as being in any way like her, or coming to the same troubles, ever.” (50).

Women’s quest for fulfillment is also touched upon in the story, which mirrors more current concerns of women. For instance, Mrs. Peebles feels restricted by living in the country with two children, whereas Edie’s mother knows no other way of living and finds Mrs. Peebles’ complaints quite ridiculous (39). Besides, Alice Kelling illustrates the fact that being educated and able to support herself is no guarantee for happiness either: she still keeps chasing Chris, presumably in order to find fulfillment in love.

5.2.1.4.4 Social class

Another issue that is addressed in the story is the significance of social class in the protagonist’s everyday life (see Weiss 866). Edie remarks that people’s attitude towards her often changes when she tells them that she is “the hired girl”: “their whole way of looking at you and speaking to you changes” (41). It is clear that Edie’s background is considered “lower class” by most of the people in the story. Edie resents this judgment, but at the same time she judges Loretta Bird and her family in the same way. She despises Loretta for her behavior, but also dismisses her for her low socioeconomic

standing. This becomes apparent in comments such as “They had seven children and couldn’t get credit at the Hi-Way Grocery.” (37). The characters seem to prefer to associate with people of similar or higher social status, as the example of Mrs. Peebles and Alice Kelling shows: “Mrs. Peebles seemed pleased enough now, having company” (47). They are both described as wearing sunglasses (45) and as getting along quite well (47). Another telling scene is when the women believe that Edie has slept with Chris, and Alice Kelling starts insulting her (50-51). Alice’s comments reveal her contempt of what she sees as lower-class girls from the country. The story therefore gives an impression of how perceptions of social class and status influence all of the characters in the story to some degree.

5.2.1.4.5 Small-Town Life

The story offers a “valid portrait of small-town society” in a rural environment (Weiss 866). It provides a contextualization of people’s views and the organization of social life in that period of time, which tend to be particularly pronounced in small-town communities, like the one in the story. For example, the importance of religion is hinted at in the comment: “She asked me did they fight and did they keep things in the dresser drawer not to have babies with. She said it was a sin if they did.” (38). Meanwhile, the fact that people still go on plane rides “in spite of it being preached against from two pulpits” (45) offers some insight into their dynamic handling of religious questions. While religion forms part of people’s everyday life and influences people’s perceptions and societal norms, it does not determine everything that people do. None of the characters in the story appears to be particularly religious. Further aspects that contribute to the realistic portrayal of the story’s world are the relevance of farm work and the lack of compulsory schooling.

Another significant element in the depiction of small-town life is the contrast between city and country. Throughout the story, the particularity of certain customs is highlighted by their lack of an equivalent in the other context. For example, when Mr. Peebles invites Alice Kelling to spend the night with them, Edie notes that “[a]sking people to stay, just like that, is certainly a country thing, and maybe seemed natural to him now, but not to Mrs. Peebles, from the way she said, oh yes, we have plenty of room.” (46). A different example is Edie’s comment on having dinner outside: “Dr. Peebles invited Chris to stay for supper, [...] Mrs. Peebles wanted it served in the yard, in spite of bugs. One thing strange to anybody from the country is this eating outside.”

(47). From the point of view of the country people, the people from the city thus have curious ideas and are somewhat impractical or removed from reality.

5.2.1.4.6 Minor Themes

A secondary theme in the story is that of secrecy, which is a frequent element of Munro's stories (Regan 123). In one of his essays on "How I Met My Husband", Brian Sutton observes that "[t]hroughout this story, problems result when characters disclose their own private information or try to gain access to that of others, and good things result when characters discreetly withhold information" (*Munro's*, 107). Examples include Edie's discretion as a maid (43), her secret stack of food (39), or the secret of Edie wearing Mrs. Peebles' dress, which unites Edie and Chris. The most significant secret in the story arguably is Edie's willful omission of the real reason for her waiting at the mailbox. She has kept this secret for years, failing to correct her husband's account of their courtship in order to ensure his happiness.

A related theme is that of illusion and pretending. Throughout the story, several of the characters pretend to be something they are not. For example, Edie tries on Mrs. Peebles' dress and cosmetics to experience a different version of herself. After she is discovered by Chris, she hurriedly gets rid of her mask in order to go back to her normal appearance: "I dressed in my own clothes and took my hair down and washed my face, wiping in [sic] on Kleenex, which I threw in the wastebasket" (42). A different facet of this is the kind of self-deception that Alice Kelling engages in in her persistent but fruitless pursuit of Chris. She tells herself that Chris will contact her after he left (50) and is still waiting for their future together.

Another theme that informs the story is that of coming of age, which can function as an umbrella term for several of the story's significant themes. As has been pointed out above, Edie's introduction to love, her budding sexuality and her role as a growing woman are important elements in the story. The reader follows Edie through her struggles as a teenage girl into her life as a grown-up wife and mother. Her transition into adulthood therefore stands at the center of the narrative.

5.2.2 Discourse Level

5.2.2.1 Narrative Technique

The story has a first person homodiegetic narrator and is told from the point of view of Edie. Similar to the narrative situation in "Boys and Girls", both the teenage Edie's immediate experiences and the adult Edie's comments and evaluations form part of the

narration. For most of the story, which focuses on the events of Edie's life as a teenager, there is no discernable narrative distance between the younger Edie and the older Edie. Only in the comments by the older Edie is the narrative distance between the "experiencing self" and the "narrating self" apparent (see Stanzel 99). Examples for such remarks include "I have had those in my own home for such a long time now it's hard to remember how much of a miracle it was to me" (39), "That was before they ever thought of making the appliances all different colors and doing the cupboards like dark old wood and hiding the lighting" (39), "I wasn't even old enough then to realize how out of the common it is, for a man to say something like that to a woman" (41), "I'm still ashamed of what happened next" (51), or "I didn't figure out until years later the extent of what I had been saved from" (52). Furthermore, the last sentence of the story, which uses present tense, is told directly from the adult Edie's point of view.

Once more, Munro uses a perceptive young woman as the narrator of her story (see Coldwell 777-778). The young Edie can present an authentic and innocent view of a first encounter with love and sexuality. Moreover, her position as a girl from a family of lower social status allows her to observe things that the adults in the story are oblivious to, such as the differences between the Peebles' and her own family's way of life, or the way people treat the "hired girl". The commentary of Edie as an older woman adds a more mature perspective and helps to view the events of the story in context. As has already been described in more detail in the analysis of narrative technique in "Boys and Girls", the retrospective first person narrator is a distinctive feature in a significant number of Munro's stories (see section 5.1.3 of this thesis). Thacker highlights that this technique has "enabled [Munro] to create a dialectic between present and past, between experience and understanding" (*Clear Jelly*, 58). With the older Edie's narration of the events that the younger Edie seems to immediately experience, "How I Met My Husband" is exemplary for this narrative technique.

5.2.2.2 Time

The story follows an overall linear temporal order. This is only interrupted by a short flashback explaining Edie's background and how she came to work for the Peebles. Overall, the story covers a time period of several years, beginning with Edie as a fifteen-year-old girl and ending with her as grown-up woman. However, most of the narrative is taken up by the summer of the plane's arrival near the Peebles' house. Only on the last two pages of the story are the following years explored, in an instance of striking acceleration:

I was surprised when the mailman phoned the Peeble's place in the evening and asked for me. He said he missed me. He asked if I would like to go to Goderich where some well-known movie was on, I forget now what. So I said yes, and I went out with him for two years and he asked me to marry him, and we were engaged a year more while I got my things together, and then we did marry. (53)

In addition, this later point in time is present throughout the story in the form of the older Edie's comments.

5.2.2.3 Structure

The story is structured in paragraphs and divided into six main sections. The first section presents Edie's life with the Peebles until her first encounter with Chris, while the second section focuses on Edie and Chris' second meeting, when she asks him to keep the dress incident a secret. The third section is shorter, summarizing the following days of Chris presence and his plane ride business. The fourth section covers the arrival of Alice Kelling, up to Edie and Chris' passionate encounter in his tent before his departure and the promise of a letter. In the fifth section, the discovery of Chris' leaving upsets Alice Kelling and leads to the questioning of Edie and the misunderstanding around "being intimate". The sixth section then presents an account of Edie's unfruitful wait for a letter from Chris, and the summary of her marriage to the mailman and their current situation.

The structure of the story is critical for achieving its surprise effect, which is based on the reversal of romantic stereotypes. First of all, the title helps to create expectations of a love story in the reader. These expectations are then reinforced by the development of the story, which resembles that of a typical romance plot. Consequently, most of the story concentrates on "blossoming romance between the naive central character, Edie, and the charming Chris Watters, the chief obstacle seemingly being Alice Kelling, Chris's fiancée" (Sutton, *Comfortably*). In addition, Chris is the only possible candidate for marriage to be presented in the story, until the introduction of the mailman on the penultimate page. The surprise effect is realized at the very end of the story, through the revelation that Edie has actually married the mailman. The attentive reader might already catch on to the improbability of a marriage between Edie and Chris before the ending, but for most first time readers the story holds some surprise.

5.2.2.4 Language and Style

In terms of language and style, the story is altogether quite straightforward. On a more particular level, several expressions stand out. For example, the Peebles' son's "crash

landing” statement at the beginning of the story, which could also be seen as foreshadowing the course of the relationship between Edie and Chris. Moreover, the expression “being intimate” leads to a significant misunderstanding in the story. This is particularly interesting as it means that language and ambiguity are directly addressed in the story. The meaning is then negotiated and the misunderstanding cleared up. Another example is the word “beautiful”, whose use by a man is deemed exceptional: “I wasn’t even old enough then to realize how out of the common it is, for a man to say something like that to a woman, or to somebody he is treating like a woman. For a man to say a word like *beautiful*.” (42).

A further notable feature in terms of language is the authentic rendition of the characters’ way of speaking, which contributes to conveying the setting of the story as well as to the characterization. Loretta Bird is the most obvious example. Her remarks reveal her lower-class background and emphasize her grandiose attitude. Telling examples include “I thought it was going to crash into the house and kill youse all!” (37), “She wouldn’t find time to lie down in the middle of the day, if she had seven kids like I got” (38), “I knew you was a nurse when I first heard you in that coffee shop” (46), or “Youse’ve had a long engagement” (46).

The story also makes use of a number of set phrases and colloquial expressions, as in “[d]essert was never anything to write home about, at their place” (38), “she was wondering what on earth it would be like to have only two children and no barn work, and then to be complaining” (39), “It was the luckiest thing in the world I didn’t spill the ginger ale down the front of me then and there” (41) or “I never meant to scare you” (41).

5.2.3 Background and Contextualization

“How I Met My Husband” is one of Munro’s earlier stories, and is comparably short and uncomplicated. Quite typical for Munro, it is narrated in first person, from the perspective of a young, perceptive girl. It also deals with themes that are frequently found in Munro’s fiction, such as love and romance, coming of age, small-town life, sexuality, and women’s experiences and concerns regarding all of these. Moreover, “How I Met My Husband” exemplifies what Coral Ann Howells has called Munro’s “ironic revision of popular romance plots” (60). At the same time, it stands out as one of Munro’s “most humorous stories” (Weiss 866).

5.2.4 Relevance for the Classroom

“How I Met My Husband” holds a variety of benefits for the use in the English language classroom. First of all, its surprise effect and structure make it particularly interesting for reading, hypothesizing and analysis. Students’ expectations are overturned by the story, which can help to engage them and provide the basis for further analysis and discussion. Secondly, the topics and the protagonist that stand at the heart of the story are likely close to the students’ own life and concerns, which can increase the interest and perceived relevance of the story. Thirdly, “How I Met My Husband” is a humorous story, combining irony with an empathic portrayal of its characters. This can provide a welcome change from the more serious materials that are often used in the classroom. Moreover, the treatment of love and relationships and the coming of age of a woman in a small-town environment can offer starting points for important discussions about more general issues in society.

In addition, the story’s relation to the *Themenpool* topics for the oral Matura in English provides further reasons for using it in the classroom. As with the previous story, these topics will be presented using their original German name and the number with which they are listed in the Austrian Ministry’s document (see BMBF, *Themenpool* 13).

5.2.4.1 “Beziehungen und soziale Netzwerke” (Topic 1)

The story portrays different types of romantic relationships between men and women. Additionally, it features varying relationships between women, as well as insights into the organization of social life. Moreover, the role of social class in everyday life is explored. This can provide the basis for a variety of fruitful discussions in the classroom. For example, an analysis of the differences between “young love” and “older love”, or between men and women’s perception of love could prove to be stimulating for discussion. On a more general level, the view of different types of love and relationships in society could be addressed as well. A further possibility would be for students to talk about their own experiences of the relevance of social status in everyday life.

5.2.4.2 “Wohnen und Umgebung” (Topic 2)

Contrasting living arrangements are described in the story. The most notable difference exists between Edie’s family’s modest house and the Peebles’ more “luxurious” house. In class, students could try to find modern appliances that would nowadays correspond to the commodities that amaze Edie. Moreover, the differences between city and

country living are mentioned in the story, and could be further discussed in class. For this purpose, students could draw on their own experiences, and also discuss their own preferences and their personal likelihood of living in the country or the city in the future.

5.2.4.3 “Mode und Trends” (Topic 3)

Fashion is portrayed in the story as a way of expressing oneself, and as a way of influencing one’s impression on others. Moreover, dressing up is a way of pretending to be someone else. This is shown in the scene where Edie puts on Mrs. Peebles’ dress and styles herself, and is consequently mistaken for the “lady of the house” by Chris Watters. The description of the other characters’ appearance also indicates the significance of fashion. Building on this, the role of fashion and appearance in everyday life could be discussed in class, both on a general and a personal level. The notion of changing one’s looks in order to appear like someone else might also be worth exploring.

5.2.4.4 “Schule und Bildung” (Topic 6)

Edie’s description of her negative experience with school could form the backdrop for more far-reaching discussions of schooling and education. In this, it might be interesting to consider developments over time, such as mandatory schooling or empowerment of the student. Moreover, Edie’s comments “the [school] work was hard, they didn’t make it nice for you or explain the way they do now” (38) or “The last thing I wanted, anyway, was to go on and end up teaching school” (39) could serve as additional stimuli for debate. A further issue for discussion might be the relation of intelligence and formal education, in reference to the characters of Edie and Alice Kelling in the story. Possible questions include to what extent formal education is necessary to succeed in life (and how this has changed over the years), the benefits education can offer, or what different views of education there are in society.

5.2.4.5 “Arbeitswelt” (Topic 7)

The story features different jobs, such as veterinary, maid, pilot, mailman, and housewife. These could be compared in terms of their prestige and importance, as well as in terms of their desirability to students. Moreover, it would be interesting to consider how Edie’s job as a “hired girl” would be viewed today. In this sense, the discussion could also be connected to issues concerning “Tradition und Wandel”. This could help students in learning to discuss several topics in an interrelated manner. A further

valuable possibility would be to address the similarities and differences of Edie's situation in comparison to the students' own lives and work experience. This would provide an opportunity for students to speak about their own experiences with the working world, which is an important aspect for them to be able to present.

5.2.4.6 “Tradition und Wandel” (Topic 10)

The story vividly illustrates development and modernization by presenting Edie's astonished admiration of several new inventions and things she sees for the first time, such as the plane or certain household devices. The issue of how things have changed since the time the story is set in lends itself to analysis and discussion. A valuable addition could be discussing the changes in terms of social organization, gender roles, and relationships in a comparison of the story and students' current living environment.

5.2.4.7 “Persönliche Zukunft / Pläne” (Topic 18)

In relation to the story, students could discuss their plans for the future in relation to love, relationships, work, or living arrangements, thereby connecting this topic to some of the previous ones. Another possible aspect for discussion would be the opposition of a romantic and idealized version of love and a more realistic image of a happy and stable marriage, as portrayed in the story, and how these might apply to real life and the students' opinions.

5.2.4.8 “Erwachsenwerden und Identitätsfindung” (Topic 20)

Growing up is a significant theme in the story, which follows Edie as she moves from her teenage years into adulthood. Different aspects of confidence, embarrassment, sexuality, love, disappointment, and independence are illustrated and might be taken up for discussion in class. Other ideas for debate include the possible influence that experiences with love and disappointment can have on a young person's life, development, and identity, or the significance of society's evaluation of a young person's behavior, with particular reference to sex and relationships.

5.3 “The Bear Came Over the Mountain” (1999)

“The Bear Came Over the Mountain” was first published in the *New Yorker* in 1999 and subsequently included in the 2001 collection *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*. It is one of Alice Munro's most famous stories, having been included in three later volumes of selected stories: in *No Love Lost* in 2003, in *Alice Munro's Best: A Selection of Stories* (also published as *Carried Away: A Personal*

Selection of Stories) in 2006 and in *New Selected Stories* in 2011. In addition, the story has been adapted for the screen under the name “Away from Her” in 2006 by renowned Canadian actress Sarah Polley making her feature length directorial debut. The movie was highly acclaimed, earning two Academy Award nominations: a best actress nomination for Julie Christie and a best adapted screenplay nomination for Polley. The success of the film adaptation contributed to the promotion of Munro’s story. At the center of “The Bear Came Over the Mountain” are the topics of love, relationships, and aging. The revised version of the story in *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* runs 48 pages. The following analysis is based on this version.

5.3.1 Story Level

5.3.1.1 Plot

The story is centered on Grant and Fiona, an elderly couple who have been married for more than 50 years. They have a happy and loving relationship, despite Grant’s past infidelities. They live together in a large house in a rural area until Fiona begins to show signs of dementia. When her condition gets worse, the couple decides that she will move into a nursing home. In order to facilitate Fiona’s transition to her new surroundings, Grant is prevented from visiting her for the first month. After the first month, Grant goes to visit Fiona but she fails to recognize him. Grant learns that over the past month, Fiona has developed a close relationship with one of the other residents, Aubrey. Grant is hurt but does not interfere. Aubrey is only in the nursing home temporarily, while his wife is on holiday. When she returns and takes Aubrey with her, Fiona is devastated. When she does not get better, Grant drives to Aubrey’s house to ask his wife to bring Aubrey back to the nursing home. She refuses, but later invites Grant to a dance. He sees an opportunity to convince her and accepts. The story ends with Grant bringing Aubrey back to Fiona. However, Fiona does not recognize Aubrey, but only Grant. She tells him that she is happy to see him and relieved that he has not abandoned her.

5.3.1.2 Setting

The story is set in a rural area in Ontario near Georgian Bay. The first sentence already provides some orientation: “Fiona lived in her parents’ house, in the town where she and Grant went to university” (275). Later on in the story the location of this town is clarified: “The cardiologist had died, after some bewildered and stoical time alone in the big house, and Fiona had inherited both that property and the farmhouse where her

father had grown up, in the country near Georgian Bay” (287). Further references to Canada include the statement that Grant and Fiona’s old neighbor’s house was “replaced by a gimcrack sort of castle that was the weekend home of some people from Toronto” (281), and that Aubrey and Marian’s son lives in “Kamloops, B.C.” (312).

The TV shows that Grant mentions provide some direction regarding the temporal setting of the story. He states that they watched these shows “[d]uring the years that they had lived in this house” (283), which equals the twelve years previous to Fiona’s move to Meadowlake (279). Grant traces their “infatuation with an English comedy about life in a department store”, which they “gave up watching before the final end” because they found it sad to see everything on set get old and fade. This most likely refers to the BBC’s “Are You Being Served?” TV series, which ran from 1972 to 1985 (see “Are You Being Served?” at IMDb). Grant also mentions “Masterpiece Theatre”, another BBC program, which started airing in 1971 (see “Masterpiece Theatre” at IMDb). This suggests the early 1980s as the most likely time for the action to take place.

Most of the action plays out in the house where Grant and Fiona have lived together, and in the nursing home called Meadowlake, where Fiona lives now. Nature and the surroundings of these places are also described in some detail over the course of the story. Other places that are referred to include the house of Aubrey and his wife, Marian, and the university where Grant used to teach. In addition, Grant and Fiona’s travels to countries such as Greece, Australia and Costa Rica are mentioned briefly (283).

Fiona and Grant’s house is described as follows: “It was a big, bay-windowed house that seemed to Grant both luxurious and disorderly, with rugs crooked on the floors and cup rings bitten into the table varnish” (275). During the time when Fiona lived in the house with her parents, it saw many guests and political discussions (275). In later years, things were quieter, as Fiona’s mother passed away and her father lived there alone, until he died as well. Fiona then inherited the house and she and Grant moved in, to start “a new life” in the country after Grant’s early retirement. The rural surroundings were new to them, but over the next years they explored them, while also renovating the house (283).

Aubrey and Marian’s house is quite different from that of Grant and Fiona. The neighborhood and the homes within are described as starter homes; houses for young

families with little money, who after becoming more successful, typically move to a bigger home in a nicer area. Aubrey and Marian have stayed there however. In contrast to most of the houses surrounding it, their house is well maintained (307). The interior is decorated somewhat ostentatiously with curtains, carpets, mirrors, and various smaller adornments. Grant observes that it is the stylistic antithesis of his and Fiona's home, which Fiona had furnished in a "bare and bright" way that was typical for her (311). He thinks that if Fiona had seen Aubrey and Marian's house, "she would have been astonished to see so much fancy stuff crowded into such a small space" (311).

Meadowlake, the nursing home, is also described in detail. The old building, which Grant and Fiona knew from visiting their old neighbor when he moved there, was torn down, and a new one was put up instead. In contrast to the old building, which was rather drab and constricted, "[t]he new Meadowlake was an airy, vaulted building, whose air was faintly pleasantly pine-scented. Profuse and genuine greenery sprouted out of giant crocks" (281-282). The "light of the huge sky windows in the large central space, with its cathedral ceiling" is also mentioned (289). Moreover, there is a garden for residents to walk around, as well as an observatory filled with plants and a fountain. In spite of the new building's brightness and friendlier atmosphere, it is not presented as a happy place, given that the people living there only do so because they cannot live by themselves anymore. It is a place that the vast majority of residents never leave again. The nursing home itself can be seen as a reflection of the state of mind of its residents. For example, despite Grant's frequent visits to the nursing home, he continually finds himself getting lost (299). Meadowlake thus seems to be directly connected to the ailments and deteriorating condition of its residents.

5.3.1.3 Characters

The main characters are portrayed in depth in the story, using both direct and indirect characterization (see Prince 13). Their appearance is described in particular detail. In what appear to be Grant's observations, the other characters' physical traits are noted attentively. One example for this is the description of Fiona:

She was a tall, narrow-shouldered woman, seventy years old but still upright and trim, with long legs and long feet, delicate wrists and ankles and tiny, almost comical-looking ears. Her hair, which was light as milkweed fluff, had gone from pale blond to white somehow without Grant's noticing exactly when, and she still wore it down to her shoulders, as her mother had done. (276)

The description of Marian is explicitly done from Grant's perspective:

He had got the impression of a trim waist and wide buttocks. [...] He was right about the waist – the tight belt showed she made a point of it. It might have been better if she didn't, since she bulged out considerably above and below. She could be ten or twelve years younger than her husband. Her hair was short, curly, artificially reddened. She had blue eyes – a lighter blue than Fiona's – a flat robin's-egg or turquoise blue, slanted by a slight puffiness. And a good many wrinkles, made more noticeable by a walnut-stain makeup. Or perhaps that was her Florida tan. (310)

In contrast, Grant's own looks are hardly mentioned. Only his "tendency to pudginess that he had had since he was twelve years old" comes up once, when he talks about how it disappeared as a result of his affairs (303).

Regarding psychology, Grant's thoughts and feelings are presented in depth, whereas the other characters' states of mind are mostly presented through his observations and subjective speculations. Examples for Grant's considerations include "it was the old building that Grant would find himself picturing Fiona in during the long month he had to get through without seeing her. It was the longest month of his life, he thought" (282) or "So if she could remember that so vividly and correctly, could there really be so much the matter with her? It was all he could do not to turn around and drive home" (280). Examples for his assessment of the other characters' thoughts and emotions would be "Aubrey preferred to ignore her as long as she stayed close" (295) or "She must have had some high hopes, when she picked Aubrey. [...] No doubt it seemed unfair" (319). Occasionally, the characters' looks and personality are directly connected in Grant's observations: "[Fiona] looked just like herself on this day – direct and vague as in fact she was, sweet and ironic" (277).

The story's nuanced portrayal of its characters is particularly notable. None of them can be neatly classified and dismissed, as they all present quite complex individuals. For example, at first glance, it would seem as though Grant was the despicable character in the story, having cheated on his wife despite their happy marriage. The emphasis of Fiona as an extraordinary woman and wife, both on an intellectual and a physical attractiveness level, makes Grant's affairs seem even more incomprehensible. However, the story is written in a decidedly non-judgmental way, where the reader is presented with different perspectives and can make up his or her own mind about certain actions or characters. Consequently, Grant's past infidelities stand in contrast to his constant deep love and care for Fiona, and the things he is willing to do for her. He tries everything in his power to make her feel better, even resorting to bringing Aubrey, who is technically his adversary, back to her.

A further notable feature, which concerns both characterization and language, is the comparison of characters to animals in the story (see Ventura 4). The characters' physical and psychological traits are illustrated by showing their parallels to the features of certain animals. For example, Fiona is likened to her two dogs, whom she took on from a friend: "The dogs' long legs and silky hair, their narrow, gentle, intransigent faces made a fine match for her when she took them out for walks" (279). Grant, too, is linked to the dogs, albeit in a different way:

Grant himself, in those days, [...] might have seemed to some people to have been picked up on another of Fiona's eccentric whims, and groomed and tended and favored. Though he never understood this, fortunately, until much later. (279)

Meanwhile, Aubrey is compared to a horse:

He was a man of about Grant's age, or a little older. Thick coarse white hair fell over his forehead and his skin was leathery but pale, yellowish-white like an old wrinkled-up kid glove. His long face was dignified and melancholy and he had something of the beauty of a powerful, discouraged, elderly horse. (291)

While Marian is not compared to an animal, Grant likens her to a litchi fruit, in a revealing comparison to Fiona:

Trying to figure out Fiona had always been frustrating. It could be like following a mirage. No – like living in a mirage. Getting close to Marian would present a different problem. It would be like biting into a litchi nut. The flesh with its oddly artificial allure, its chemical taste and perfume, shallow over the extensive seed, the stone. (318)

5.3.1.3.1 Fiona

Fiona is portrayed as a strong woman, who is self-confident and independent. She is described as attractive, having preserved her beauty up until her current age of seventy years. She is tall and slim, and has long white hair (previously blond) and blue eyes. Her mother was Icelandic and her father Canadian. Her parents were quite wealthy, but supporters of left-wing politics. When Fiona was a university student, she had several suitors, but made fun of all of them, including Grant (275-276). However, she is the one who actually proposed to Grant one day at the beach, shouting "Do you think it would be fun if we got married?" (276). This illustrates her impulsive temperament. At the same time, she is down-to-earth and very practical. Some years later, she is shown as not interested in the affairs and scandals that the people around her (including Grant) are engaging in (285, 302). She seems to be happy with her life with Grant. Then she starts to develop dementia, and when her condition worsens, she herself suggests moving to

the nursing home as the logical next step. Her practicality also shows in her initial attempts to deal with her fading mind by using a copious amount of notes to guide her daily life, in what seems to be a natural extension of her usual note-taking habits (277).

Despite being the cuckquean, Fiona is not portrayed as a victim. Throughout the story, Fiona is presented as strong and somewhat mysterious. From the very beginning, she is the one setting the tone in the relationship. Grant also gets his job at the university through her parents' money and connections. It is not clear how much she really knew about Grant's affairs, but it seems as though she is somehow above those things, removed from the lower pursuits of the people around her:

Fiona was in [...] the sort of corner she was always finding at a party – some high-and-dry spot where she drank wine with mineral water, and smoked ordinary cigarettes and told funny stories about her dogs. Holding out there against the tide, with some people who were like herself, as if the dramas that were being played out in other corners, in bedrooms and on the dark verandah, were nothing but childish comedy. As if chastity was chic, and reticence a blessing. (285)

Moreover, Fiona preserves her dignity even when her illness worsens. She is “a real lady”, as one of the nurses points out (294). Even though her memory is failing her, she still knows how to conduct herself around people, and at no point is presented as completely helpless. Only when Aubrey leaves and she is overcome with sadness, she seems to start giving up on herself. In the last scene, however, she has at least temporarily regained her memory (along with her affection for Grant), and almost seems to be back to her old self.

5.3.1.3.2 Grant

While there is little information on Grant's appearance, his mental state and observations stand at the center of the story. He is an intelligent man who has risen beyond his simple origins, partly due to his marriage to Fiona. Regarding his childhood, his family's working class background and mentality is emphasized. He found their excessive practicality restricting and depressing, whereas he thinks they never understood his aspirations. He presumably met Fiona at university, and felt that he “wanted never to be away from her. She had the spark of life” (276). Fiona seems to be the love of his life, even after many years of marriage. Even so, he has cheated on her multiple times throughout their relationship. He used to work as a university professor of Anglo-Saxon and Nordic Literature (301) at the same university that he and Fiona had attended earlier. He seems passionate about his subjects, and Nordic mythology in

particular, whereas Fiona exhibits little interest in her own Icelandic heritage. Overall, Grant seems less self-confident than Fiona; his affairs seem at least partly motivated by his need to prove his desirability. Consequently, they make him feel better about himself: “What he felt was mainly a gigantic increase in well-being” (302). However, his character is not reduced to being a womanizer in the story. Rather, the insights into his thoughts, emotions and motivations reveal his sensitivity, as well as his insecurities and his kindness. Moreover, his genuine, deep love for Fiona is an important part of his character. He accompanies her throughout her illness, and suffers as a result of having to observe her mental and physical deterioration. He is also hurt by her relationship with Aubrey, but ultimately he overcomes his own pride and jealousy and tries to do what he thinks is best for Fiona.

5.3.1.3.3 Marian

Marian is a practical and resolute woman with humble origins. Her sober view of the world reminds Grant of that of his family. She is described as notably younger than her husband Aubrey, with short died hair and light blue eyes. Grant observes that she is rather pudgy and has “a good many wrinkles” (310). Overall, Marian is presented as significantly less attractive in comparison to Fiona. In spite of this, Grant still ends up thinking about her in a sexual way (322). Marian takes care of her husband at home, ever since he caught a debilitating infection on a trip. This takes up most of her time, as she does not have any help (315). Their relationship is not presented as a very intimate one, but the story does not go into much detail about this. Marian does not seem happy, but has come to terms with the way things are. During Grant’s visit, she tells him that she is unwilling to take Aubrey back to the nursing home for sporadic visits, and that she cannot afford for Aubrey to move to Meadowlake permanently. At first, she seems reserved and dismissive, but when Grant gets home, she has already called him twice, asking him out. This reveals a more sensitive and vulnerable side of her, possibly caused by a feeling of loneliness. Grant calls her back and they presumably start an affair until he convinces her to take Aubrey back to the nursing home.

5.3.1.3.4 Aubrey

Aubrey is originally from the town where Fiona’s grandparents lived, and where Grant and Fiona moved after inheriting the old farm house. Fiona remembers Aubrey from the time when he used to work at the local hardware store when they were younger (290). Later on, he was a respected salesman and got married to Marian. He got into some kind

of trouble with his company, leaving them in difficult financial circumstances. After an infection during a trip, which caused him to fall into a temporary coma, his physical mobility is severely limited and he has difficulty speaking. It is not entirely clear how this has affected him mentally and psychologically. He lives at home where his wife takes care of him, and only spent some time at the nursing home when she went on holiday. He likes watching sports on TV and playing cards. At Meadowlake, he bonds with Fiona, and is very sad when he has to leave again.

5.3.1.3.5 Secondary Characters

The secondary characters include Fiona's parents, the Meadowlake nurse Kristy, and Mr. Faquart, Grant and Fiona's old neighbor. Moreover, Grant's mother and several of the women he has had affairs with are referenced.

5.3.1.4 Themes

5.3.1.4.1 Love and Relationships

The story includes depictions of different kinds of love and relationships. Fiona and Grant share a special bond, and appear to have an almost ideal relationship up until old age. This notion is put into question when the reader learns about Grant's repeated affairs with other women over the years. Nonetheless, their love and deep affection for each other is evident in the story. Their intimacy is illustrated by their private jokes and games, as well as by Grant's descriptions of Fiona. He emphasizes her wit and beauty, which she has allegedly preserved even at her age. In spite of his affairs, Grant has never considered leaving Fiona, and their separation affects him deeply. The month he cannot see her is described as "the longest month of his life" (282). When he visits her at the nursing home for the first time, there seems to be a new distance between them: "He could not throw his arms around her. Something about her voice and smile, familiar as they were, something about the way she seemed to be guarding the players from him – as well as him from their displeasure – made that impossible." (290). In the following months, Fiona's psychological change and increasing emotional distance from Grant is visualized in her change of appearance, including differences in her facial features, clothes and hairstyle. During his first visit, Grant already notices that Fiona "looked a little puffy in the face, the flab on one cheek hiding the corner of her mouth, in a way it hadn't done before" (289). Later on, she is also given clothes to wear that are not hers, presumably because "they didn't bother to sort out the wardrobes of the women who were roughly the same size" (299). In addition, they cut her hair, or as Grant observes

“[t]hey had cut away her angelic halo” (299). Grant is irritated by these developments, which make Fiona seem estranged to him. He is used to spending most of his time with her, and their separation weighs heavily on him. These changes, which took place in his absence, make him feel further away from Fiona. They have spent most of their lives together, and their close connection over all these years makes the separation and estrangement even harder to bear. Grant feels helpless because he cannot change or control the situation they are in, and he has no influence on Fiona’s condition and mental state. She is fading, and there is nothing he can do against it.

The connection Grant had with the women he had affairs with is very dissimilar to his connection with Fiona. Apart from his first affair, Jaqui, whom he saw for about a year and who he was close to, the other affairs seem more like passing flings, based mostly on sexual attraction.

The relationship between Marian and Aubrey is also different from that of Fiona and Grant. There are no evident signs of affection between the two, and the reader does not get direct information about their feelings. Marian takes care of her husband, but the main reason for not putting him in the nursing home seems to be lack of money.

Fiona and Aubrey’s connection is yet another form of love represented in the story. They seem to find consolation and support in each other in their bleak life at the nursing home. Struggling with the loss of her memory, Fiona seems happy to find someone who does not confuse her. In a symptom common in patients suffering from Alzheimer’s, Fiona can remember events and people from her early life, but not those that are more recent. She therefore remembers Aubrey from the time when they met as teenagers, but does not seem to recognize her husband Grant. Aubrey in turn seems to enjoy Fiona’s attention and affection, which he might not be getting from his own wife. It is not clear how his mind has been affected by his illness, but he seems to genuinely like Fiona. In a more removed perspective, their relationship could be seen as a comment on past opportunities for love that were never realized. Fiona and Aubrey met when they were young, during a summer where Fiona was visiting her grandparents (390). They liked each other, but Aubrey did not ask her out until her last weekend there. They went to a baseball game, which is presented in a schematic impressionistic flashback later on in the story. It seems as though they never saw each other again after that, until their meeting at Meadowlake as seniors. They then seem to rekindle the brief liaison that they shared as teenagers, resulting in a bond based on mutual affection.

5.3.1.4.2 Adultery

Another crucial theme in the story is that of adultery. Whereas cheating on a partner generally tends to be condemned on a moral level and painted in distinctly stark terms, the story illustrates a far more nuanced view of adultery. For instance, from Grant's point of view, his affairs are described quite matter-of-factly. They simply happened, without any malicious intention on his part, but rather as a way of taking advantage of opportunities that presented themselves to him. From his description, it seems as though he merely gave in to the temptations surrounding him. Moreover, most of the people around him were engaging in the same kind of activities, therefore making them seem more acceptable. Nonetheless, Grant is aware of the standard expectation of monogamy in a marriage and the potential of his affairs to destroy his marriage, despite his lack of ill intentions. He therefore hides his affairs from Fiona and does not make "the error of a confession" (286) even when rumors spread at university, causing him to take "an early retirement with a reduced pension" (287) and promising Fiona "a new life" (286). He does not exhibit substantial regrets regarding his affairs, he only acknowledges later on that his early retirement was probably for the best, saving him from going over the top and possibly losing Fiona as a result.

Acts of infidelity are therefore presented as a fairly ordinary part of life, resulting from human nature and the desire to feel sexually wanted. Men in particular seem to have a strong need to prove again and again their sexual virility and their ability to conquer women. However, the potentially destructive consequences of such infidelity also feature in the story. These include hurting and disappointing a loved one as well as divorce. Moreover, the story shows that if continued, affairs tend to turn out to be very similar to the marriages that they dismantled in the first place, as in the following example of Grant's colleague: "Grant recollected that he had in fact married one of those girls, and that she had taken to giving dinner parties and having babies, just as wives used to do" (284).

Grant's affairs represent the most prominent instances of adultery in the story. He is in full control of his own actions, and chooses to engage in sexual activities with various women. He is aware of the potentially destructive consequences of his behavior, but seems to try to avoid these by "not going too far". In comparison, Fiona and Aubrey's relationship could be seen as an original variation on the theme of adultery. Their physical and mental ailments act as a kind of cover, exempting them from the negative judgment that is typically associated with committing adultery. Their liaison could

further be understood as Fiona taking a form of inadvertent revenge for all the affairs that Grant engaged in over the years. Her dementia absolves her from the responsibility that would usually be associated with this behavior. She seems to not even remember that she has a husband, so she cannot reasonably be blamed for fostering an intimate relationship with another man at the nursing home. Nevertheless, their behavior does affect Grant: it hurts him to see them together so intimately, unable to get through to his wife or to change the situation. Even so, he ultimately accepts his lack of influence, and tolerates their relationship. Moreover, when he sees how devastated Fiona is after Aubrey's departure, he decides to try to bring Aubrey back to her. This could also be read as a quest for redemption, in order to make up for his past mistakes. Ironically, he tries to help Fiona – and to achieve redemption – through yet another act of adultery, this time with Marian. Even though this is not explicitly stated in the story, it is strongly implied. However, Fiona does not ultimately recognize his good deed, thereby undermining its value. Margaret Atwood observes that Grant's implied affair with Marian shows how he uses sex "as the decisive element in an astonishing feat of emotional commodities trading".

Overall, adultery does not automatically mean the end of a relationship in the story. It illustrates that enduring love is possible despite acts of infidelity. Love is therefore presented as a dynamic entity that evolves over time and in response to the given circumstances.

5.3.1.4.3 Aging and Dementia

The story unsparingly portrays the difficulties connected to aging, showing the deterioration of both the body and the mind. The positive sides of happily growing old together, as exemplified by Grant and Fiona's relationship, are contrasted with the negative aspects of aging, such as Fiona's dementia. Even though Fiona's illness is never explicitly defined in the story, her symptoms indicate that she suffers from Alzheimer's. Initially, she states: "I don't think it's anything to worry about, [...] I expect I'm just losing my mind" (278). Her illness is traced from its disconcerting beginnings, over its gradual but constant deterioration, to a state where she does not even seem to remember who her own husband is. Once it is more advanced, her dementia saves her from realizing how hopeless her situation is. In contrast, Grant is forced to watch his wife's condition get worse, and is utterly helpless in the light of their situation. One of the most positive features of old age is the wealth of memories that comes from having lived a long life. Therefore it seems particularly cruel when

these memories are taken away through an illness. There is also the unspoken question of what an old person has left, once their memories disappear, and their body and mind are increasingly failing them.

Apart from Fiona's illness, the problems associated with aging are illustrated through the other residents' ailments. Grant observes that "there used to be some unnerving sights when he and Fiona went to visit Mr. Farquar" at the old Meadowlake some years before: "[w]hiskers on old women's chins, somebody with a bulged-out eye like a rotten plum. Dribblers, head wagglers, mad chatters" (289). When Fiona moves to the new Meadowlake, "it looked as if there'd been some weeding out of the worst cases" (289). Grant attributes this to new ways of addressing such problems, including drugs and surgery. However, later on in the story, on a Saturday when many families are visiting, Grant acknowledges that "surrounded by a variety of outsiders these insiders did not look like such regular people after all": "[f]emale chins might have had their bristles shaved to the roots and bad eyes might be hidden by patches or dark lenses, inappropriate utterances might be controlled by medication, but some glaze remained, a haunted rigidity – as if people were content to become memories of themselves, final photographs" (298). A further problem associated with old age is isolation and loneliness. For instance, Marian complains about her son sending her expensive gifts instead of coming to visit them (312). But loneliness can also be caused by the mental isolation resulting from an illness such as Alzheimer's. The feeling of not understanding and not being understood by others can greatly affect a person and make them feel lonely.

An additional way of highlighting the progress of aging is the repeated comparison of children and seniors throughout the story. For example, when Fiona catches a cold upon moving to the nursing home, the nurse explains to Grant that this is similar to children first starting school: "[t]here's a whole bunch of new germs they're exposed to, and for a while they just catch everything" (282).

Despite dealing with such heavy subject matter, the story does not succumb to excessive sentimentality. Ventura observes that "[f]ramed as it is between a Folk Song title and the groping for the right form of an irregular verb in the last lines, the story seems to refrain wittily from pathos and self-pity in order to favour a playful, distanced, and ironic approach to the ravages of aging" (2). It is in this context that the following observation can be understood, which puts the story's aging characters' problems into

perspective. In reference to Kristy, the Meadowlake nurse who is struggling with her current situation as a working single mother of four children, it reads: “To her, Grant and Fiona and Aubrey too must seem lucky. They had got through life without too much going wrong. What they had to suffer now that they were old hardly counted” (306).

5.3.1.4.4 Minor Themes

One secondary theme which informs “The Bear Came Over the Mountain” is Nordic culture in general, and Icelandic heritage in particular. Myths, poems, and the Icelandic language feature in the plot, both in connection to Fiona’s Icelandic ancestry and Grant’s professional interest in Iceland as a university professor of Nordic literature. The book about Iceland that Grant buys for Fiona plays quite a significant role in the story. It functions as a symbol for Fiona’s unfulfilled longing for Iceland, as well as her recognition and remembering of Grant at the end of the story.

Another theme being broached is that of gender roles, and the responsibilities and expectations which are associated with them. For example, the predominant view presented in the story is that of men as “philanderers”, and women as victims of their husbands’ infidelity. This view is partially questioned through the portrayal of Fiona as a strong, independent woman, who seems unaffected by her husband’s cheating. Furthermore, Fiona herself engages in what could be classified as a form of infidelity. Another aspect connected to gender roles is the presentation of women as caretakers in the story. All the people looking after the seniors are female: the nurses at Meadowlake, Marian, and the women who visit their relatives at the nursing home (see 297). In this context, a telling quote reads: “Women wiped away the dribble from shivery old chins and men looked the other way” (298).

A further topic that the story addresses is that of social class. Grant’s and Fiona’s upbringing are contrasted in the story: whereas Fiona’s parents are described as affluent and sophisticated, Grant comes from a poorer working class background. The people in his family are presented as practical and unpretentious, but also narrow-minded and dispiriting. Discussions with them leave Grant feeling hopeless. Meanwhile, Fiona’s parents are political and support left-wing ideas, which Grant’s family in turn finds alarming, classifying them as out of touch with reality.

5.3.2 Discourse Level

5.3.2.1 Narrative Technique

The story is narrated in third person, from what appears to be Grant's perspective. The narrator can therefore be described as a homodiegetic third person narrator (see Prince 40-41). While at the very beginning of the story, the narrator seems to be neutral and omniscient, a shift towards the perspective of the protagonist Grant soon becomes evident. Grant's observations ("It was a big, bay-windowed house that seemed to Grant both luxurious and disorderly", 275; "Her hair, which was light as milkweed fluff, had gone from pale blond to white somehow without Grant noticing exactly when", 276) and feelings ("He wanted never to be away from her", 276) already feature on the first two pages of the story. Grant's opinions and perceptions influence the presentation of events and characters. For example, Marian is qualified as "[p]robably a flirt. The fussy way she had of shifting her buttocks on the kitchen chair, her pursed mouth, a lightly contrived air of menace – that was what was left of the more or less innocent vulgarity of a small-town flirt" (319). Most of the story is clearly presented from Grant's perspective. Only for the flashback of the baseball game that Fiona and Aubrey attended as teenagers is the narrative perspective not clearly identifiable. However, the speculative tone of the sequence ("He'll take off his jacket, if he's wearing one", 296) suggests that it is most likely Grant's imagination of the event, after Fiona has told him that Aubrey once took her "to a ball game" when they were younger (290).

The story is narrated from a male point of view, with Grant being the focalizer, which is rather rare in Munro's stories. This allows for more insight into the male perspective by illuminating Grant's thoughts and motivations, as well as his understanding of things and his evaluations of the other characters. The women in the story are presented as strong and multidimensional characters, even though their feelings and thoughts are revealed in a more implicit way. Overall, the choice of a male focalizer, in combination with Munro's heightened sensitivity towards female concerns, makes for a balanced and nuanced presentation of both genders in the story.

5.3.2.2 Time

"The Bear Came Over the Mountain" illustrates why Munro is known for her skillful use of time in short stories. The story switches back and forth in time, but does this so smoothly that the ordinary reader is unlikely to consciously realize that this is happening. While the "current events", starting with Fiona's move to the nursing home,

are presented in a roughly chronological order, their presentation is frequently interrupted by accounts of past times and events, or flashbacks. These flashbacks are often contextual and elucidate further details of an issue to the reader. While the story's overall temporal organization is thus non-linear, the presentation of information is plausible and can easily be comprehended by the perceptive reader. For example, events and actions are repeatedly explained only after their initial presentation, often by referencing past developments. A case in point is Fiona's move to Meadowlake: on the second page of the story (276), there is an indication that she is moving out permanently ("She remarked that she would never have to do this again, since she wasn't taking those shoes with her"). Only on the next page (277) is there a first hint at her illness ("so many little yellow notes stuck up all over the house"), and the possibility of moving to a nursing home is not mentioned until page 279. For the attentive reader, the first clue already causes expectations of possible scenarios explaining her move, which can then be confirmed or disproven by reading on. In addition, the time is stretched or compressed at various points throughout the story, for instance, when the first 30 days in which Grant cannot visit Fiona feel like "the longest month of his life" (282).

5.3.2.3 Structure

The story is divided into 27 distinct sections, ranging from 1/3 of a page to 7 pages in length. The longest section is the one that describes Grant's visit to Marian, counting 7 pages. Other longer sections are the one showing Grant's first visit to the nursing home and the one about Marian's calls and Grant's considerations (4 pages each), as well as the one about Grant's struggle with Fiona and Aubrey's relationship and the one about Aubrey's departure from the nursing home (3 pages each).

A noteworthy structural feature is the gradual introduction of issues through hints and association. For instance, Grant's affairs are first alluded to on page 278 ("Some of Fiona's made-up voices [...] had mimicked uncannily the voices of women of his that she had never met or known about"), and then again on page 282 ("longer than the month Jaqui Adams spent on holiday with her family, near the beginning of their affair"), but they are not addressed in detail until page 286. The structure of presentation being employed in the story seems quite natural, because of its close connection to everyday storytelling. The narration of one event might spark associations to other events, or might necessitate further clarification. Such clarification is often achieved by filling in previous developments, leading up to the event in question.

5.3.2.4 Language and Style

Munro's economy with words can once again be noted in this story. She applies a skillful understatement and refrains from adding words for mere ornamentation. Her original combination of words (especially adjectives and nouns) is particularly interesting, revealing her observation skills as well as her special gift for language. Examples from the story include "cup rings bitten into the table varnish" (275), "a gimcrack sort of castle" (281), or "her sweetly shaped skull" (323). Munro's use of similes is also notable, for example in "her hair, which was light as milkweed fluff" (276), or in "[h]er skin or her breath gave off a faint new smell, a smell that seemed to him like that of the stems of cut flowers left too long in their water" (323).

In Munro's stories, the way the characters speak tends to be important, often conveying additional information about their social background and status, as well as about their personality. Moreover, Munro has a "good ear for dialogue" (Proulx xiii), rendering authentic exchanges between her characters. In "The Bear Came Over the Mountain", a good example for both of these aspects is Marian. Her remarks in her conversation with Grant illustrate her resolute personality and practical approach to life, as well as her slight defensiveness (310-317).

The story also features comments on the use and significance of language. Single words or individual phrases can be of significant importance, and occasionally, this importance is addressed directly in the story. For example, Grant is shown struggling with the ambiguity of the word "fine": "'He was a fine person,' she said, and Grant did not know whether this meant that Aubrey was honest and openhanded and kind to people, or that he was well spoken and well dressed and drove a good car. Probably both" (293). Another example is Grant's comment on Marian taking care of Aubrey at home: "'Well. That's very good and noble of you.' He hoped the word 'noble' had not sounded sarcastic. He had not meant it to be" (315). A further case in point is the word "drapes", which Grant cannot remember at first when he recalls Fiona's use of it: "Fiona had a word for those sort of swooping curtains – she said it like a joke, though the women she'd picked it up from used it seriously" (311). Language also forms part of Grant and Fiona's private games: "They had always had their games – nonsense dialects, characters they invented" (278). Fiona resorts to wordplay even when she is suggesting that she will have to move to the nursing home: "'Shallowlake, Shillylake,' she said, as if they were engaged in a playful competition. 'Sillylake. Sillylake it is'" (280). Furthermore, the power of language is alluded to in the Hofuolausn ode that Grant

recites at university (303). In it, a poet who had been sentenced to death by the king is released because the king is moved by the ode he has written for him (see Ventura 6-7).

5.3.3 Background and Contextualization

“The Bear Came Over the Mountain” is one of Munro’s later stories, which tend to be longer and more complex and ambiguous than their early counterparts. It is also one of only a few of Munro’s stories that are told from the point of view of a male character.

In a review of Munro’s 2004 collection *Runaway* for *The New York Times*, Jonathan Franzen has highlighted the complexity of Munro’s stories by pointing out how difficult it is to summarize them. Adopting a comprehensive perspective of Munro’s work, he takes “The Bear Came Over the Mountain” from the 2001 collection *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* as a case in point: by merely listing the main events of the plot, one cannot capture the essence of the story, nor its extent and ramification.

In addition, the story’s extended length, compared to “Boys and Girls” for example, allows for a more in-depth contextualization and characterization of the protagonists and their actions. There are various secondary characters and themes that are broached throughout the story. Even though they are not described in detail, they significantly contribute to creating a richer fictional world.

For James Wood, writing for *The New Yorker*, two characteristic features of Munro’s fiction make “The Bear Came Over the Mountain” an exceptional story. First, there is “Munro’s astounding lack of sentimentality”, which shows in her “clear-eyed, utterly unillusioned, bleakly subtle description of the nursing home, its inmates, and its staff”. The second feature is “the formal freedom of the story, which compacts a lot of life into a short space, and moves backwards and forwards over a great deal of terrain”. “The Bear Came Over the Mountain” is a good example of a skillful realization of these characteristics of Munro’s writing, as well as of the effects that can be achieved through these.

The title of the story is a quote from a children’s nonsense folk song. In the song, the bear crosses the mountain in the hopes of discovering something new on the other side, but once he is there, all he sees is the other side of the same mountain. Different versions of the lyrics exist, but the most common one seems to be the following (see CanTeach):

The bear went over the mountain,
 The bear went over the mountain,
 The bear went over the mountain,
 To see what he could see.
 And what do you think he saw?
 And what do you think he saw?
 The other side of the mountain,
 The other side of the mountain,
 The other side of the mountain,
 Was all that he could see.

The title is never mentioned in the actual story, but could be interpreted with regards to several of its themes. For one, if the title is interpreted with regards to aging, it could mean that aging does not change the essence of things; but only offers a different perspective on them. Alternatively, the earlier years of life could be seen as the climb of the mountain, and the way down on the other side as the decline of quality of life associated with aging. In this sense it could be “all downhill from here” (Sustana), and the other side of the mountain would be the place that an aging person cannot escape. The difference between “came” in the title and “went” in the song could imply more direct relevance to the reader (see Sustana). By suggesting that the bear is *coming* towards us, rather than *going* away from us, the title would then highlight that the reader is not exempt from what is happening, but rather a part of it. This refers predominantly to aging, but could also include dementia. If taken as a reference to adultery instead, the title could highlight the fact that despite the repeated chasing of something new, in the end, this will not change anything. The only thing on the other side of the mountain is the other side of the mountain. In yet another interpretation, the characters’ actions in the story could be compared to those of the bear in the song (see Ventura 4-5). Grant’s and Fiona’s struggles with aging and the loss of memory could then be seen symbolically as going over the mountain.

5.3.4 Relevance for the Classroom

“The Bear Came Over the Mountain” is relevant for the language classroom not only because of the way it is written but also because of the themes it addresses. Avoiding any rash judgments, the story offers insights into the perspectives of its different characters, illuminating their feelings and motivations. Instead of jumping to conclusions about a person’s actions, students can learn to take into account different ways of seeing and experiencing things. The story shows that a person’s actions cannot be divided into “good” or “bad” in a straightforward way, but that things are usually

more complex. Munro avoids portraying the world in a black-and-white scheme and highlights the gray areas instead. These do not only exist in the story, but are an essential component of everyday life. By learning to take into account perspectives other than their own, students can benefit from reading and working on this story in terms of developing empathy and tolerance. Moreover, the story's construction in terms of structure, time, and narrator can offer opportunities for interesting and insightful discussions.

A further strong argument for the use of "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" in the language classroom is its relation to the topics specified in the *Themenpool* for the Austrian Matura. As with the last story, these topics will be presented using their original German name and the number with which they are listed in the Austrian Ministry's document (see BMBF, *Themenpool* 13).

5.3.4.1 "Beziehungen und soziale Netzwerke" (Topic 1)

The story illustrates an array of different relationships, predominantly of love, partnership and marriage, but also of caretaking. The varying dynamics of romantic relationships are explored, including issues such as intimacy and affection, support and betrayal, faithfulness and adultery. One significant feature of the story is the nuanced portrayal of personal relationships and interactions. Since these are issues that are often associated with rather strong opinions and emotions, they provide ample opportunities for authentic discussion in the classroom. Through negotiating their own opinions regarding the characters' behavior in exchange with others, students can practice speaking about relationships, while learning about other perspectives. Another interesting aspect for discussion would be the relationship between personal relationships, social networks and aging.

5.3.4.2 "Wohnen und Umgebung" (Topic 2)

Different living environments are presented in the story. For example, Grant and Fiona live in a large house in a rural area. Their house used to belong to Fiona's parents, who are described as fairly wealthy. This could be contrasted with the more affordable housing in Aubrey and Marian's area, which is also described in the story. This could help students to practice talking about different types of housing and the ways in which these are connected to a person's income, background and social status. Moreover, with the nursing home constituting an important part of the setting, the story portrays a particular type of living arrangement in some detail. This could provide a basis for

discussions of different housing solutions for different ages, and of how these are represented in the students' own environment.

5.3.4.3 “Ernährung, Gesundheit und soziale Absicherung” (Topic 4)

The story contrasts health and illness, and illustrates the significance of aging in modern societies. It depicts some of the mental and physical problems that are linked to aging, such as dementia or limited mobility. Moreover, it shows different forms of taking care of aging people, including home care and living in a nursing home. These issues are of crucial relevance for current and future societal developments, therefore constituting a meaningful topic for classroom discussion. For example, the implications of an aging population for a society could be discussed, with particular reference to how this might affect younger generations. On a more personal level, students' experiences with aging and age-related illnesses, for example of their relatives, could be addressed sensitively.

5.3.4.4 “Arbeitswelt” (Topic 7)

The working environments that are most directly addressed in the story are the university and the nursing home. The hospital is also broached as a working place, through Fiona's father's job as a cardiologist, and Fiona's own job as a “hospital coordinator of volunteer services” (287). The dynamics that are at work at the university as a workplace are explored through Grant's memories of his past as a university professor. The work at the nursing home is presented through Grant's experiences with the staff, including the different nurses. Moreover, there is one nurse, Kristy, whose job and background is portrayed in more detail. Potential topics for discussion include a contrast of these two working environments, including responsibilities, mental and physical aspects of the work, and advantages and disadvantages. Further interesting aspects could be the societal relevance of geriatric care jobs, as well as the demands of such work on the people who do it. Such discussions can help to increase students' background knowledge about the working world, as well as help them to achieve a more varied repertoire of language to discuss work-related issues.

5.3.4.5 “Kunst und Kultur” (Topic 13)

Art and culture feature in the story in a significant way, with particular attention being paid to Nordic culture and literature. Fiona's Icelandic heritage through her mother is mentioned several times, and Grant teaches Nordic literature at university. Traditional Icelandic tales and their characters are presented. The relation of art, culture and academia is also touched upon: as a university professor, Grant's teaching of Nordic

literature is described as well as his writing about it. Moreover, the integration of talking about literature and culture into everyday life is illustrated when Grant and Fiona are shown discussing the Icelandic myths that Grant is working on at the dinner table (284). Based on this, students could discuss the influence of traditional stories of a culture on people, or compare their knowledge of folk tales to that presented in the story.

5.3.4.6 “Natur und Umwelt” (Topic 16)

Nature and the environment are closely connected to the events in the story, and are described in some detail. The portrayal of the surroundings of Grant and Fiona’s rural house, as well as the landscape that Grant observes during his drives offer insights into the local flora and fauna and the change of seasons. The story presents information about nature and some related vocabulary in a meaningful context, which can help to prepare students to talk about this topic. Another interesting subject for discussion could be the similarities between the natural phenomena described in the story and the characters’ state of mind. This could also serve as the starting point for a discussion covering several *Themenpool* topics in an interrelated manner.

5.3.4.7 “Gesellschaftliche Gruppierungen” (Topic 23)

The most prominent social group being portrayed in the story is that of seniors. As has already been pointed out, the story offers some insights into an aging person’s concerns and problems. This can help students to learn about the perspective of a group of people that differs from them in many ways, and that they might not give too much thought about otherwise. Working with this story can therefore provide students with enriched background knowledge to discuss issues regarding social groups and societal organization. Furthermore, the positive and negative sides of aging could be made the subject of discussion, as well as possible advantages and disadvantages of senior citizens in a society. The fact that the number of elderly people is increasing in most countries adds current relevance to such discussions, in addition to their applicability to the topics specified for the oral Matura.

5.3.4.8 “Regeln, Vorschriften, Gesetze” (Topic 24)

Rules and regulations form a central part of life in the nursing home as depicted in the story. Examples include the “rule that nobody could be admitted during the month of December” (280), and the rule that “[n]ew residents were not to be visited during the first thirty days” at the nursing home (280). Consequently, it would be interesting to

discuss in class to what extent rules are necessary to make things work, providing orientation and a frame of reference, and to compare this to how they might restrict people's personal freedom or even affect them negatively. A further point for discussion would be the restriction of an elderly person's freedom for their health and safety while taking into account the possibly differing perspectives of the person in question, their family, and their caretakers.

6. Conclusion

Both literature and language learning are issues that have formed an important part of people's lives for a long time. As such, they have been widely discussed and have sparked an array of scientific investigation. The role of literature in language teaching, which has been the focus of this thesis, has undergone significant changes in perception and prominence over the years. After a period of lessened importance, it has attracted increased attention and interest since the 1980s. Although literature has been found to offer significant advantages for language learning, in actual classrooms it is still used only infrequently.

This thesis has demonstrated the value of literature as a resource for the foreign language classroom through a consideration of both theoretical and practical concerns. In terms of theory, both literature in general and short stories in particular have been examined in terms of the historical development of their role in the classroom, as well as their current relevance and value. These examinations have been complemented by a survey of the current state of the art on literature in language teaching and a summary of the most important research results. The arguments for the use of literature in language teaching have been considered in detail. These include advantages in terms of the students' language acquisition, personal development, intercultural understanding and motivation and involvement. In addition, possible concerns and difficulties regarding literature have been addressed. These include the time needed to prepare and work on literature, the difficulty of literary texts in terms of language and (cultural) content, and students' or teachers' possible aversion towards literature. Various strategies have been presented as to how these difficulties can be avoided or overcome. For example, the careful selection of literary texts based on the people involved and the particular teaching and learning context, as well as the clarification of literature's beneficial effect with regards to students' language learning objectives are crucial elements of the

successful integration of literature in the foreign language classroom. Moreover, an overview of different approaches to using literature in the classroom has been provided.

In terms of more practical considerations, the potential of Alice Munro's stories for the language classroom has been assessed. On the one hand, the suitability of her work has been demonstrated through an examination of notable features of her fiction. These include Munro's characteristic simple style, frequent themes in her stories (such as love, embarrassment, or social norms), her literary treatment of women, her particular talent for observation and description, and her sensitivity and empathy in portraying her nuanced characters. On the other hand, a detailed analysis of three of her stories has highlighted this suitability by way of concrete examples. "Boys and Girls", "How I Met My Husband", and "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" exhibit typical aspects of Munro's literature and offer both literary and educational value. The significant literary features of these stories have been examined, and their relevance for the language classroom has been explored. In particular, it has been illustrated how the topics that form part of the *Themenpool* required for the revised Austrian Matura feature in these stories, and how these stories can be used to address these topics in the classroom. Altogether, these explorations are intended to provide a sound basis for working with literature in the language classroom.

Nowadays, literature in the language classroom is a topic of avid interest in terms of both theory and practice. While literature has been shown to offer a variety of beneficial effects on language learning, further empirical research is needed to consolidate literature's role in language teaching. Moreover, the focused development of accessible publications exemplifying the use of literature in the language classroom is highly desirable. Ideally, such publications would be based on current parameters of language learning, and address issues such as standards in language education, assessment, and the role of literature in different language learning contexts. An additional project for the future would be the advancement of literature in the language classroom on a broader level. This could be achieved through increased information and assistance for language teachers, as well as through the supply of materials facilitating the introduction and the continued use of literature in their classrooms.

Overall, this thesis has illustrated the value and the applicability of literature for the foreign language classroom in various ways. It is hoped that this will contribute to the

ongoing discussions about literature in the language classroom, as well as offer practical relevance as a useful resource for language teachers.

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Abstract

The role of literature in language teaching has been the subject of avid debate, and keeps attracting interest in academic circles as well as among language teachers. After a history of shifting perceptions and importance, literature has recently been assuming a more prominent role in language teaching contexts. Despite the fact that literature has been found to influence language learning positively, its use in language classrooms remains quite scarce.

This thesis contributes to ongoing debates about literature in foreign language teaching by presenting a survey of the current state of the art on the topic, as well as an examination of the potential of Alice Munro's stories for the foreign language classroom. Arguments for the use of literature in language teaching are considered in detail, including beneficial effects on language acquisition, personal development, intercultural understanding, and motivation and involvement. Possible concerns and difficulties are addressed as well, alongside suggestions for avoiding or overcoming them. Moreover, Alice Munro's fiction is analyzed in terms of its suitability for the language classroom. Three short stories by Munro are addressed specifically: "Boys and Girls" (1964), "How I Met My Husband" (1974), and "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" (1999). These stories are examined in terms of their significant literary features on the story level and the discourse level. In addition, their content, style, and construction is analyzed in terms of its relevance for the language classroom. Each story's relation to the topics specified in the *Themenpool* for the revised Austrian Matura is addressed in particular. The overall evaluation of these three stories by Munro shows that they are particularly suitable for the language classroom. While the focus of this thesis is on the teaching of English as a foreign language in Austrian secondary schools, much of it is also relevant for other contexts of language teaching.

This thesis therefore highlights the potential of literature for the foreign language classroom, with particular consideration of Alice Munro's short stories. Moreover, it illustrates how students' language proficiency and their ability to speak about certain topics in the target language can be enhanced through the use of literature.

Zusammenfassung

Die Rolle von Literatur im Fremdsprachenunterricht ist seit einiger Zeit Gegenstand lebhafter Debatten und erregt sowohl in akademischen Kreisen als auch unter Sprachlehrern anhaltendes Interesse. Nachdem Literatur im Laufe der Geschichte unterschiedliche Stellenwerte innehatte, ist sie nun dabei, eine prominenter Rolle im Kontext des Sprachenlernens einzunehmen. Obwohl der positive Einfluss von Literatur auf das Sprachenlernen wiederholt festgestellt wurde, wird Literatur in der Unterrichtspraxis nur selten verwendet.

Diese Diplomarbeit trägt zu aktuellen Debatten über Literatur im Fremdsprachenunterricht bei, indem sie einen Überblick über den aktuellen Stand der Forschung gibt, sowie das Potential von Alice Munros Literatur für den Fremdsprachenunterricht untersucht. Argumente für die Verwendung von Literatur im Sprachunterricht werden im Detail behandelt. Literatur wirkt sich unter anderem positiv auf den Spracherwerb, die persönliche Entwicklung, das interkulturelle Verständnis, und auf Motivation und Mitarbeit aus. Mögliche Schwierigkeiten und Bedenken werden ebenfalls thematisiert, nebst Vorschlägen zu ihrer Vermeidung oder Lösung. Des Weiteren wird Alice Munros Werk in Bezug auf seine Eignung für den Fremdsprachenunterricht analysiert. Drei von Munros Kurzgeschichten werden im Speziellen behandelt: „Boys and Girls“ (1964), „How I Met My Husband“ (1974), und „The Bear Came Over the Mountain“ (1999). Diese Kurzgeschichten werden in Hinblick auf ihre bedeutenden literarischen Merkmale in Bezug auf „story level“ und „discourse level“ untersucht. Zusätzlich werden Inhalt, Stil und Aufbau der Texte in Bezug auf ihre Relevanz für den Sprachunterricht untersucht. Im Besonderen wird die Verbindung jeder Geschichte zu den Themen, die im *Themenpool* für die neue österreichische Matura festgelegt wurden behandelt. Die abschließende Beurteilung dieser drei Geschichten zeigt, dass sie für den Sprachunterricht besonders gut geeignet sind.

Diese Diplomarbeit zeigt daher das Potential von Literatur für den Fremdsprachenunterricht auf, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Alice Munros Kurzgeschichten. Zudem veranschaulicht diese Arbeit, wie durch die Verwendung von Literatur die Sprachkompetenz der Lernenden, sowie ihre Fähigkeit, über bestimmte Themen in der Fremdsprache zu sprechen, gefördert werden kann.

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