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Birgit Geiblinger

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## **List of Abbreviations**

AHS.....	Allgemein bildende Höhere Schule
EFL.....	English as a Foreign Language
ELT.....	English Language Teaching



## 1. Introduction

Evidently, today's nations and cultures have been considerably shaped by the phenomenon of globalisation. As a result of the growing interconnectedness between nations and cultures, modern societies are increasingly characterised by ethnic and cultural heterogeneity. Under such circumstances, intercultural contact is inevitable for most people. Unfortunately, this contact, or even the mere awareness of the multicultural reality within one's own country or community, is frequently met with hostility, fuelled by xenophobia. As recent reports on manifestations of xenophobic and racist tendencies demonstrate, a considerable rise in corresponding attitudinal inclinations is evident in Austria and other European countries (e.g. Great Britain). In the light of these developments, the significant importance of educating open-minded, reflective and tolerant individuals, who are able to act competently within multicultural societies, becomes apparent.

For such purposes, the concepts of intercultural learning, *Fremdverstehen* and transcultural learning have been introduced. While all three concepts will be of relevance, the more modern term of 'transculturality', as defined by Welsch, is favoured in the context of this thesis in order to account for the notions of mutual intercultural influence and contact as well as cultural hybridity. In connection with the concepts of intercultural learning and *Fremdverstehen*, proponents of those fields have frequently argued that literature represents a suitable tool for initiating intercultural learning processes and, therefore, for developing intercultural competence and *Fremdverstehen*. Such claims mostly build on the fact that literature offers the encounter of situations and experiences which would otherwise remain inaccessible to the reader as well as a profound insight into inner-perspectives through representations of exceptional immediacy. As such, this approach is to be located within the domain of reader-response criticism and mainly relies on the processes of adopting perspectives as well as feeling empathy for the character(s) in the text. Those processes are, in turn, believed to trigger reflections which may result in a modification of negative attitudes and entrenched stereotypes held towards the other.

The purpose of this thesis will be to reveal the potential of British young adult fictions of migration for the purpose of introducing a transcultural learning process in the Austrian EFL-classroom at the end of lower secondary level. In the first part of the thesis, the theoretical background will be established, which constitutes the framework for the second part of the thesis, which consists of a detailed analysis of an example of the genre in question based on a close contextual reading. In a final step, the results of the analysis will briefly be contextualised didactically.

At the beginning of the first part, the central concepts of intercultural competence and learning, *Fremdverstehen* and transculturality will be introduced. Subsequently, I will outline the theoretical discussion evolving around the accuracy of those concepts as well as the relationship between them. Based on this outline, I will later present my own theoretical position with regard to this ongoing debate. In the following chapter, I will briefly demonstrate the contemporary relevance of transcultural learning by presenting current data concerning the cultural and ethnic heterogeneity as well as xenophobic and racist tendencies in Austria and Great Britain. As a next step, the suggested potential of literature for contributing to transcultural learning processes will be addressed. For this, I will predominantly consult works by authors who focus on the concept of *Fremdverstehen*. In the course of this discussion, it will become apparent that the value of literature for contributing to such processes lies in its immediate representation of the inner perspective of characters and, therefore, in its capacity for initiating the process of adopting perspectives and feeling empathy for the characters in the text. Thereafter, I will introduce the genre of British young adult fictions of migration along with its assumed potential for contributing to transcultural learning processes. Finally, the general preconditions for fostering transcultural competence in the Austrian EFL-classroom at the level in focus, namely the fourth grade of lower secondary level, will be determined by looking at the institutional framework for teaching this particular competence as well as at the personal and linguistic developmental stage of this target group.

The second part of this thesis consists of a detailed analysis of an example of the genre of British young adult fictions of migration. This analysis

will focus on the text's potential for introducing transcultural learning processes on the aforesaid level. For this, I will analyse the young adult novel *The Weight of Water* by Sarah Crossan in a close contextual reading. The analysis will follow certain categories, which I have established on the basis of the theoretical background presented in the first part. The third and final part of the will serve to make the preceding analysis more accessible for the purpose of implementing the suggested approach practically. Thus, I will relate findings from the analysis with Rösch's model of intercultural learning.

I assume that, by adopting the perspective of a protagonist who is roughly at the same age as the students and who experiences the process of migration as well as corresponding problems and challenges, the students can develop a better understanding of and empathy for migrant communities in general and, as a result, will hold more positive or at least more informed attitudes towards such groups. Further, I presume that British young adult fictions of migration lend themselves as an effective tool for providing students with a more realistic picture of Great Britain, as a nation and culture that has been considerably shaped by a variety of foreign cultural influences.

## **2. Theory and Models Evolving around the Idea of 'Transcultural Learning'**

In the course of engaging in the theoretical discussion which revolves around the concept of 'transcultural learning', one cannot help but notice that it is indeed one of high complexity, unclear terminology and blurred boundaries. This appears to be the case due to its inherent connection with the concept of culture and the multifaceted individual with its unique dispositions, influencers, attitudes and experiences, which are, without a doubt, dynamic, abstract and problematic to conceptualise. Thus, it is crucial to discuss the various existent concepts evolving around the field of, to name it in a rather neutral way, learning to interact and socially act within a multicultural world and society. In the following, the main concepts of 'intercultural learning/competence', 'transcultural learning' and '*Fremdverstehen*' will be introduced and discussed, before the understanding of 'transcultural learning' on which this thesis is based, will be described. Within the discussion of the theoretical field, the succession of the concepts presented will be based on their perceived proximity to foreign language teaching. Ultimately, the idea behind this thesis will be, at least to some extent, connected to all of the following concepts.

### **2.1. Intercultural Competence**

The concept which is mostly mentioned explicitly in connection to foreign language teaching is the concept of 'intercultural competence' or 'intercultural communicative competence'. According to Byram's definition, who coined the expression 'intercultural communicative competence', the concept generally aims at developing the students' competence of successfully interacting with native speakers of the target language as well as with speakers of that particular language with other cultural backgrounds, thus, "in lingua franca situations" (3). Among the models of intercultural competence, Byram's model of 'intercultural communicative competence' (34) is certainly one of the most prevalent ones in the field:

	<b>Skills</b> interpret and relate ( <i>savoir comprendre</i> )	
<b>Knowledge</b> of self and other; of interaction: individual and societal ( <i>savoir être</i> )	<b>Education</b> political education critical cultural awareness ( <i>savoir s'engager</i> )	<b>Attitudes</b> relativising self valuing other ( <i>savoir être</i> )
	<b>Skills</b> discover and/or interact ( <i>savoir apprendre/faire</i> )	

Table 1: Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence

Table 1 shows the various dimensions of Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence, including the dimension of "knowledge", which is mostly concerned with sociocultural knowledge on a national and international level (36). Further, he mentions the skill to "interpret and relate", which refers to the ability to accurately perceive and reinterpret documents, which draw on certain cultural predispositions for their intended perception to be realised, despite reading them from the perspective of a cultural outsider. The second skill he includes is the skill to "discover and/or interact" and concerns the learning process which enables one to comprehend "beliefs, meaning and behaviours which are inherent in particular phenomena whether documents and interactions" as well as the capability of correctly interpreting salient entities or practices within a foreign context (37–38). Finally, Byram also names the dimension of "attitudes" (34), which will be in the focus of this thesis.

In Byram's model, the domain of "attitudes" refers to those stances towards individuals "who are perceived as different in respect of the cultural meanings, beliefs and behaviours they exhibit, which are implicit in their interaction with interlocutors from their own social group or others" (34). While attitudes which are influenced by negative sentiments are recognised as impeding successful "intercultural interaction", Byram emphasises the relevance

of “attitudes of curiosity and openness, of readiness to suspend disbelief and judgement with respect to others’ meanings, beliefs and behaviours” as well as the will to distance oneself from one’s original thinking and interaction patterns in order to undergo a change in perspective (34).

All in all, most concepts of intercultural competence show a similar structure and are broadly divided into the domains of attitudes, knowledge and skills. This is reflected in Borghetti’s concept of intercultural competence, which is based on the analysis of twelve different existing models (142-152). The specific task for foreign language teaching now seem to be to contribute towards the fostering of this competence and, therefore, to provide ‘intercultural learning’.

### 2.1.1. Attitudes and the Ethical, Political Dimension

Byram acknowledges attitudes, as described in his model, to be inherently connected to all other factors and even categorises them as “the pre-condition for successful intercultural interaction” (34). In relation to an older study by herself (Deardorff 2006/2009 qtd. in Deardorff 38), Deardorff mentions attitudes “of openness, respect and curiosity” as a “[s]tarting point of” and as a prerequisite for acquiring intercultural competence (44). For this thesis, I adopt the idea that a disposition characterised by openness and the readiness to pay respect to and show interest in other lifestyles and cultures constitutes the basis for developing transcultural competence.

A model of intercultural competence, which specifies and underlines the attitudinal and cognitive dimension, is one presented by Rösch. Due to its purpose of specifying the ethical and political dimension of intercultural competence (Rösch, „Interkulturelle Kompetenz“ 96), I consider her model as being of relevance for the transcultural learning approach suggested in this thesis as well for pedagogical practices in the EFL-classroom in general, despite her focus on German language teaching.

In connection to her model, Rösch describes intercultural competence as available and acquirable cognitive skills necessary for engaging in intercultural communication („Interkulturelle Kompetenz“ 95). Generally, based on the reflections of Imahori and Langian (qtd. in Rösch, „Interkulturelle Kompetenz“

96), Rösch names four main categories which are divided into four or five sub-skills respectively.

The first category is concerned with acquiring and applying knowledge concerning cultural interdependencies and hybridity, processes of migration and globalisation along with migratory living conditions, forms and effects of the concept of cultural domination, culture specific and intercultural rules of interaction as well as foreign language skills and linguistic knowledge (Rösch, „Interkulturelle Kompetenz“ 96). The second category includes the cognitive skills of identifying and distancing oneself from (cultural) stereotypes and ethnocentrisms, of undergoing a change of perspective, developing empathy and, subsequently, of relating various perspectives to one another. Further, it demands taking a reflective stance towards one's own as well as foreign cultures, linguistic and cultural interdependencies and the concept of dominant cultures (96). The third category basically comprises a general disposition of openness, the will and readiness to adapt to the linguistic particularities of the interlocutor, to emphasise commonalities rather than differences and to create harmonic interactions based on the notions of respect, equality and flexibility (96). Finally, the fourth and last category lays a focus on motivational and volitional factors and skills, including a reflective attitude towards the processes of migration, globalisation and migratory living conditions, a neutral attitude towards different cultures and members of those, the development of a critical attitude towards the concept of dominant cultures as well as the acceptance of a multicultural and –lingual environment (96).

The succession of sub-skills within the respective categories is meant to reflect a progressive approach of building up intercultural communicative competence, meaning that the sub-dimensions of each category are arranged in a manner that the most basic skill is listed at the beginning, followed by more advanced sub-skills which build upon the previous, more basic skills (96).

Through the attitudinal and ethical emphasis which underlies Rösch's model, the relevance of attitudes within the context of intercultural (communicative) competence and the assumption that without an attitude of openness and acceptance, successful intercultural communication cannot occur, are

strengthened. It is this ethical-political dimension which will be of particular relevance in the course of this thesis.

### 2.1.2. Intercultural Learning

Another term which occurs within the context of foreign language teaching, often in connection with the concept of 'intercultural (communicative) competence', is 'intercultural learning'. The complexity and ambiguity by which the concept of intercultural competence is surrounded also extends to the definition of intercultural learning itself. It is therefore not a simple task to find one which is as clear-cut as desired. According to Hapgood and Fennes (275), such a definition could not possibly capture the concept in its complexity and depth. Still, Hapgood and Fennes provide a useful description of the term based on Larcher (62):

Intercultural learning implies the development of greater openness towards other cultures, the appreciation of cultural diversity, the overcoming of cultural bias and of ethnocentrism. Intercultural learning is necessary in situations where people of different cultural backgrounds and languages live together. The tensions and conflicts caused by coexistence and an inevitable lack of understanding must not result in violence, but have to be resolved in a communicative process. This does not mean that this process must result in mutual understanding. It is a large step to learn to accept that you do not understand each other. (Hapgood and Fennes 37)

This definition reflects notions of previously described models of intercultural (communicative) competence, as it pledges for the acceptance of, for respect for as well as an interest in the cultural other, in order to make harmonic intercultural coexistence and communication possible. Still, what is new in this definition is the fact that understanding is not necessarily described as a goal of intercultural learning, but, rather, the ability to handle cultural discrepancies in a harmonic and respectful way seems to be sufficient.

Some, mostly older theoretical sources (e.g. Klippel; Volkmann) present an understanding of intercultural learning in the EFL classroom which, at least when it comes to the examples they give, is rather influenced by the notion of learning about cultural particularities of English speaking countries like Britain,



the USA or others. Of course, I do not deny the fact that involving cultural information and raising awareness of the those countries and their respective cultures enhances motivation on the students' side (Klippel 15) and that this constitutes an essential part of foreign language teaching. However, in the context of this thesis, I pledge for a more modern understanding of intercultural learning in foreign language teaching on various levels, which is less confined to the traditional definition of culture, leaves room for a variety of notions of difference and underlines the ethic dimension of intercultural learning. After all, as Rösch claims, intercultural competence is not limited to dialogic encounters between individuals with a different cultural background, but it also includes matters of harmonic co-existence within multicultural societies, which have been shaped by migration in the course of globalisation as well as by the concepts of dominant cultures and ethnocentrism (*Deutsch Zweit-/Fremdsprache* 144)

## **2.2. Transcultural learning**

The terminological discussion evolving around 'transculturality' and 'interculturality' is complex, ambiguous and, as Reichl points out, often involves "terminological nitpicking" (107). Therefore, this chapter is not meant to actively engage in this discussion, but rather to develop a theoretical basis for the justification of the choice of the term 'transcultural learning' for the overall concept of this thesis.

Recently, there has been a certain amount of critique towards the term 'intercultural' by researchers. This critique often includes the connotations of the prefix 'inter-', which implies an encounter between two different, self-contained entities, leaving no space for mutual influence. A transcultural concept, on the other hand, allows for such interactions and, therefore, could be expressed as a further progression of the intercultural concept (Fäcke 17-18). Similarly, Seidl prefers the expression "transcultural competence" to take account of the transition one has to undergo in order to "act successfully between two cultures", which lies in the act of overcoming or distancing oneself from one's own cultural imprint in order to open oneself to unknown cultural meanings (107).

The prevalent conception of 'transculturality' is one that is often mentioned in the same breath with Wolfgang Ivers (Delanoy, „Transkulturalität und Literatur“ 95). His reason for contributing to this field was his perception of a reality of the state of cultures which was no longer compatible with the existing theory of culture. This moved him to develop a new, more modern concept of culture – the concept of 'transculturality' (Ivers 59). The elements of the traditional concept of culture, which Ivers labels as outdated, are “social homogenisation”, meaning that certain “act[s]” and “object[s]” are hastily characterised as a result of cultural influence on people, “ethnic consolidation”, meaning that cultures are thought to be “folk-bound”, and “intercultural delimitation”, indicating clear-cut boundaries and separation between individual cultures (61-62). Firstly, according to Ivers, the element of homogeneity fails to recognise existing heterogeneity within societies in this day and age, be it due to social class or other expressions of lifestyle. Secondly, he labels ethnic consolidation as having always been far from reality, considering the “historical evidence of intermingling” and the social construction of the entity of nation. Thirdly, to him, the danger of the element of delimitating cultures is threefold. It lies in the development of so-called “cultural racism”, its incompatibility with the concept of intercultural understanding as well as its predisposition to trigger serious intercultural conflicts (59-63). Finally, he also criticises the concepts of multiculturalism and interculturality for perpetuating the notions of separateness of and homogeneity within cultures and, therefore, for failing to effectively account for cultural reality (64-66).

As a consequence, Ivers responded to those deficiencies by suggesting the term “transcultural” to describe the current character of cultures, as it “goes *beyond* the traditional concept of culture and *passes through* traditional cultural boundaries as a matter of course” (67). This transcultural reality, which the term recognises, exists on a macro- as well as on a micro-level. On a macrolevel, the relationship between the cultures is characterised by “*external networking*”, which is reflected in lifestyles showing international influence. Another characteristic of today's cultures is “hybridization”, which relates to the population, goods and information accessible. Ultimately, “cultural mixing”, which also takes place on this level, characterises “high culture” as well

as “daily routine”, while a “[d]issolution of the foreign-own distinction” can be identified (68-69). On a microlevel, transcultural elements can be detected in individuals, making them “cultural hybrids”, “determining the formation of individuals’ cultural identity”, as well as in multifaceted identities, occupying various positions available within one society (71-72). So, the most obvious strength of the concept of ‘transculturality’ is its accurate theory of cultures, describing them as hybrid, flexible entities which are not stable, but rather subject to change.

Critique of a clear distinction between ‘interculturality’ and ‘transculturality’, as well as of Welsch’s conceptualisation and his commentary on multicultural and intercultural models comes from Delanoy. With reference to critique on the concept of interculturality, Delanoy points out the existence of positions within the context of intercultural foreign language teaching which are critical of existing power relations in society, in favour of change and against essentialist concepts of culture („Transkulturalität und Literatur“ 97). Further, he draws attention to more recent approaches, which, unlike Welsch, do not see inter- and transculturality as oppositional concepts, but rather initiate attempts to connect those concepts and establish a dialogic relationship between them. In the course of those attempts, a connection between the concepts of trans- and interculturality, (self-) critical awareness as well as an aspiration for fairness for and well-being of everyone has been aimed at (98). Finally, Delanoy presents two major arguments against the notion of presenting ‘interculturality’ and ‘transculturality’ as concepts characterised by clear boundaries and hybridity respectively. First of all, in the context of foreign language teaching, hermeneutic intercultural learning concepts actually include an understanding of intercultural encounters which is characterised by the merging and changing of perspectives. This presupposes the diffusion of clear boundaries and ultimately triggers personal development in the learner. In this context, a zone is created which offers the possibility of encountering and merging with entities characterised as ‘different’, which is already denoted by the prefix ‘inter’ in intercultural. Secondly, Delanoy points out that, when it comes to the development of individual viewpoints, even Welsch’s understanding of transculturality includes delimitations in connection with merging (99). In other

words, one concept is characterised by key elements of the other and vice versa. He therefore deems a clear differentiation between those concepts as irrelevant and even counterproductive. Instead, Delanoy suggests a stronger focus on commonalities, in order to enable a dialogical exchange between those concepts, which could ultimately lead to a synthesis of their respective potential for analysing, critically examining and refining the comprehension of various phenomena of cultural hybridity and differentiation. Such an approach is characterised by an endeavour to develop a differentiated understanding of the concept of transculturality and corresponding phenomena (100).

Other researchers also concerned themselves with the relationship between the concepts of inter- and transcultural learning, among them Rösch (*Deutsch Zweit-/Fremdsprache* 153–154; „Interkulturelle Kompetenz“ 99) and Fäcke (16–21). While a detailed account of their respective positions cannot be given in this thesis, it can be said that, remarkably, Fäcke’s conception of transcultural mental processes (21) does include elements which Rösch explicitly assigns to the intercultural domain (*Deutsch Zweit-/Fremdsprache* 153–154; „Interkulturelle Kompetenz“ 99). On the one hand, this exemplifies the ambiguity which evolves around the terminology and definitions in the field of inter- and transcultural learning. On the other hand, it seems that their positions represent two inherently different conceptions of the relationship between the concepts of interculturality and transculturality. While Rösch’s conceptualisation underlines a clear opposition of those concepts, Fäcke’s approach reflects a conception of transculturality as an advancement of the concept of interculturality.

### 2.2.1. The Concept of Cultural Hybridity

In the following, the concept of cultural hybridity on a collective and individual level, which will be of relevance in the analysis in the second part of this thesis, will be specified. Generally, this term has been subject to various debates and therefore, it seems necessary to briefly illustrate how this thesis positions itself in regard to this discussion.

Especially after 1850, the term was associated with notions of “impurity” through its connection with the fields of biology and botany as well as with the

racist concept of miscegenation, in which the term was used for “referring to the mixing of different species”. In this sense, the concepts of “hybridity, mixing and mutation” were perceived as producing deviants from the concepts of biological, cultural and social purity, which were characterised by inferiority. Through its use in the fields of “sociology, anthropology and history”, the term entered academia at the beginning of the following century (Ackermann 6–7). This phase was followed by the term’s “strategic re-positioning” through the discipline of post-colonial studies three decades ago (11). While, in this context, the term has been criticised for connoting the existence of purity (Stockhammer 2), post-colonial theorists see “culture [...] [as] hybrid *per se*” (Ackermann 11–12). Such a view represents a sharp contrast to the earlier “conception of culture”, which, as Witchalls points out, was envisioned as being of a “static, object-oriented, homogenous and clearly delineated” character (14).

One of these theorists, who is often associated with the term ‘hybridity’, is Homi Bhabha. To him, hybridity is a dynamic, naturally infinite process and an inherent characteristic of all cultures. He classifies manifestations of cultures as mere “attempts to still the flux of cultural hybridities” (Huddart 6–7). In this context, Bhabha clearly argues against a conception of hybridity which claims a combination of two entities characterised by purity (126). Rather, his interest lies in the space “inbetween” “the overly familiar forms of official culture”, which is the space from which “the creation of new cultural meaning” stems (7). To him, this hybridity, this “third space”, bears the potential of allowing “other positions to emerge” (interview *Third Space* with Bhabha 211 qtd. in Huddart 126). As Bhabha situates his concept of hybridity within the process of “the creation of meaning”, however, he has been criticised for being “idealistic” and “unrealistic” (Huddart 7).

Another concept of hybridity, which originates from the domain of linguistics and has proven to be useful in the cultural domain, is Bakhtin’s (Ackermann 22). While his academic work is to be situated within the fields of philosophy and linguistics, he used the term ‘hybridity’ in order to refer to the “way in which language, even within a single sentence, can be double voiced – one voice ironising and unmasking the other within the same utterance”. With regard to a discussion of the phenomenon of cultural hybridity, the two forms of

hybridity Bakhtin names, “*intentional* and *organic* hybridity”, appear particularly interesting. The term ‘organic hybridity’ is used to name a blending of “diverse cultural elements” as a continuous and incidental process (12). In this sense, with reference to the societal and cultural context, Werbner concludes that the development of cultures is characterised by dynamic processes of intercultural influence over time which, however, allow for the “illusion of boundedness”, despite the nonexistence of delimited cultures as such (4-5). Therefore, as organic processes of cultural hybridization are not consciously perceived, cultures might be seen as homogenous (Ackermann 22). Intentional hybridity, on the other hand, “sets different points of view against each other in a conflictual structure” (13).

With reference to Bakhtin’s concept of ‘organic’ hybridity, I envision a concept of hybridity in which cultural manifestations are open and dynamic accumulations of cultural elements, which are, partly, territorially established, but also, due to the phenomena of globalisation and migration, increasingly mobile. They penetrate into other dynamic, flexible accumulations of cultural elements, with which they fuse into an accumulation of another character, therefore causing change. As those processes are, at least partly, unnoticed, those accumulations manifest themselves as ‘national cultures’.

On an individual level, hybridity also extends to cultural identities. Just as Hall points out, the concept of cultural identity is nothing but an attempt to establish apparent unity among diverse individuals (*Rassismus* 205). In the course of globalisation, new positions for identification have emerged. Further, identities have been subject to pluralisation and have become more flexible. Cultural identities are shaped by the fusion of various cultural elements and are, mostly, moving between different positions (217–218). Being subject to such a perpetual movement, there is a “constant process of creating new identities”, which are, therefore, marked by a perpetual process of “becoming” (Huddart 7). Similarly, Hall pledges for an understanding of “identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (“Culture Identity“ 222). According to psychoanalysts, this incompleteness inevitably is a core characteristic of all identities, whether they are of “individual” or “collective” nature (Huddart 9).

In order to analyse the incomplete and dynamic character of identities, Laclau and Mouffe's concept of 'subject positions' appears to be suitable. By assuming that discursive connections are characterised by ambiguity, inconsistency, and contradiction, the process of subjectification is categorised as the same. Within this context, subjects, marked by fragmentation and decentralisation, are established through invocation (Brodén and Mecheril 8–9). Those invocations occur within discourse, which includes dynamic connections and rearticulations and, therefore, characterises identities occurring within it as merely relational (Laclau/Mouffe 1991, 162 qtd. in Brodén and Mecheril 9). Attempts to establish fixations of meaning and, thus, identities within the discourse are partial and manifest themselves as 'nodal points', which are established through articulation and correspond with so-called 'subject-positions' (Laclau/Mouffe 1991, 168 qtd. in Brodén and Mecheril 10). In this regard, subjects consist of the articulation of the entirety of subject-positions that occur within a discourse (Mouffe 1993 qtd. in Spies para. 36). It is important to note, however, that subjects can never be bound to a single subject position, as a variety of subject positions in different discourses exist. These might even be in conflict with each other (Angus). Identities are therefore fragmented, meaning that there is no unity (Laclau & Mouffe 2006, S. 131 qtd. in Spies para. 37). Before the process of articulation, or of situating the subject within a subject position, the subject is characterised by deficiency. This deficiency is compensated for by the subjugation to the discourse (Reckwitz 307). In order to adopt a subject-position, however, Hall sees the necessity of an investment into the respective position, either in the form of acceptance, transformation or resistance against the position (Spies para. 54). It is Laclau and Mouffe's concept of subject positions which indicates the multifaceted and dynamic character of today's identities and might help to analyse and refer to this fragmentation in concrete situations. This will be of particular relevance in the analysis part of this thesis.

With regard to the process of subjectivation in the context of migration, the influential character of racist tendencies is to be considered. Within the concept of racism, processes of subjectivation are suggested to be based on a combination of knowledge and power (Stuart Hall 2000 qtd. in Brodén and

Mecheril 14). In relation to this concept, people are assigned to differential societal positions. While drawing upon physical, cultural or ethnic features, those practices create the impression of being justified, along with their influence on those peoples' actions, as well as the on their way of conceptualising the world as well as themselves (Brodén and Mecheril 14–15). The assignment of societal positions according to racist conceptualisations of affiliation and differentiation serves as a tool for interpreting social reality as well as one's own position within this reality and, at the same time, has a structural and constitutive influence on experiences as well as a normative and subjectivating effect, calling people into specific subject positions. Thereby, the productive nature of the racist order manifests itself in its influence on self-conceptualisation of those occupying inferior positions as well as others and resulting practices (17). According to Hall, with regard to subjects of diaspora, this influence results in self-conceptions of "see[ing] and experienc[ing] [themselves] as 'Other'" ("Culture Identity" 225). Focusing on texts which feature experiences of people finding themselves in diasporic situations, it is suggested that the influence of racist tendencies on diasporic identity-formation might be of relevance in the analysis part of the thesis.

### **2.3. Fremdverstehen**

Another concept which evolves around intercultural encounters or differences is one called "Didaktik des Fremdverstehens" developed by the "Gießner Graduiertenkolleg" (Fäcke 13). Similar to intercultural and transcultural learning, "Fremdverstehen" is a concept which is strongly connected to the field of foreign language teaching (see e.g. Bredella et al., Introduction). There are approaches which see *Fremdverstehen* as including all kinds of understanding in general. This is because, strictly speaking, every aspect we attempt to understand is unfamiliar to us (Bredella et al. XII) and every form of understanding, regardless of the aspect, requires the same skills (Hammerschmidt 240).

In general, *Fremdverstehen*, in this regard, refers to the attempt of understanding something not within one's own context, but within an unfamiliar one (Bredella 1992: 576f. qtd. in Bredella et al. XII). Within the field of foreign language teaching, however, the unfamiliarity of the context mostly appears to



be of a cultural nature (e.g. Bredella and Christ 11) and is predominately aimed at yielding an understanding of the culture and individuals from countries represented by the target language (Bredella et al. X). In more general terms, the didactic concept of *Fremdverstehen* should aim at dissolving inter- and intracultural tensions (Beisbart 111).

### 2.3.1. The Process of Initiating *Fremdverstehen*

With regard to the concept of *Fremdverstehen*, Hammerschmidt ascribes the wide variety of different approaches to the fact that there is a pragmatic, a cognitive and an emotional dimension underlying the holistic aspiration of the concept, which is a contribution to a universal understanding of foreign cultures (10). The concept of *Fremdverstehen*, in general, seems to be closely related to the concept of intercultural learning, as they frequently find simultaneous mention in various works on the didactics of *Fremdverstehen* (e.g. in Bredella, Christ, and Legutke).

Bredella and Christ see *Fremdverstehen* as a dialogical process, which does not necessarily presuppose similarity on a personal level, but interaction with each other (9). Being a dialogical process, *Fremdverstehen* is characterised by two features, inference and inconclusiveness. This is due to the fact that the attempt to reconstruct thoughts, feelings or intentions of another person can never yield entirely accurate results, just as much as the process of understanding another individual can never be completed (10). The latter assumption appears to build on the fact that processes of understanding, like the adoption of perspective, are of hypothetical (Burwitz-Melzer, *Allmähliche Annäherungen* 97), creative (45) and constructive nature (Bredella and Christ 13). As such, they are merely based on assumptions of the other's intentions or meanings and under the constant influence of one's subjective tendencies (13). According to those limitations, the process of *Fremdverstehen* can only be restricted to fostering a more accurate understanding of another individual in an emotional and cognitive sense.

In order to initiate a development of *Fremdverstehen*, however, some qualities are required. Meißner summarises those attitudinal qualities with reference to Bredella and Christ. According to him, *Fremdverstehen* requires

the willingness and ability to discard intracultural patterns and prejudices, to appreciate foreign patterns, to encounter foreign cultures, to perceive them from an inner perspective and to rethink one's own attitudes. Finally, one should also be able to perform those skills in real-life intercultural encounters and adapt one's behaviour accordingly, as well as to transfer knowledge from a concrete intercultural experience to others (518-519). What Meißner provides here might help as a framework with regards to the subskills that need to be developed in order to foster *Fremdverstehen*.

A key term within the discussion of *Fremdverstehen* appears to be the one of 'perspective'. As theorists underline, the changing of perspective, the act of seeing the world through the eyes of the other, the discarding of prejudices as well as of familiar manners of conceptualisation and interpretation are essential in order to make *Fremdverstehen* possible (Meißner 525; Bredella et al. XIX). Within the concept of *Fremdverstehen*, there is a distinction between an inner and an outer perspective (Bredella and Christ 16; Bredella et al. XIX-XXVII). The adoption of an inner perspective involves an imaginary walk in someone else's shoes, as well as perceiving the world from someone else's point of view, including the perception of the person's self-image and the attempt to understand this self-image (Bredella, *Literarisches Verstehen* 147). Such an adoption of an inner perspective of the foreign culture in question, is not only necessary for developing communicative competence in the corresponding foreign language, but also contributes to intercultural understanding and peace by contributing to the development of tolerance for foreign costumes and habits (Schinschke 40–41). Therefore, the competence of adopting an inner perspective can also be categorised as an objective of general education (Bredella, *Literarisches Verstehen* 150). As one can never fully possess the identical disposition as a different person for the perception of a particular situation, one can never feel the exact same feelings or perceive situations exactly like another person. Therefore, the existence of an outer position for evaluating situations is permanent (Bredella, *Literarisches Verstehen* 17). In order to yield a complete process of *Fremdverstehen*, it is necessary not to discard the outer perspective, but to draw on it in order to maintain a critical position (Bredella and Christ 16). As comprehension and

approval represent two different positions (Bredella et al. XXII), one should have the ability to understand without approving.

It is important to note that, in the end, *Fremdverstehen* aims at causing a change in the learner and is as much concerned with the self as with the other. After all, *Fremdverstehen* is a concept which modifies the self (Bredella et al., XXXI; Bredella and Christ 18). It has to be underlined, however, that this confrontation should lead to the strengthening of one's own cultural identity rather than the opposite (Bredella et al. XXX) and to raise critical awareness about the dogmatism inherent in all cultures (Bredella and Christ 18). Another aspect which is of relevance in addressing issues like the perception of and experiences with the other as well as with corresponding prejudices and stereotypes lies in their effect on social and subjective dispositions, on the behaviour towards the other, as well as on attitudes and values (Hammerschmidt 10).

Just like the intercultural concept, however, this *Fremdverstehen* has been heavily criticised for its dichotomous character, suggesting an opposition of 'the other' and 'the familiar' (Fäcke 35). While I reject such dichotomous tendencies, the distinctive usefulness of the concept of *Fremdverstehen* for this thesis lies within its openness and its non-existent constraint to the cultural domain. As already indicated, every attempt to understand another individual can be categorized as *Fremdverstehen* as every other individual is, to some extent, foreign to others. The unfamiliar context in which another person should be 'understood' is the experience of migration and corresponding issues, which are not necessarily of a cultural nature. Further, the adoption of perspective will play a fundamental role in the suggested approach of transcultural learning. Finally, since the impossibility of fostering a full understanding of another individual is recognised, this thesis aims at bringing two individuals in different contexts closer to each other in a cognitive and emotional sense.

## **2.4. Theoretical Positioning of the Thesis**

Within the discussion evolving around the concepts of 'transculturality', 'interculturality' and *Fremdverstehen*, it is rather difficult to position the idea this thesis is based on. Especially the concepts of 'interculturality' and

*Fremdverstehen* are not explicitly distinguished and appear next to each other. Further, those concepts have recently been subject to critique, especially from transcultural positions.

This critique is primarily aimed at the dichotomy and delimitation those concepts suggest. However, despite my neglect of dichotomous tendencies, I believe that it should be kept in mind that, as each and every individual is formed by different influences, dispositions and characteristics, the concept of *Fremdverstehen* as understanding someone in a different or unfamiliar context, regardless of the degree of unfamiliarity, is relevant in every interaction process. Still, it also seems essential to acknowledge commonalities as a basis for such an understanding to occur and the notion of cultural hybridity mentioned by transcultural theorists (e.g. Welsch).

In line with Delanoy („Transkulturalität und Literatur“) and Fäcke, this thesis builds on an understanding of a relationship between inter- and transculturality which is based on fusion and cooperation rather than opposition. In this sense, transculturality is thought to be a further development of interculturality rather than an opposed model. While, to a certain extent, intercultural models and concepts as well as elements of the concept of *Fremdverstehen* will be incorporated in this thesis, the term ‘transculturality’ is preferred in order to account for the recent constitution of cultures mentioned by Welsch, to promote the notion of hybridity and connectivity rather than delimitation and to underline the mental and attitudinal flexibility necessary for reflections of the self, foreign and familiar cultures as well as for developing a tolerant disposition.

### **3. The Current Ethical and Social Relevance of Transcultural Learning**

As already mentioned previously, modern societies are characterised by a multicultural nature. With regards to the Austrian EFL classroom, this multicultural nature seems relevant in the light of the sociocultural context of the students' own home country, Austria, as well as in connection with English speaking countries, which are often in focus in EFL contexts. Within this thesis, it is the country of Great Britain which is of particular relevance.

#### **3.1. Multicultural Reality in Great Britain and Austria**

For Britain, recent figures provided by the Office for National Statistics, which date back to 2015, reflect diversification. While the population of the United Kingdom was estimated at 64 265 000 people, 8 623 000 of those had not been born in the UK (Table 1.1). Among those people born outside the UK, Poland (831 000), India (795 000) and Pakistan (503 000) were most frequently named as "countries of birth" (Table 1.3). Additionally, several African countries are to be found on the list naming the sixty "most common countries of birth" outside the UK (Office for National Statistics, *Population United Kingdom*). Concerning the ethnicity and national identity of the foreign born people in England and Wales, „almost half [...] [them] identified with a White ethnic group, a third identified as Asian/Asian British [...] and 13% [...] identified with Black/African/Caribbean/Black British" in 2011. Most of the people identifying themselves as "Other White" were Polish (Office for National Statistics, *2011 Census analysis: Ethnicity*). Due to this ethnic and cultural variety present in Great Britain, it appears important to include such issues when discussing British culture and society in a classroom context. Thereby, an accurate picture of British society can be provided.

In connection with Austrian EFL learners, transcultural learning also appears to be relevant in order to enable them to act accurately within the multicultural context they encounter in Austria. According to Statistik Austria, 22,1 % of the people living in Austria have a migration background. Of those,

75.5 % are first-generation immigrants. From 2008 to 2016, the number of people with a migration background in Austria rose by 471 600 (*Bevölkerung nach Migrationshintergrund*). This shows that migration to Austria is a growing phenomenon. Based on those figures, it can be said that Austria is a country characterised by a diverse and multicultural community. Transcultural learning is therefore required in order to enable students to interact peacefully and respectfully within a multicultural context – be it at home or abroad.

### **3.2. Hostile Reactions Towards Migration**

Regrettably, the phenomenon of migration, which considerably shapes modern societies, is met with hostility by some parts of the population in both countries, Austria and Great Britain. Such attitudes indicate the need for transcultural learning, in order to reduce negative sentiments in connection to multiculturalism. In the following, the scope of and processes behind such xenophobic tendencies will be discussed.

Media coverage has included incidences of discrimination against foreigners as well as attempts to spread “fear of the foreign” for more than two decades now. Such discriminating acts and propaganda serve as indicators of rising xenophobia and ethnocentrism and are frequently aimed at migrants and refugees (Hapgood and Fennes 6). The term “xenophobia” refers to hostile feelings towards representatives of the foreign, whose foreignness might stem from their ethnicity, their sexual orientation or their ability. Hostile reactions towards the foreign appear as a result of xenophobia. Xenophobia, however, cannot be seen as a natural consequence of encountering the foreign but is more likely to occur according to “[...] the socio-economic and psycho-social condition of the person” (7). Additionally, the fear of the foreign is nourished by certain politicians, due to the fact that it is used as a tool for generating votes and for strengthening political influence. This is mostly achieved by presenting “foreigners (migrants, refugees, ethnic and cultural minorities)” as “a threat to jobs, income, living conditions, cultural identity” and as triggering negative developments in the country itself. Political actions aimed against foreigners show limited, if any, effect, as the previously described presentations are misrepresentative (8-9). As Hapgood and Fennes point out, “[i]t seems that a

modern society based on freedom, justice and democracy can only be created if it is possible to overcome fear and rejection of the foreign” (6).

In order to create a basis for the overcoming of xenophobia and for fostering a harmony between foreigners and non-foreigners, Hapgood and Fennes suggest the concept of “intercultural education”, which seeks to establish the ability to enter a harmonic, positive, empathetic and successful interaction with the foreign as well as a reflective, thoughtful and critical disposition concerning certain stances and discriminatory processes (11). “[B]elonging to the lowest income group, hav[ing] access only to housing with minimal standards and [being] held responsible for taking jobs away from the population [...]”, migrants often face significant social problems within the European context. Due to this, it is vital to acknowledge the relevance of social learning within the context of intercultural learning, which should result in respect for foreign cultures (41).

A recent event which appears to have occupied European politics on a large scale in the previous two years was the ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015 as well as its aftermath. For the year 2015, The UN Refugee Agency reported a number of 65.3 million “forcibly displaced worldwide”. This number represents a new record (2). As reflected in the figures given by ZARA, racist incidences rose significantly during and in the aftermath of the refugee crisis of 2015, from 794 documented incidents in 2014 to 1107 documented incidents in 2016 (ZARA, *Statistik 2010-2016* ). When skimming through selected incidents, which are described throughout the report, it becomes apparent that refugees and Muslims were common victims of such incidents (ZARA, *Rassismus Report 2016*). By those figures, it is strongly suggested that xenophobia, especially towards refugees and Muslims, recently represents a major problem in Austria.

Similarly, xenophobia appears to be a recent issue in Great Britain. According to the latest ECRI report on racism for the year 2014-2015, 52 528 cases of “hate motivated criminal offences” were documented. In total, a rise of 18% in hate crimes was noted in relation to the previous year (ECRI 16). The report also includes numerous references to the negative portrayal of migrants, refugees and Muslims in political discourse (17) as well as to negative media coverage of Muslims in tabloids (18). Finally, the number of Islamophobic and

antisemitic online attacks is shown to have risen significantly in the last few years (18–19). More recently, the Brexit referendum in summer 2016, which resulted in a majority voting for leaving the European Union (Weerth), has caused hate crimes to rise significantly. The Independent reported that “[...] in the week following the vote to leave the EU the number of incidents rose by 58 per cent” (Mortimer). According to the Guardian, common victims of those hate crimes were eastern Europeans in Britain, among them many Polish people. A distinctly cruel incident is believed to be the murder of a 40 year-old Polish man, which occurred in August 2016, approximately two months after the Brexit vote (Weaver).

In the light of those multicultural and xenophobic tendencies in Austria and Great Britain, it appears that a transcultural learning approach needs to go in two main directions. First of all, it seems useful to confront Austrian students with individual stories of migrants and with migration-specific problem areas, in order to provide an insight into migratory realities. Ideally, such insights will promote transcultural learning in a way that students form their own opinion on the phenomenon of migration more independently or develop a more tolerant and open disposition. Secondly, in order to convey a realistic picture of Britain’s culture and society, its cultural and ethnic diversity needs to be addressed.



## **4. The Potential of Literature for Transcultural Learning**

The following chapter is intended to demonstrate the character of literature's potential for the purpose of contributing to transcultural learning in the Austrian EFL classroom. Within this context, perspective related skills are believed to be of particular relevance. However, the general aspiration of stimulating certain attitudinal or dispositional effects in the reader through the interaction with certain literary texts is to be located within the field of reader-response criticism, as will be demonstrated in the following chapter.

### **4.1. A Matter of Reader-Response Criticism**

In the context of using literary text to develop *Fremdverstehen*, two different processes need to be distinguished. First of all, *Fremdverstehen* can occur on the story level, by means of presenting intercultural encounters between various characters (Nünning, „Fremdverstehen Und Bildung“ 125). This type of *Fremdverstehen* is located within the fictional sphere and occurs between fictional characters. Secondly, *Fremdverstehen* can occur as a result of the reading process itself, through the interaction between the literary text and the reader. In this sense, *Fremdverstehen* is to be situated within the field of reader-response criticism (126). It is believed that through this interaction between the reader and the literary text, certain skills which are essential to enable the learners to understand the other are fostered. Those skills are the ones of changing and adopting perspectives (Nünning, „Intermisunderstanding“, 98), which will be subject to a separate chapter. The manner in which this skill-development proceeds remains unclarified to this point (Nünning, „Fremdverstehen Und Bildung“ 128).

Due to their fictional origin, literary texts enable readers to encounter situations which would, in reality, remain inaccessible to them. It is this characteristic which, according to Nünning, presents the distinctive potential of literary texts for establishing an understanding of the other („Intermisunderstanding“ 105). After all, literary texts have the privileged potential to represent others' feelings, experiences and thoughts (Bredella, *Literarisches Verstehen* 14) in an exceptionally poignant manner (328). Further,

cognitive, affective, ethic (19) and imaginative (308) involvement are required in order to arrive at a comprehension of literary texts in general (308) and experiences as well as actions in specific (19). Literary texts confront us with the way in which characters experience and approach diverse situations, also under their specific cultural influence (308). With regards to developing an understanding of the other, those characteristics sound rather promising.

What appears to be relevant in this context is the question concerning the relationship between *Fremdverstehen* fostered by literary texts and the understanding of the other in real life or, in more general terms, between the fictional literary world and reality. In this respect, Bredella adopts Mukařovský's (qtd. in Bredella, *Literarisches Verstehen* 19) stance, who concludes that the function of the fictional world is to broaden one's mind by representing reality in an unfamiliar light, rather than to offer escape from reality. Similarly, he argues for the necessity of involving real-life sentiments and stances in the aesthetic reading process of literary texts, in order to allow emotional involvement. At the same time, however, Bredella mentions the term 'aesthetic distance', which refers to the fact that, because of the awareness of the fictional nature of the literary text, the reader is enabled to monitor his or her own reactions to the representations, while becoming emotionally involved (19). It is this distance which makes understanding of the other through literary texts distinctive and enables the reader to allow him- or herself to be drawn into the story untroubled. This is because the reader is well aware of the impossibility of interfering with the events represented in the literary text (329). Therefore, it appears that, despite a certain personal distance towards the fictional world, which seems necessary in order to generate an aesthetic experience, fictional texts might indeed bear considerable potential to influence the attitudes and values the reader holds outside the fictional world.

However, it must be considered that theoretical positions which suggest that the reading of literary texts is beneficial for developing an understanding of the other in real life contexts is entirely build on a collection of reasonable premises which are, however, in no way empirically confirmed (Nünning, „Intermisunderstanding“ 98). While the first premise, which Nünning views critically (98), suggests an analogical relationship between perception in the real

world and the fictional one (Wolf 69), the second premise assumes that during the reading process, the reader identifies and empathises with fictional characters – a phenomenon which, according to Nünning, depends on the reader as an individual („Intermisunderstanding“ 98). Finally, the third premise builds on the assumption that there is no distinction made between fictional experiences in the literary world and realistic experiences in the real world (Funke 1990: 592 qtd. in Nünning, „Intermisunderstanding“ 98-99). Despite the lack of empirical evidence, Nünning still appears to agree with the common opinion that the consumption of literary texts can contribute to an understanding of the other (103).

All in all, it appears that, for the purpose of developing *Fremdverstehen*, the most convincing argument for an approach which relies on literary texts is the fact that we do live in a multicultural reality in many senses and that, as Bredella points out, literary texts have the exceptional potential of transcending cultural, ethnic, racial and religious boundaries like no others. Literary works in which major relevance is given to intercultural encounters, to a harmonic co-existence within a multicultural society and which reflect cultural hybridity on a macro and micro level, triggered by the global phenomena of colonialization and migration, have been created throughout the last few decades. In the course of such representations, literary texts have the potential for taking a stance, also by showing the subjective relevance and perceptions of specific complex situations as perceived by certain characters (Bredella, *Literarisches Verstehen* 309). Furthermore, the aspect of offering insight into specific worldviews (Nünning, „Intermisunderstanding“ 105; Nünning, „Fremdverstehen Und Bildung“ 123) makes literary texts suitable for developing an awareness of the fact that the nature of perception is strongly subject-bound (Nünning, „Intermisunderstanding“ 105).

Ultimately, didactic theory aims at initiating the processes of adopting and coordinating perspectives by strengthening certain skills on the emotional and cognitive level. Such processes are believed to be constitutive in the development of an understanding of the other (Nünning, „Fremdverstehen Und Bildung“ 127) and, essentially, they are among the most relevant skills for acting within a joint Europe, as well as for developing social competence, intercultural

communicative competence and for showing sensitive and sympathetic reactions to others' worldviews, sentiments and actions (139 - 140). A more detailed account of perspective related skills will be given in the following chapter.

## **4.2. Transcultural Learning and Perspective**

The belief that an understanding of the other can be developed through the processes of changing and adopting perspectives by reading literary texts, as has been indicated by Nünning, appears to be held broadly. In specific, the central processes involved are said to be the analysis of the variety of perspectives in the literary text, the intuitive process of a reflective change in perspective as well as the purposeful promotion of the skill of adopting new perspectives („Fremdverstehen Und Bildung“ 123).

According to Delanoy, the term 'perspective' refers to the viewpoint from which a certain situation is perceived. Those different viewpoints eventually result in a variety of stances towards specific situations or problems (Bruner 1996: 31 qtd. in Delanoy, „Prozeßorientierung Fremdsprachenunterricht“ 219–220). The process of adopting perspectives allows for changing stances and, therefore, for becoming more conscious of one's own disposition for the perception of situations (220). Moreover, the term includes the entirety of aspects which constitute the disposition for perception and concepts of reality. Among those, values and norms, internalised conventions, one's psychological disposition, one's biography and culturally determined schemes of interpretation, needs and desires, knowledge and skills can be named. Those aspects require reconstruction in the process of changing perspective (Surkamp 2003: 36-49 qtd. in Nünning and Surkamp 28).

In order to teach intercultural understanding, an awareness of the tensions between the inner and the outer perspective (Bredella, *Literarisches Verstehen* 17), which brings the reader into an ambivalent position of simultaneous involvement in and distance from the literary text (Bredella, „Grundlagen Literaturdidaktik“ 42), is vital in order to teach intercultural understanding (Bredella, *Literarisches Verstehen* 17). While the adoption of the 'inner perspective' has the goal of understanding the text, the adoption of the

'outer perspective' is essential in order to interpret and evaluate the text (Bredella, „Grundlagen Literaturdidaktik“ 43).

#### 4.2.1. The Processes of Changing and Adopting Perspectives

As mentioned previously, the belief that the changing of perspectives and the adoption of unfamiliar perspectives is functional in contributing to an understanding of the other by reading literary texts is widespread among theorists in this field. For Nünning, the processes of changing, adopting and coordinating perspectives have to be the fundamental objectives of an attempt to foster an understanding of the other through literature, rather than the transmission of factual knowledge („Fremdverstehen Und Bildung“ 124). During the reading process itself, even the intuitive and therefore unintentional performance of those acts generates an involvement in the text which is beneficial for understanding the other (138). At the same time, those processes are seen as constitutive in the transfer of acquired skills in the domain of *Fremdverstehen* from the literary, fictional sphere to real-life contexts. This is relevant because, after all, the ultimate goal of a didactic approach to understanding the other is its successful performance in real-life contexts (Nünning, „Intermisunderstanding“ 98). In the course of this thesis, the processes of changing and adopting perspectives will be of particular relevance, which is why those will be discussed in more detail in the following.

First of all, there is the process of changing perspective. For this process, literary texts offer excellent preconditions by providing the opportunity to engage and empathise with the ideas, attitudes and feelings of fictional characters. (Nünning, „Intermisunderstanding“ 105-106). In order for a change of perspective to happen, the learner requires an open-minded disposition (Müller-Hartmann 166; Byram 34) and must be willing to undergo this process, so that an understanding of the other can happen. As a consequence of this change of perspective, one's own cultural disposition might, through a confrontation with unfamiliar ones, be subject to reflection and, eventually, change (Müller-Hartmann 165). Such a modification is likely to happen due to one distinct characteristic of literary texts. While those texts involve readers by drawing on their world-knowledge and values (Bredella, *Literarisches Verstehen* 307), they

generally aim at a modification of those rather than a confirmation (307; Dewey 138). This is where their value for understanding the other lies (Bredella, *Literarisches Verstehen* 307).

The second process mentioned in connection to *Fremdverstehen* is the one of adopting perspectives. Along with the capacity of feeling empathy for other people, this process is recognized as being a basic constituent of the concept of intercultural competence (Schinschke 39), of any social act and of comprehending motivational and intentional aspects behind one's actions (Nünning, „Intermisunderstanding“ 109). The process of adopting perspectives finds its justification in the perspective-bound nature of perception (108). As such, it denotes the capacity of adopting the viewpoint of another person (Edelstein, Keller and Wahlen 181) and of reconstructing situations on the basis of this process (181; Delanoy, „Prozeßorientierung Fremdsprachenunterricht“ 219). Finally, the process of adopting perspectives builds on the fact

that we can imagine ourselves in situations very different from the one we are in, we can create images of sensations we should have, we can become aware, in part, of the meanings we should see in it, what our intentions, attitudes and emotions would be, what satisfactions and frustrations we should experience (Harding 1977a, 65 qtd. in Bredella, „Grundlagen Literaturdidaktik“ 42–43).

This capacity constitutes an exceptionally precious skill of imagination which appears pivotal for understanding what we do not know - the other.

As Schinschke mentions, the line between the concepts of adopting perspectives and feeling empathy is somewhat blurred and unclear (39). According to Roper's distinction, the cognitive level of feeling empathy is identical to the process of adopting a perspective. They both require motives, objectives, attitudes, values etc. of a character to be cognitively conceived and relived by the reader. The reader understands, but does not feel with the character. In this sense, the affective level of empathy, which lies in the emotional response of the reader to represented sentiments of the fictional character, is the distinguishing element between empathy and the adoption of a perspective (Ropers 1990 qtd. in Schinschke 39). For Grim, “empathy consists of the ability and process of identifying with another person's feelings, intentions and opinions” (Plé 2003:227 qtd in. Grimm 454) and, therefore, includes

emotional and cognitive identification with the character. A similar emphasis on the process of identification can be found in Schoen's (1995: 110 qtd in Grimm 454-455) understanding of empathy, which Grimm describes to be "the process of assuming the affective condition of someone else, for example, when a reader identifies with a literary character based on common emotion" (454–455). It is precisely this process of identification which is supposed to initiate a change in the reader and his or her attitudes. As Grimm points out, during the "receptive act" of feeling empathy, a modification of self-perception as well as a reflection of one's own perspective can be initiated (455). In the light of such effects, it seems more than reasonable that Nussbaum underlines the relevance of literature to "foster an informed and compassionate vision of the different" (*Cultivating Humanity* 89), for instance by representing

"how circumstances shape the lives of those who share with us some general goals and projects; and we see that circumstances shape not only people's possibilities for action, but also their aspirations and desires, hopes and fears. [...] Understanding, for example, how a history of racial stereotyping can affect self-esteem, achievement, and love enables us to make more informed judgments on issues of relating to affirmative action and education." (87)

Literature offers the opportunity to get an insight into such issues and might, eventually, result in more informed opinions on lifestyles which are different to one's own, also in real life situations. This is also suggested by Bredella, who, in relation to the short story *Mannequins*, concluded that, the empathy and sympathy felt for the protagonist in the reading process eventually causes the reader to reflect on whether they lack of empathy and sympathy for others in real life (Bredella, „Grundlagen Literaturdidaktik“ 67). It is assumed that other literary texts, which invite the reader to identify with the other, bear the potential to trigger similar processes of reflection.

In the context of this thesis, I therefore focus an adoption of perspective of a fictional character on a cognitive and, even more, on an emotional level. Beyond the beneficial effects identification with the other can have on the attitudes and values of the reader, it is also the process of understanding another individual which relies heavily on identification, as will be shown in the chapter 'Young Adult Literature'. This makes the process of identification an

important aspect in the transcultural learning approach in focus of this thesis. For those reasons, with its emotional focus, I see the feeling of empathy as a constitutive part of the process of adopting a perspective in its entirety. The perceived analogy between the reader and the fictional character is assumed to lead to identification and, ultimately, to an approximation of the self and the other, which might result in the reflection of one's attitudes, values and entrenched stereotypes.



## **5. British Young Adult Fictions of Migration and Transcultural Learning – Theoretical Considerations**

In order to refer to the types of texts which will be in the focus of this thesis, I have decided to use the term 'British young adult fictions of migration'. This term represents a compound of the genre labels 'Young Adult Literature' and 'British fictions of migration'. What sort of texts are denoted with this compound term and in how far those are thought to be useful for initiating and/or supporting transcultural learning processes, will be addressed in the following.

### **5.1. Young Adult Literature**

The term 'young adult literature' refers to literature which displays the world "from the [v]iewpoint of [y]oung [p]eople", features a teenage protagonist who proves to be successful in his actions and represents "emotion[al]" matters relevant to the respective age group. The genre itself is characterised by rapid progress, by the portrayal of "a [v]ariety of [g]enres and [s]ubjects and [l]evels of [s]ophistication" , "[m]any [d]ifferent [e]thnic and [c]ultural [g]roups [n]ot [o]ften [f]ound in the [l]iterary [c]anon" as well as by a "[b]asically [o]ptimistic" tenor (Nilsen et al. 28–35). While the terms "teenage or adolescence fiction" can be used synonymous to "young adult literature", there appears to be a similar vagueness with regards to the age of the target group ranging "between [...] twelve and eighteen"(3) for some, and between twelve and sixteen for others (Richter 88).

Overall, various reasons can be named for using young adult literature in the EFL classroom in general and for contributing to the process of transcultural learning in specific. First of all, the probability that young readers identify with a protagonist of their age group is particularly high (Reichl 110; Monseau and Salvner xii) and very likely to increase both, emotional identification with the character as well as reading motivation (Reichl 110; Alter 70). Due to the high potential for identification, "instead of merely learning *about* the literature they read in school, [...] students become involved *in* the literature" (Monseau and Salvner xii). The genre's potential for making a contribution to transcultural

learning, however, goes beyond the process of identification with the characters in the text. As Alter points out, “[e]xperiences depend on a number of aspects such as age, gender, sexuality, religion, as well as geographic surroundings and rural or urban environments” (71). Consequently, the experiences of the reader can never be identical to the experiences of the characters in the text. In this sense, as already mentioned in connection to the concept of *Fremdverstehen*, every understanding of another individual is *Fremdverstehen* and, thus, every other individual is, at least to some extent, unfamiliar and, therefore, ‘the other’. So, as Hesse and Bredella point out, the reader constantly moves between identification with the characters on the one hand, and the perception of unfamiliar features on the other (Hesse 1997: 10 qtd. in Richter 96–97; Bredella, „Interkulturelles Verstehen“ 140). Without any form of identification and commonality between the reader and the character, understanding would be impossible. Without any form of foreignness between the reader and the character, the concept of understanding would be redundant. This is where, according to Bredella, the analogy between literary and intercultural understanding lies, as they both build on certain common features between the subjects involved in order to develop understanding of the other’s thoughts and emotions (Bredella, „Interkulturelles Verstehen“ 140). According to Hesse, it is precisely this discrepancy between the familiar and the unfamiliar within one reading process, which constitutes reading motivation (Hesse 1997 10 qtd. in Richter 96–97).

In the specific context of EFL teaching, literature originating from English speaking countries inherently serves as a tool for transcultural learning, as it mostly features cultures which are unfamiliar to the language learner (Alter 70). Additionally, on the content level, young adult literature tends to present general values held by certain cultures, which represents a useful trait for fostering an understanding of foreign cultures (Bredella, „Interkulturelles Verstehen“ 197–198). Concerning this type of literature, it has been argued that literature written for the target group of native speakers is characterised by the special feature of providing learners with “language that is genuine and undistorted” as well as with specific “cultural information” (Collie and Slater 3–4). It should, however, be taken into account that such texts pose a certain level of difficulty for students in

the EFL classroom, which is not as high when using didacticized texts (Richter 88). Still, when it comes to “the more conceptual areas of comprehension” in particular, a certain extent of complexity can function as an initiation of certain reflection processes (Reichl 111).

Finally, there are certain characteristics of young adult literature beyond the content level, which are regarded as beneficial for transcultural learning processes. Nussbaum claims that the potential to involve the reader empathetically in the text lies in the mere “form” of the “mainstream realist novel” (*Poetic Justice* 66). Similarly, Reichl underlines the “insight into the protagonists’ thoughts and ideas” which is given by a “relatively direct narrative perspective” (“first person narrative” or “figural narrative situation”) – a common way of representation in “young adult fiction” (Reichl 111). After all, the immediacy of or narrative situation in the story is decisive in giving access to the emotions and thoughts of the characters and, therefore, makes the inner perspective of the characters more or less accessible to the reader. It is this accessibility which, among others, makes an emotional and cognitive approximation between the reader and the character possible.

To sum it up, the distinctive vantage of using young adult literature for fostering transcultural understanding appears to be its potential for identification with the protagonists, in particular on an emotional level. The common ground established through identification forms the basis for understanding those aspects which are unfamiliar to the reader and, at the same time, represents a considerable motivational factor. While using non-didacticized young adult literature in the EFL classroom appears to be recommendable due their linguistic and cultural proximity to native speaker contexts and reasons of reader motivation, the choice of text should be made in consideration of the precise needs and ability of the particular group of learners, in order to provide the appropriate balance of comprehensibility and complexity.

## **5.2. British Fictions of Migration**

In the light of the terminology within the context of literature reflecting multiculturalism, which shows a significant lack of flexibility, the attempt to find a label for the kind of literature in the focus of this thesis proved to be fairly

complex. The type of literature considered in this thesis is characterised by the guiding theme of the experience of migrating into Great Britain made by young adults. Several terms that suggest intercultural or transcultural aspects are either restricted to certain ethnic or racial affiliations of the author, like “multicultural literature” as described by (Kruse & Horning 1990: vii qtd. in Richter 90) or “black British literature” (Sommer 194). In the end, the term ‘British fictions of migration’, a term derived from Sommer’s term “fictions of migration”, appeared suitable. I decided to add the term ‘British’, in order to emphasise the British focus of this thesis.

Sommer claims that he introduced the “fictions of migration” in order to provide an alternative to narrower concepts (6), just like the ones mentioned previously. Generally, the term ‘fictions of migration’ functions as a hypernym for literary works with multi- and transcultural tendencies (6), thus, providing flexibility as well as connectivity (7). The literary texts subsumed under this term are broadly concerned with global impacts of migration and can also be of European authorship (7). In order to be classifiable as fictions of migration, texts require the inclusion of issues of interculturality, which are, according to Sommer, the categories of identity, representation and alterity. Additionally, he specifies the setting of the texts to be Great Britain, or he demands at least an obvious connection to former British postcolonial issues (7). On the content level, contemporary examples of fictions of migration feature a genuine portrayal of cultural and social reality by means of representing variation with regards to topics, identity concepts and genres (193). However, while Sommer explicitly includes European authorship as a possible characteristic of examples of the genre, this notion is not reflected in his selection of texts, which are exclusively of black British authorship. In this regard, the approach of this thesis can be seen as an extension to Sommer’s conceptualisation of fictions of migration due to its categorization and analysis of a young adult novel of European authorship as an example of fictions of migration.

In line with the process of adopting perspectives, the assumption that the representation of migrant experiences is valuable for transcultural learning processes goes along with the fact that, as described by Freitag, literature fosters understanding for others by allowing to experience their “*life stories*”

through their perspective (198). This is where Nussbaum sees the “political promise of literature” and its unique significance as “an expansion of sympathies that real life cannot cultivate sufficiently”. “[I]t can transport us, while remaining ourselves, into the life of another, revealing similarities but also profound differences between the life and thought of that other and myself and making them comprehensible” (*Cultivating Humanity* 111). Thereby, literature allows for connections between people which would probably have not been possible without it (Richter 106), at least presumably not with on same level of emotional and cognitive proximity.

In the context of the Austrian EFL classroom, the use of literature including the topic of the process of migration can be considered as useful for various reasons. Most notably, however, topics like cultural identity and diversity are as prominent in most European societies as much as they are in British fictions of migration (Freitag and Rupp 333). Therefore, texts representing the situation of young adults confronted with a new cultural reality in America or England are indeed valuable for the German (Richter 92–93) as well as for the Austrian context. This is also the case because, as indicated previously<sup>1</sup>, the categorization as ‘migrant’ or ‘refugee’ is often perceived as reason enough to be confronted with hostility by others in both countries, Austria and Great Britain. As Freitag and Rupp claim, it is the ability to develop sensibility towards issues related to cohabitation within multicultural societies, which represents a special trade of novels (333).

However, when the topic of migration is introduced by a novel which represents the experience itself, it should be considered that this experience should not be regarded as representative of all migration experiences. This is since there are influential factors like “class [...] and the histories that shape each group that moves”, which, despite some general thematic parallels, constitutes differences between “diasporic experiences and exiles” (Loomba 180–181). The same holds for the literary representations of ethnic minorities, which should and cannot be taken as representatives of a specific culture (Richter 93).

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<sup>1</sup> see chapter “Hostile Reactions Towards Migration”

In the light of the theoretical background presented up to this point, it seems highly relevant to try to include the theme of cultural hybridity on a personal (individual identity) and collective level (society). This is important due to the fact that, as Korte and Sternberg argue, the concept of Englishness and Britishness as well as British society in general is categorised by ethnic variety as an intrinsic component (26). Corresponding themes can be found in a wide range of YA-literature in the form representations which suggest variety and dynamism as core characteristics of cultures, often by presenting characters as being under multicultural influence, combining tendencies from various cultural sources (Bredella, „Interkulturelles Verstehen“ 191). In other words, texts which indicate a critical stance towards cultural delimitation and convey examples of cultural overlapping as well as processes of wandering between cultures (Sommer 191), can be considered as valuable. For Freitag and Rupp, this is especially true for texts which provide a portrayal of the development of cultural identities and self-concepts, which are often characterised by hybridity. In the case of members of ethnic minorities, the development of self-concepts is often influenced negatively by essentialistic ascriptions. The discriminative and harmful nature of those influences can be subject to reflection based on literary texts (326).

All in all, British young adult fictions of migration appear to lend themselves perfectly as a tool for fostering transcultural competence in the (Austrian) EFL classroom. By reliving experiences of others, in this case, young people in the experience of migration, literature can bring people closer who, for various reasons, do not frequently interact with each other in real life. In order to create the unique tension between identification and foreignness necessary for understanding, Richter suggests using texts which simultaneously feature issues which average students face every day, as well as such which go beyond those and are unfamiliar to them (98). In this context, unfamiliar elements will mostly be inherent in the representation of the experience of as well as problems related to migration.

### **5.3. Critical Voices on Transcultural Learning with Literature**

Despite the suggested potential of British young adult fictions of migration for transcultural learning, which is based on the theoretical framework provided, similar approaches have been subject to mild criticism.

This criticism is concerned with the instrumentalisation of literature for “a political agenda” (Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity* 89) and the fact that the process of trying to achieve a change within the student’s personality is accompanied by several critical aspects. Especially the question of the degree to which the teacher can be regarded as entitled to get involved in such an endeavour on a professional and ethical level (Alsup 2010,5 qtd. in Alter 77) should be considered. After all, values are highly subjective and personal aspects and just because teachers perform the honourable occupation of educating young individuals, one cannot automatically assume that their values agree with those of mainstream society. As Alter points out, it could be the case that “[...] a teacher decides to develop students’ identity by teaching literature that a surrounding community may consider to be harmful” (77).

In response to this, the concept of transcultural learning with literature, as I envision it for this thesis, should not be seen as an attempt to change students’ personalities, but rather as an empowerment of the students. The opportunity to adapt a hitherto unfamiliar perspective allows them to see the world from a different angle. On the basis of those impressions, I believe that students are enabled to develop their own, more informed stance towards the issues presented in the book. This empowerment appears highly relevant in the light of the already discussed fact that especially the media and political entities repeatedly attempt to influence individuals’ attitudes towards the topics of migration and refuge for political instrumentalisation.

### **5.4. Transcultural Learning at Lower Secondary Level in Austria**

Due to the didactic focus of this thesis, it appears relevant to refer to the way in which transcultural learning is acknowledged and considered in the institutional framework for EFL-teaching in Austria. Generally, the Austrian Ministry of

Education recognises the value of intercultural skills as representing core competences in the age of globalisation as well as in being constitutive for a peaceful relationship between migrants and non-migrants. In this sense, some more specific sub-competences are mentioned. According to those, intercultural competence consists of an open disposition, the readiness to question one's own attitudes and stereotypes, to adopt unfamiliar perspectives, to unveil prejudices relating to race and eurocentrism, the ability to treat disadvantaged members of society along the lines of solidarity and morality as well as to handle conflicts in a sober and effective manner. Notably, however, the ministry warns of establishing an opposition of fictional entities of 'the migrants' and 'us' as well as of supporting essentialist views of cultures (BMBF, *Interkulturalität*). In order to avoid such polarising and generalising tendencies, a transcultural approach, which underlines cultural hybridity on various levels (the individual, society) appears suitable.

With regard to the actual Austrian school program, intercultural learning is defined as a general teaching principle, which has been considered in curricula since the 1990s. Being a teaching principle, the Ministry of Education sees the development of intercultural competence as being the responsibility of all subjects, rather than of any specific ones. As such, intercultural learning should facilitate reciprocal understanding as well as the recognition of commonalities and differences and prompt the refutation of stereotypes (BMBF, *Das Unterrichtsprinzip*). More specific objectives for intercultural learning are given in the section of general educational objectives of the Austrian curriculum for secondary education, including the awareness of cultural values, the fostering of appreciation of cultural variety as well as an interest in cultural differences. Ultimately, students should be guided to mutual reciprocal tolerance and appreciation (BMBF, *Lehrplan AHS*).

Finally, for the specific context of intercultural learning at the fourth grade of lower secondary level, the educational standards for teaching English give a rather detailed account of what this should comprise and how it can be achieved. In there, intercultural learning is categorised as a “*übergreifende[], dynamische[] Fähigkeit[]*” or as a “*soft skill[]*” and, therefore, as an interdisciplinary matter (Brock et al. 6). Being categorised as such, intercultural



learning is meant to contribute, among others, to the development of individuals who are able to act with responsibility, independence and maturity within society (7). The relevance of the fostering of intercultural competence is justified with the growing cultural variety in the Austrian classroom. In this context, the elimination of prejudicial and hostile tendencies towards each other as well as the creation of an open, sympathetic and friendly learning environment should be achieved by fostering intercultural competence (41). In this context, the specific skills which constitute intercultural competence are divided into two categories. While the first category includes practical skills concerning the skilful and competent management of intercultural encounters, the second category consists of the personal traits of being an open, interested, reflective and respectful individual (42).

Notably, only intercultural concepts find mention within the relevant sources. Those, however, appear to be very well entrenched within the Austrian school program as well as within the educational standards for teaching English at the level in focus. Throughout those, attitudinal and personal traits, like the development of a disposition characterised by tolerance and solidarity, which are also focused in this thesis, find specific emphasis. Finally, by warning of establishing of fostering dichotomous tendencies in the context of the discussion of migratory issues, the Austrian school program shows, at least vaguely, support of transcultural notions.

## **5.5. Reading Literature at Lower Secondary Level**

In order to plan a transcultural learning approach with literature, the capability of the respective target group of learners has to be considered. In this context, the language level of the students as well as their stage of personal development will be relevant. In both senses, students at the grade in question appear to experience a transitional phase.

Concerning language competence, students in the eighth grade are usually in a transitional phase with regard to their reading competence. As a rule, they find themselves between the level of A2 and B1, according to the Common European Framework (Horak et al. 20). In consideration of the CEFR-descriptors which are relevant for literary reading at this level, students appear

to possess sufficient linguistic competences in order to be introduced to reading literary texts in the foreign language. While the A2-descriptors for reading exclusively refer to brief and simple functional texts, explicit reference to literary texts can only be found in the following B1 descriptor (BIFIE and ÖSZ 12):

“6. Kann einfache literarische Texte (z.B. fiktionale Texte, Lieder und Gedichte) verstehen.“ (12)

At lower secondary level, other aspects have to be considered, which could have a disruptive effect on the process of reading English literary texts. Those take various forms. First of all, students might have difficulties understanding an English text due to problems with the language (Richter 94; Burwitz-Melzer, "Lehrende und Lernende" 203). This is especially true for students between the grades seven and ten, in the case of a wide vocabulary range in the text, for instance (Burwitz-Melzer,"Lehrende und Lernende" 203). Secondly, difficulties could occur with regard to foreign cultural references in the book (Burwitz-Melzer,"Lehrende und Lernende" 203; Richter 94), which, depending on frequency and complexity, could be used for reflection in the context of transcultural learning. An overall comprehension of the text itself is constitutional for the emotional involvement of the students in the story (Richter 95). Should those difficulties be too severe, students could lose interest in continuing the reading process. Therefore, books should be chosen carefully with regards to their complexity on a linguistic and cultural level (94). Such a choice might not be easy at lower secondary level, as this group of learners is characterised by high heterogeneity concerning reading competency, linguistic competence, previous literary experience, motivation, ability and interests (Burwitz-Melzer,"Lehrende und Lernende" 215).

Considering the learners' personal development, students on lower secondary level are considered to be rather challenging. Notably, they find themselves in the particularly complicated stages of pre-puberty and puberty, which are characterised by the forging of identity. Therefore, it can be problematic to cater to the interest of all students in class (213–214). Another transitional phase, which young people at this age are confronted with, is of

social or sociocultural nature. At this particular stage of development, the students acquire the skills of reciprocally coordinating perspectives. This particular skill enables students to adopt and consider various perspectives simultaneously and evaluate situations on the basis of those. The development of this skill is believed to happen between the age of nine and fifteen. However, the skill of adopting the perspective of groups with an unfamiliar social or cultural influence is supposed to be fully developed at the age of twelve (Silbereisen 835-836 qtd. in Burwitz-Melzer "Lehrende und Lernende" 213–214).

All in all, students in the eighth grade can be regarded as qualified for a confrontation with literary texts in the target language. This is especially true if, overall, the group of learners can be considered as high-achieving. Of course, close attention should be given to the degree of linguistic and cultural difficulty within the books, which needs to be appropriate for the capability of the specific group of learners. Finally, due to the mostly completed development of the skill of the adopting perspectives, an approach of transcultural learning built on this process can be considered as feasible.

## **6. British Young Adult Fictions of Migration and Transcultural Learning - Analysis**

The following part of this thesis serves to analyse the potential of British young adult fictions of migration as a tool for transcultural learning in the Austrian EFL-classroom. This will be achieved by means of a close contextual reading, which follows certain categories and is supposed to yield an analysis of the aptitude of the chosen literary text for the specific transcultural approach suggested in this thesis. In order to obtain specific results, the categories established for the analysis are based on the theory section. Finally, this analysis should provide a basis for practical implementations in the EFL-classroom.

### **6.1. Context and Categories for the Analysis**

As already discussed in the previous chapter, regarding the reading of literary texts at lower secondary level, care should be taken concerning possible complexity on the linguistic and on the cultural level. Further, it has been mentioned that the domain of attitudes can be seen as a prerequisite for fostering transcultural competence. Therefore, the transcultural learning approach suggested in this thesis should serve as an introduction to the domain of transcultural learning.

In terms of the trans- and intercultural models presented, the following approach is, first and foremost, meant to contribute to the attitudinal as well as the ethical and political domain of transcultural learning. Concerning the Austrian curriculum and educational standards presented in this thesis, this approach can be situated within the general educational principles as well as within the general dynamic skills meant to be taught throughout all subjects. Notably, being a transcultural approach, the following analysis will, in reference to Welsch's model of transculturality, lay an additional focus on representations of cultural hybridity, manifested in modern identities and cultures.

The categories I established for the following analysis are based on the general theoretical framework presented in the theory part of this thesis. By using those, I mean to reveal the potential of the literary text in focus for my

suggested approach to transcultural learning. Correspondingly, the categories for the analysis are:

- Adoption of the perspective of migrants
  - Teenage-specific issues
  - Migration-specific issues
  - Immediacy of the novel
- Hybridity and other qualities beneficial to a transcultural approach
  - Hybridity of British society and culture
  - Hybridity of (cultural) identities
  - Further transcultural tendencies

The first set of categories is concerned with the process of adopting the inner-perspective of young adult migrants who find themselves in the very experience of migrating. As suggested in the theoretical framework provided, the adoption of an inner perspective should lead to the identification with and the feeling of empathy for the protagonist. Further, while the process of identification relies on the representation of issues relevant to the respective group of readers, in this case, teenagers, the understanding of something unknown depends on the simultaneous representation of the familiar and the unfamiliar. Thus, the representation of issues related to teenage life (familiar) and migration experiences (partly unfamiliar), will be analysed. The process of adopting a perspective and the identification with the protagonist also rely on immediacy of the way in which a story is told, like the immediacy of the narrative situation, making it an interesting category for the analysis.

The second set of categories for the analysis is meant to identify representations in the novel which support the concept of transculturality. In particular, I will analyse in how far cultural hybridity, which is a key characteristic of modern societies in general and of British society in specific, is featured in the story. This could be reflected in the representation of the population in of a country, as well as in the multiculturalism presented in the public sphere (e.g. range of restaurants, groceries, institutions). Further, it also appears relevant to address the general fragmentation as well as the notion of cultural hybridity

present in individual identities today. This hybridity could be manifest in a person's self-image, lifestyle or language. Hence, the penultimate category is concerned with such issues. In the last step of the analysis, I will present manifestations of transcultural tendencies in the novel which go beyond the representation of cultural hybridity on a micro- and macrolevel.

## **6.2. Choice of Text**

As an example of British young adult fictions of migration, I decided to use the young adult novel *The Weight of Water*, which was written by Sarah Crossan and published in 2012. A special trait of *The Weight of Water* is the fact that this novel is written entirely in verse and, therefore, comprises multiple individual poems which tell the story of Kasienska and her migration experience.

Kasienska is twelve years old when her father leaves his family without any explanation and moves to England. Consumed with the thought of finding him and bringing him back, Kasienska's mother immigrates to England with her daughter. There, life is not easy for Kasienska. Her life is mostly characterised by poverty, loneliness, social exclusion and homesickness on the one hand, and family issues on the other hand. Once Kasienska finds her father, her mother falls into depression, Kasienska struggles with the thought of her father having a new family and the impression that her family will never be the same as it was before coming to England. The encounter with some very special people, like Kanoro, her neighbour, William, her first love, or Dalilah, her first friend in the new school as well as her passion for and special skill of swimming make her gain confidence and enable her to develop into an active subject who controls her own fate.

While the topic of immigration to Great Britain makes the novel, according to Sommer's standards, classifiable as fictions of migration, the fact that the book features a twelve to thirteen year old protagonist and presents the story on a language level that can definitely be considered as feasible for students at an A2/B1 level, qualifies this book for use in the Austrian EFL classroom on the aforesaid level. If and in how far this novel contains features that make it a suitable tool for the transcultural learning approach envisioned in this thesis, will be evaluated in the following.

### **6.3. Analysis – *The Weight of Water***

The following chapter is meant to identify the potential of the young adult novel *The Weight of Water* for initiating transcultural learning processes in the Austrian EFL classroom. This will be done by analysing the text according to the previously established main categories, namely its capability of initiating the adoption of perspective, its representation of the cultural hybridity present in British society as well as of hybridity on the level of identity. The analysis itself will not focus on all elements which are present in the novel with respect to the previous subcategories but only on those which are most salient as, otherwise, the analysis would extend the scope of this thesis.

#### **6.3.1. The Adoption of a Migrant Perspective**

Due to the fact that the adoption of the perspective of the protagonist has been established as the basic process in the transcultural learning approach in question, the novel's potential to stimulate such an adoption will be the main focus of the analysis. Correspondingly, this category will account for the largest part of the analysis and comprise multiple subcategories.

##### **6.3.1.1. *Teenage-Specific Aspects***

I have already argued multiple times in this thesis that any attempt to understand, or to understand someone better, depends on the presence of familiar elements and, therefore, experiences the reader can identify with. In the case of British young adult fictions of migration, those familiar elements are believed to be problems and issues specific to the lives of teenagers. In the course of the novel, the protagonist encounters various such issues.

The teenage-specific problems which are most apparent in the novel are those of social exclusion and bullying, along with their psychological effects. As soon as Kasienska starts school in England, she categorises herself as an outsider, which manifests itself in various instances. In the poem "Group Work" (48), for instance, Kasienska talks about the anxiety outsiders feel when people get to choose partners for group activities and the outsiders wait, "Desperately

scanning,/Hoping to be considered/ By a group of unpopulars” (49). Just as immediately, Kasienska describes the deep embarrassment and humiliation felt once, as a result of “exclusion” (49), the teacher assigns abandoned outsiders to random groups:

There is eye rolling and chair scraping  
As we shuffle forward,  
Unwanted and misused,  
Like old boots dragged  
From a river. (49)

The fear Kasienska feels of being exposed as an outsider by remaining unchosen, her hope to be chosen by some “unpopulars” (49) and her embarrassment of being assigned to a group in which she feels unwanted, present the considerable emotional burden which results from being a victim of such practices of exclusion.

A similar manifestation of social exclusion, which establishes an opposition of the popular and the unpopular, can be found in the poem “To London” (209), in which Kasienska describes the team’s journey to a swimming competition. In this context, she says that “Some rules are universal:/ The back of the bus is reserved for the popular./ So I’m at the front behind Ms. Morrow” (209). Such manifestations of social exclusion within the classroom can certainly be described as wide-spread within school contexts and, therefore, as familiar to most teenagers. By encountering such immediate representations of the emotional effects of those practices, I suggest that, on the one hand, students feel empathy for Kasienska and, on the other hand, become more aware of such practices within their own school context. What seems to bother Kasienska much more, however, is her role as a victim of bullying.

Explicit attacks on Kasienska by the bully, Clair, begin to occur after Clair finds out about Kasienska’s friendship with William. Clair starts rather discretely by ignoring Kasienska (77–79), then moves on to verbally attacking her by calling her a “lesbian” due to her short hair (80) and by making similar random categorisations, marking Kasienska as ‘different’, until the situation degenerates to the spread of rumours about Kasienska (114) and to a mild physical attack in the poem “The Assembly” (127). After a phase of trying to find reasons for the



bullying, as a reaction to Clair's comment, stating that Kasienka's hair makes her look homosexual, Kasienka attempts to change her appearance in order to belong. She begins by straightening her hair, which fails to change anything:

They just have to stare  
At my hair,  
For me to know  
It isn't enough  
To impress them,  
Though it's so straight now  
You could paint with it.  
(87)

Instead of accepting Kasienka, however, Clair looks for new reasons to continue the bullying and accuses her of "smell[ing] of old meat" (87). A similar situation as the one quoted above occurs when Clair cuts off Kasienka's hair in the poem "The Assembly" (127–128), despite the fact Kasienka only "decide[d] to grow it" in order to not "look/ Like a Polish lesbian/ Any more" (81) and, therefore, to belong. Shortly after, Kasienka describes her situation with the metaphor of a hunt:

I am a fox surrounded by beagles.  
They will eat me alive and spit out the fat.

I am their prey and there is nothing  
I can do to stop them pouncing. (88)

Kasienka's metaphor of the fox hunt as well as Clair's apparently random selection of reasons to bully Kasienka represent two different characteristics of the practice of bullying. First of all, the fox hunt metaphor indicates Kasienka's recognition of the fact that confirming Clair's demeaning comments about her appearance by changing her looks will never stop the bullying. After all, changing herself according to Clair's standards affirms the accuracy of Clair's demeaning comments and, correspondingly, Kasienka's position as the inferior and the position of the bully as the superior. Therefore, acting affirmatively towards the bully's critical comments can never function as a tool for acting against the practice of bullying. It is the passive role of the bullied person which becomes apparent in Kasienka's desperate attempts to change and belong.

Ultimately, it is this passivity on which the success of bullying depends. As long as Kasienska adheres to and evaluates herself according to the standards set up by Clair, she will always remain the passive victim controlled by Clair's judgement. Further, it is evident that Clair uses a wide variety of aspects in order to humiliate Kasienska and that, as soon as one aspect becomes outdated, Clair classifies something else about Kasienska as inferior or irregular. Consequently, no matter how much Kasienska tries to adapt to Clair, she will never be accepted. Kasienska desperately tries to understand but cannot name the flaws which make her different. This becomes apparent in the poem "All Wrong", when Kasienska tries to find out what exactly it is that is "*ridiculous*" (82) about her bag:

Today I was told  
It is *all wrong*.

I'm looking at the bag.  
I'm desperate to know  
What doesn't work.  
But I just can't figure it out (82)

The random reasons Clair chooses for excluding Kasienska, Kasienska's inability to act against the mobbing by changing her appearance as well as her inability to grasp in which way she is different enough to be subject to such humiliation indicate the arbitrariness with which bullying actually works. In order to humiliate the victim, random characteristics of that specific person are characterised as irregular. This arbitrariness inherent in the practices of bullying becomes even more recognisable when, in the poem "Karma", Kasienska mentions that, back in Poland, together with her friend, she also used to actively exclude another girl and that she "wouldn't be friends/ With a new girl either" (83). The fact that Kasienska used to be a bully herself underlines the arbitrary nature of bullying by showing that the question whether someone finds him- or herself in the role of the victim or the bully does not primarily depend on the character of the person, but rather on the context in which the person finds him- or herself. In the end, Kasienska manages to escape this vicious circle of being humiliated by acting against Clair's rules and, therefore, by stepping out of the passive role of the victim. Her rebellion against the role of the victim starts when she wins the

swimming competition in the poem “Gold” (215) in spite of the fact that, in the poem “Practise”(186-187), Clair’s friend Marie advises Kasienska to step back, as Clair wants to be the best swimmer in order to become captain of the team. By winning the competition, Kasienska acts against Clair’s rules and positions herself as an active rival as opposed to a passive victim.

Through her representation of social exclusion and bullying in the novel, I suggest that Crossan achieves two things. Due to her immediate representation of the emotional effects of bullying and the social exclusion Kasienska suffers from, the text is likely to stimulate empathy for and identification with Kasienska, even among students who have not been subject to social exclusion themselves. Moreover, by revealing the randomness concerning the circumstances which position a person as a victim of bullying, the reader receives a sense of how such practices work and, thereby, the power of such practices is likely to be reduced.

Another theme which increasingly gains importance in the course of the novel is the one of friendship. In the first two thirds of the novel, it is merely the lack of and need for friendship which dominates the text. Being subject to social exclusion at school, friendless Kasienska desires nothing more than to have a genuine friend. The desperate nature of this desire manifests itself particularly well in the following situation. In the poem “Maybe”, Kasienska encounters Clair alone after a series of humiliating acts Clair committed against her. Clair greets Kasienska, smiling, “[b]linking”, which makes Kasienska hope that this means that they are friends (89). The fact that, despite the humiliation Kasienska has experienced by Clair, she still hopes to become Clair’s friend, shows that her wish for friendship is intense. Other instances in which she expresses the wish to have a friend, can be found in the poem “Art Class”, in which she assumes Arlene to be “the friend [she’s] been waiting to find” (90), as well as in the poem “Dalilah”, when she admits that “Mostly [she] want[s] a friend” (176). In the second half of the novel, Kasienska finds the friend she has been longing for in Dalilah, the new girl at school:

We keep thinking of funny things  
To tell each other  
And secrets to share,

Stories we forgot were important  
Until we turn out the lights.  
[...]  
She does not feel sorry  
Or come closer to comfort me:  
Instead  
She tells me her own secrets  
And they are just as strange  
As mine.

And I do not feel sorry either.  
(198–199)

This passage deals with Kasienska's sleepover at Dalilah's house. It reveals the genuine nature of their friendship, which is not based on pity, but on trust and mutual understanding. The passage also underlines the ways in which Kasienska's various friendship-related desires are stilled. She has finally found someone to share her secrets with, to trust and to talk with about everything that moves. Finally, there is one instance in which the nature of her friendship with Dalilah is explicitly referred to:

### **Side by Side**

Clair still stands in the centre  
Surrounded by a thick circle of girls.

I can feel their desperation,  
The thirst for admission.

It is a dance for popularity,  
Swapping places every day,  
Knowing that tomorrow  
Any one of them could be  
Out.

Maybe it's lonely for Clair  
There.  
In the centre  
Directing the dance.  
[...]

Dalilah and I stand together  
Side by side.  
There is no one in the centre,  
We're just looking out  
In the same direction  
Not desperately at one another

### Fearing betrayal. (223–224)

In this poem, two different types of friendship are characterised. One of them is the type of friendship between Clair and her girls, which is characterised by hierarchy, competition, the constant fear of rejection and instability. It appears to be a community entirely regulated by one person. The type of friendship described in the second part of the poem is the one between Kasienka and Dalilah. It is characterised by equality, respect, support and trust. Within the poem, an opposition of those two kinds of friendship is established, in which Kasienka acknowledges her friendship with Dalilah as superior to Clair's. Clair's gang is regulated by popularity, attention-seeking and peer pressure, rather than trust, support and love. The recognition of her own type of friendship as superior indicates a considerable step in Kasienka's personal development. In a community such as a class full of teenagers, characterised by peer-pressure, material values and judgement, recognitions of this kind would represent a significant step in the personal development of every teenager. Such a development might be stimulated by reading or working with this text-passage in a classroom context. Ultimately, it appears likely that students of the same age recognise the existence of both types of friendships in their own real-life context. This is where the potential for identification lies in this particular poem. Further, Kasienka's desire for friendship, the importance she assigns to her friendly relationship with Dalilah as well as the comfort and excitement she feels when talking to Dalilah accurately reflect the high significance friendship has in the lives of young adults. Thereby, another opportunity for identification is given.

Another person who gains importance in Kasienka's life is William. The presence of William, her first love, turns out to be as life-changing and exciting, as it would be in the life of most teenagers. Through her relationship with him, Kasienka is introduced to entirely new feelings. Crossan's representation of the relationship between Kasienka and William does not only indicate conventional characteristics of teenagers' 'first love', but also features significant developments. At the beginning of the romantic relationship, Kasienka experiences emotions specific to the infatuation inherent in the process of falling in love. On the one hand, this infatuation manifests itself in scenarios which

Kasienka constructs in her imagination and which she later describes in an imaginary letter to William:

I don't want you to write a poem for me  
But it would be nice if you did  
[...]  
I don't want you to carry my book bag  
But if you feel like doing that  
Spontaneously  
I wouldn't stop you.

I wouldn't stop you being romantic  
If that's what you wanted. (124)

In this letter, Kasienka imagines William doing things which are prototypically classifiable as romantic and she implicitly expresses the wish that he would show his appreciation for her in this way. Imagining romantic scenarios with the beloved person can be seen as a common practice of teenagers in the course of falling in love. Crossan also describes Kasienka's feelings of excitement and happiness in connection to her romantic relationship with William in terms of bodily reactions to those feelings:

Music fills the small room as  
A firework explodes inside my belly and  
Colour spins and sparkles in my gut

When he smiles it is like having a torch  
Shine right at me  
Lighting up all the dark corners (181)

By choosing rhetorical figures like metaphors and similes in order to describe Kasienka's emotions, Crossan manages to make Kasienka's excitement and joy more immediate for the reader and accurately represents the emotional intensity inherent in being in love for the first time.

In the poem "In Mama's Absence" (179-183) their relationship appears to go beyond light-hearted, juvenile enthusiasm:

And we hug  
Until it is very dark outside.

And I tell him how sorry I am.

And I tell him about Mama  
And Tata,  
And revealing our feelings  
Means more than the kisses ever could. (182-183)

In this passage, Kasienska and William reveal their most intimate feelings, which makes them vulnerable to each other. Even more, Kasienska explicitly recognises this emotional intimacy, which is characterised by trust and honesty, as superior to physical intimacy. This recognition indicates a significant development in their relationship, which is strengthened on an emotional level. Finally, other issues which go hand in hand with the process of puberty as well as the experience of first love are the awakening of one's sexuality as well as initial physical encounters with the other sex. In this regard, it should be noted that Kasienska's mother holds a rather conservative attitude towards the issue of teenage love. An indication of this conservatism can be found in the Poem "Misread"(132-133), in which Kasienska's mother classifies girls who wear mascara as "[v]ulgar" (133) individuals who "always hav[e] babies" (133) and forbids Kasienska to buy make-up. The awakening of Kasienska's sexuality, however, becomes most apparent in the following passage:

William leans in  
Opens his mouth  
And I do too.  
But not too wide  
Just enough  
To give him room to breathe into me.

I close my eyes,  
Let William lead,  
And try not to pant too loudly  
As we do things  
Mama would hate. (182)

Here, the sexual nature of their actions, as slight as it may be, only becomes explicit in the last line, in which Kasienska classifies their actions as something her mother would not approve of. The technique of using the conservative disposition of Kasienska's mother as an indicator for sexual actions enables the author to hint at those in a discrete way and, therefore, to ensure the representation of such actions remains appropriate for the intended audience.

To conclude, it can be said that Crossan includes a variety of teenage-specific aspects in her novel, most notably bullying, friendship and the experience of first love. Being roughly of the same age as the protagonist, I believe that by including such topics, the novel offers multiple opportunities for identification for the students. Further, far from being superficial, the novel features a thorough, multifaceted representation of those issues along with significant developments of Kasienska's personality.

### 6.3.1.2. *Migration-Specific Issues*

In the context of this thesis, the unfamiliar elements to be understood better are specific to the process of migration. Certainly, hardly any of the following issues are exclusively of migration-specific nature and, clearly, not every immigrant encounters the same problems when moving abroad. Yet, as it has been mentioned in the theory part of the thesis, certain tendencies exist which do position immigrants in social situations bearing significant struggle. Some of those are reflected within the novel in question.

One of the issues which can be seen as most immediately connected to the process of immigration are problems connected to the language and cultural practices in the new country. Immigrants' encounters with those often appear to be accompanied by insecurity and misunderstandings. Kasienska's insecurity with and concerns about the accurateness of her English already becomes apparent upon her arrival in England:

At immigration we queue  
Nervously and practise English in our heads:  
    *Yes-thank-you-officer.*  
I know I am not at home  
When talking makes my tummy turn  
And I rehearse what I say  
Like lines from a play  
Before opening my mouth. (Crossan 6)

What is reflected in this passage is the insecurity and nervousness Kasienska feels in relation to speaking English in England. Those indicate her fear of making mistakes and not speaking 'accurately' enough in order to be accepted



by the English people. All those negative sentiments which are connected to the use of English culminate in alienation and the feeling of unhomeliness, which is reflected in the lines “I know I am not at home/ When talking makes my tummy turn” (6). Again, those negative feelings are described in terms of bodily manifestations of those. Further, the novel also features misunderstandings Kasienska and her mother experience on the grounds of their limited proficiency in the English language. This is, for instance, the case in the poem “First Day” (10-11), in which Kasienska talks about her first day at school in England and the first conversation with her teacher:

‘So what’s your name, dear?’ Mrs Warren asks,  
And I’m glad, because I was afraid she had mistaken  
Me for someone called Dear,  
And that I would have to  
Respond to that name  
For ever. (10)

Not being aware of the function of the word ‘dear’ in Mrs. Warren’s utterance, Kasienska presumes this word is a name, assuming that Mrs. Warren “mistake[s] [her] for someone called Dear”. A misunderstanding of similar nature occurs when, in the poem “The Odyssey” (40-43), Kasienska and her mother knock at a man’s door in search of Kasienska’s father:

‘Do I look like some kind of poofter to you?  
Get lost. Go on!’  
[...]  
‘What’s a poofter, Mama?’ I ask.

‘A type of landlord, Kasienska,’ Mama says,  
Very sure of her English. (41)

In order to understand in how far those two misunderstandings are similar, the specific function and the use of the words ‘dear’ and ‘poofter’ have to be considered. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, the word ‘dear’, as it is used in the context of the novel, is an informal expression (*n.p.*) and, therefore, rather restricted to spoken contexts. Further, it describes the word ‘poofter’ as “another term for poof” and, therefore, as an “offensive” term to refer to a “homosexual man” and as specific to a British context (*n.p.*). The terms’ tendency of either

being mainly used in a restricted geographical area, namely Great Britain, or in a spoken context appears to be the reason why Kasienka and her mother, who both have immigrated only recently, fail to understand those terms. In contrast to Kasienka's insecurity with the language in the first passage, the representation of those language-specific misunderstandings show a humorous nature. This adds a comical note to the novel. In a school context, those misunderstandings might also to lend themselves well for the reflection on the culture-boundedness of some terms, which exist in English as well as in German. Concerning the cultural domain, there is one instance in the poem "Prize Night Envy" (75-76), in which Kasienka shows insecurity with a cultural practice specific to Great Britain, namely the singing of its national anthem. Not being familiar with the text, Kasienka cannot participate in this cultural practice. She appears to be ashamed of this fact and pretends to be singing along. Kasienka is embarrassed and refers to her pretence as "treason". This reference indicates that Kasienka, as an immigrant in the UK, regards herself as a member of the British community and, therefore, as someone who should know the text of the national anthem as a part of the process of integration into this community. Finally, in response to Clair's reference to cutting Kasienka's hair as a joke, Kasienka asks herself whether "it's an English joke [she] can't yet understand" (128). Thus, as a result of Kasienka's insecurity concerning English cultural particularities, she shows tendencies of overextension with regards to assigning culture-specific meaning to elements which she does not understand and which are, yet, not specific to a certain culture, like Clair's 'joke'. So, while intercultural misunderstandings featured in the book are rather scarce, Crossan simultaneously achieves to avoid establishing duality between 'the Polish' and 'the English' way of life as well as reinforcing existent or to establish new stereotypes concerning those cultures (e.g. the English and their habit of drinking tea).

Earlier in this thesis, it has already been mentioned that, according to Hapgood and Fennes (41), immigrants often struggle due to low income and poor housing conditions. In the novel, it soon becomes clear that Kasienka and her mother face such problems as immigrants in England. Kasienka describes their flat in England, consisting of one room, as followed:

Mama rented a room  
In Coventry.

This is where we'll live  
Until we find Tata:  
One room on the fourth floor  
Of a crumbling building  
[...]  
There is a white kitchen in the room,  
In the corner,  
And one big bed,  
Lumpy in the middle  
Like a cold pierogi  
For Mama and me to share.  
[...]

Mama found the perfect home for  
A cast-off laundry bag.  
Yes.  
But not a home for us. (Crossan 8-9)

Later on, when she introduces their neighbour, Kanoro, she mentions that “[h]e shares a bathroom with” (44) herself and her mother, meaning that their studio is not even ensuite. It, therefore, becomes apparent that Kasienska and her mother do live in very poor conditions.

The indication of the fact that such living conditions often go hand in hand with migration is made in the poem “Noise” (23-26), in which Kasienska refers to the people in the building she lives in as “nasty people”, “not English people” (23). She says that “English people do not live in this building –/ It could not be home for them” (23). Thereby, she characterises the building as a place exclusively, or at least predominantly, inhabited by immigrants, as “a place infested with aliens” (23). Due to being poor, Kasienska’s possibilities to live like other teenagers are limited. This becomes evident when Clair cannot send a video to Kasienska, who does not own a phone (71) and when Kasienska tells Dalilah that she cannot invite her for a sleepover as she shares a bed with her mother (199). One reason why Kasienska and her mother have to face poverty appears to be her mother’s occupation:

Mama took a job  
In a hospital.

Until we find Tata

We will be poor.  
We will need the money.

Mama's job is to clean and carry.  
She doesn't have to speak to  
Anyone. (19)

In this passage, Kasienka appears to suggest that her mother's occupation, which is "to clean and carry" and, therefore, a rather low-skilled job, is one of the reasons why they will remain poor for a while. Further, the fact that Kasienka explicitly points out that her mother "doesn't have to speak to anyone" denotes that her mother depends on this job due to her poor English language skills. As compared to Hapgood and Fennes arguments, this representation correlates with many immigrants' social reality. While it is not mentioned what her mother's occupation was in Poland, Kasienka points out that Kanoro used to work as a paediatrician back in Kenya and that now, in England, he has to clean hospitals (44-45). Only towards the end of the novel, in the poem "Good News" (201-202), Kanoro receives papers which allow him to work as a doctor in London. Thereby, the novel gives an account of the difficulties that exist regarding the recognition of immigrants' professional qualifications in the new country and the (temporary) social decline they might experience as a result of those difficulties. A similar experience is made by Kasienka, when, as she describes in the poem "Year Seven" (12-13), is put "in a class with/ Eleven-year-olds", despite being nearly thirteen herself. Kasienka seems to have been put into a lower class for the sole reason of having problems with reading in English and, therefore, her insufficient proficiency in the English language. It appears that the decision to place Kasienka in a lower class was purely made based on her English language skills. Such a reduction to language problems causes her to be bored during the lessons and to suffer from mental underload. Additionally, the age difference between her and her classmates, which appears to be significant for Kasienka, causes her problems to socialise with others. She refers to this problem when, in the poem "Disco" (35), she mentions that she will be the only one of her class who will not go to a party specific party organised for them, as she is nearly thirteen years old and, therefore, too old to socialise with eleven-year-olds. So, while issues faced in the professional domain appear to be either grounded in insufficient language skills or the complexity of

bureaucratic processes, the process of assigning immigrant children to certain school levels is shown to be primarily determined by their skill in the target language, rather than on a judgement of the entirety of their intellectual abilities.

All in all, the novel features a rather multi-faceted representation of the social situation of immigrants. This is because a representation of the processes leading to specific migratory living conditions and problems as well as the emotional and social burden resulting from those social issues is featured. Thereby, the novel is believed to support the development of an understanding of the difficult social situation migrants find themselves in as well as of how specific processes in society contribute to their challenging situation.

Finally, as pointed out in the theory part<sup>2</sup>, xenophobic tendencies against immigrants and refugees are significant problems in Great Britain and Austria. Recently, in Great Britain, people of Islamic religion as well as Polish immigrants appear to be part of the main target group of those tendencies. In *The Weight of Water*, Crossan also gives an account of xenophobia-related problems those two groups face in Great Britain today. While, in the novel itself, Kasienka is not represented as a victim of xenophobic attacks herself, important people in her life experience such. One of those is her mother, who is disrespected by patients at work due to her Polish origin:

Mama's long vowels scare  
The older patients.  
They'd prefer to hear  
A familiar, imperial voice  
Than know a Pole is  
Bringing them breakfast.

On her first day  
A woman with crust on her face  
Asks Mama where she's from,  
And when Mama tells her,  
The crusty creature snarls and says,  
'I'd like someone English,'  
Politely adding, '*Please.*'

Mama doesn't have to speak to  
Anyone  
Usually.

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<sup>2</sup> see chapter "Hostile Reactions Towards the Migration"

In fact, they would rather she didn't. (19-20)

In this specific example, Kasienka's mother experiences discrimination at work by a patient. The elderly woman appears to feel uneasy about being served by a Polish woman. This unease is presumably fuelled by negative stereotypes the woman holds about Polish people. Further, the poem also suggests that her mother's accent, her "long vowels" are the only indicator of her Polish origin and that, at work, people would prefer if she remained silent. This includes an implicit request to hide her Polish identity by avoiding talking to patients in order not to unsettle those. Such an interpretation is supported by the title of the poem "Mute" (19).

The actual scope xenophobia in general and towards Polish people in Great Britain in specific can take on, as well as the corresponding danger become apparent in the poem "Radio News Flash" (74):

*A Croatian builder was attacked  
last night in Birmingham  
on his way home from work  
with his own hammer...*

*Three fourteen-year-old youths  
are now in custody awaiting bail...*

*Witnesses say the attackers shouted  
'Give us back our jobs, Polack!'  
before bludgeoning his skull  
with the forged steel head...*

[...]

Mama puts a piece of  
Potato in her mouth  
But doesn't chew. Kanoro looks at her  
Meaningfully. (74)

To begin with, this poem reflects the reality of Polish people living in Britain in various ways. First of all, violent attacks on Polish people as a result of xenophobia are clearly a part of Britain's social reality. As it has been mentioned earlier, Polish immigrants in England have increasingly been subject to xenophobic attacks, especially recently in the aftermath of the Brexit vote. Just like the attack reported in the poem, some of those proved to be extremely violent. Secondly, in the poem, it is explicitly mentioned that the teenagers

attacked the man on the grounds of the accusation of taking their jobs away. According to Hapgood and Fennes (41) this accusation is one that immigrants are frequently confronted with. Thereby, the representation of the attack appears accurate and in line with actual xenophobic practices and motives in Great Britain today. Finally, it is stated that, before the physical attack, the young men called the builder a “Polack” (74), which is, according to the *Oxford Dictionary*, a “derogatory” term to refer to “[a] person from Poland or of Polish descent” (n.p.). As it was explicitly mentioned in the news report, however, the injured man was of Croatian origin. The act of falsely labelling the man as Polish might have two different reasons. It might be the case that the attackers have been unable to identify members of the group they pledge to be against, namely Polish people, as a result of not being familiar with the Polish culture or language in any way. Another reason could be overgeneralisation, meaning that the boys did not care of which nationality the builder was and, as he was of foreign origin and white, saw him as a representative of the group a considerable part of British society choses to blame for the social problems in their country, namely Polish immigrants. Either way, this representation indicates the arbitrariness and ignorance xenophobia works with. In this specific example, a group of people within the British society, Polish immigrants, are blamed for the social problem of unemployment in Great Britain. The fact that the attackers cannot or do not bother to identify the man’s actual nationality indicates that their choice on whom to put the blame is arbitrary. Further, the silent reactions of Kanoro and Kasienka’s mother to the news flash appear to be of particular relevance in this situation. While Kanoro gives Kasienka’s mother a meaningful look, Kasienka’s mother is unable to chew, probably due to being shocked and worried concerning the danger there is for Polish people in Britain and, therefore, for herself, her daughter and her former husband. Their wordless reactions create a sense of fear, concern and danger. Again, Crossan does not only indicate the xenophobic tendencies Polish people are subjected to in Great Britain, but she also hints at the process of overextension which frequently accompanies xenophobic practises. Thereby, she exposes the arbitrariness with which xenophobia works in order to establish an opposition of the innocent self and the guilty other.

Another incident, which could be classified as xenophobic practice or at least as an action intended to provoke such, occurs in the poem “July 7”:

### **July 7**

At 8.50 a.m. The Bell rings and we stand  
To remember  
What happened.

But Clair is looking at Dalilah  
Forgetting,  
Not remembering at all.

And at break we are surrounded  
And Marie says,  
'Why did you say they deserved it?  
I heard you. I heard you whisper to Cassie.  
I heard you say that.'

And Dalilah looks at me because she was  
Standing to remember  
What we were all too young  
To remember  
While Clair was standing looking at her. (178)

In order to understand in how far and why this incident is believed to be connected to xenophobia, its context requires clarification. First of all, in the poem preceding the one currently in focus, namely “The Veil”, it is mentioned that Dalilah “wears a purple veil” (177). According to the MacMillan Dictionary, “the practice of wearing a veil for covering the face [is] followed by women in Islamic countries” (*n.p.*). Therefore, Dalilah’s veil appears to serve as an indicator for her Islamic religion. Despite never being explicitly referred to as such, it seems very likely that Dalilah is a teenage girl who is part of the Muslim community in Great Britain. Secondly, it is imperative to understand what exactly the incident is Kasienska and her classmates are standing to remember on July 7<sup>th</sup>. According to the BBC, what happened in London on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005 is classifiable as “the worst single terrorist attack on British soil” (BBC, “7/7 London bombings”), “killing 52 people and injuring more than 700” (Library). The attackers, “[f]our men [...] [who] were all British and [who] had lived what appeared to be quite normal lives [...] were all found to have links to Islamic extremism” (BBC, “7/7 London bombings”). Since the title of the poem is “July



7” (Crossan 178) it seems very likely that, in the poem, the pupils are remembering the terrorist attack that shook Britain on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005. During the remembrance ceremony, Kasienka finds Clair continuously looking at Dalilah instead of remembering the attacks. As the attacks themselves were committed by Islamic terrorists, the fact that Clair keeps looking at Dalilah might indicate xenophobic attitudes Clair holds towards members of the Muslim community. Due to her religious affiliation, Dalilah might be regarded as a representative of the group who committed the aforesaid crimes by Clair. Indeed, such connections between the British Muslim community and the suicide bombers seem to have been made rather extensively in the aftermath of the attacks in July 2005. As the BBC reported in late July 2005, the Islamic Human Rights Commission stated that the “number of attacks on Asians” rose significantly. This rise was mentioned only three weeks after the attacks had happened. According to the Muslim Safety Group, it was the media which, by suggesting that “all British Muslims share something in common with the bombers”, partly accounted for those hate-related crimes (BBC, "Hate crimes"). The impression that xenophobic tendencies underlie Clair’s behaviour becomes even stronger when Marie, Clair’s friend, falsely accuses Dalilah of having said that the victims of the attack deserved what happened to them and, therefore of agreeing with the terrorists’ actions. By accusing Dalilah of such a statement in front of the other students Marie appears to intend to spread the false impression of Dalilah sharing the view of Islamic extremists. As it has been pointed out by the Muslim Safety Group in the article by the BBC, connections between representatives of the British Muslim community and Islamic terrorists fuel islamophobia and attacks against Muslims in Great Britain (BBC, "Hate crimes"). Finally, just as it has been established in the theory part of the thesis<sup>3</sup>, islamophobia continues to be a significant problem in both countries, Austria and Great Britain. Therefore, the awareness of current islamophobic tendencies and practices is not only necessary in order to provide an accurate representation of social problems in Great Britain but also to initiate a reflection of the existence of such tendencies in the students’ country of residence. In her representation of islamophobia, however, Crossan uses subtle hints rather than explicitness. After all, it is never

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<sup>3</sup> see chapter “Hostile Reactions Towards Migration”

explicitly stated that Dalilah is a Muslim or that Clair's staring and Marie's false accusation are motivated by xenophobic tendencies. Therefore, the poem draws heavily on the reader's world knowledge for its interpretation. The readers also ought to be familiar with the events that happened in London on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005 in order to know about the occasion the students are actually remembering. As those terror attacks already happened twelve years ago, it is rather unlikely that young, non-British teenagers would know about those. Further, in order to make the necessary connections to arrive at the interpretation of Clair and Marie having xenophobic tendencies, the reader needs to have made the connection between the practise of wearing a veil and Islamic religion while reading the preceding poem. Due to the room Crossan leaves for interpretation and the necessity of using one's world knowledge in order to arrive at a deeper interpretation, it is suggested that the poem "July 7" (Crossan 178) lends itself for a classroom discussion in which the students are allowed to present and discuss their own interpretations of the situation described. Such a format would also allow the teacher to provide information beforehand, for instance about the London terror attacks of 2005, in order to assist the students in the process of interpretation.

To conclude, in consideration of the immigration-specific problems mentioned in the theory part of the thesis, the novel can be said to feature an accurate representation of the difficulties faced by (Polish) immigrants in Great Britain and elsewhere. This representation is far from being superficial, unidimensional or over dramatic and includes the portrayal of the causes and effects connected to the problems immigrants face in Great Britain. Partly, however, this is achieved by including subtle hints which require specific linguistic, sociocultural or historical knowledge. Due to their language level or age, the target group in focus of this thesis might not possess this required knowledge and, therefore, might require assistance from the teacher in this respect.

### 6.3.1.3. *Immediacy of the Novel*

It has already been mentioned that the successful adoption of the perspective of as well as the development of empathy for the protagonist heavily depend on

the immediacy of the literary text and, therefore, according to the *Oxford Dictionary*, on “[t]he quality of bringing one into direct and instant involvement with” (n.p.) the story. It is the potential for the emotional involvement of the reader as well as the exceptionally immediate representation of external (situations) and internal (feelings and thoughts of the protagonist) processes, which I regard as the most distinctive traits of the novel in question. Textual characteristics which contribute to this quality can be found on various levels. Most notably, those are the narrative perspective of the text, the text’s composition of various individual poems and their manner of representing the protagonist’s inner perspective, the layout of the poems as well as the use of rhetorical figures.

The first category which appears to be closely related to the immediacy of text is the narrative perspective. It has already been mentioned that, according to Reichl, in the case of young adult literature, the narrative perspective tends to be “relatively direct” (111). This also holds for *The Weight of Water*. First of all, this is because the novel features a first-person narrative situation, which means that the events are perceived and described from the perspective of Kasienska, the protagonist. Thereby, a deep insight is given into Kasienska’s thoughts, feelings, dreams and wishes, making them more immediate to the reader.

Similarly, it is the use of tense which inevitably influences a text’s immediacy. In this particular example, the poems are, for the most part, written in present tense, which contributes to the immediacy of the novel in a way that it gives the impression that the particular scene described in the text is happening in the moment of reading. This particular effect can be found in examples of the text given throughout the analysis. Correspondingly, the immediacy of a text is reduced in retrospective narratives. Such narratives are those which are written in past tense and tell the reader about past experiences. In *The Weight of Water*, such instances can be found in poems in which Kasienska remembers experiences in Poland. This is, for instance, the case in the poems “Before England” (Crossan 27-29) and “Swimming” (32-34). In those poems, past tense is used in order to describe memories she Kasienska has concerning her past family situation in Poland, which was characterised by the presence of her

father. Those memories are happy ones, like in the poem “Swimming” (32-34), in which she remembers the time when her father taught her swimming, as well as sad ones, like in the poem “Before England” (27-29), in which she remembers the arguments her parents had and how, as a result, her father left them without saying goodbye in person. By the use of past tense, Crossan reflects the notion of distance in those novels. The fact that past tense is used when Kasienska talks about Poland, stresses the temporal as well as the spatial distance between Kasienska in England and her home country. Further, by including retrospective narratives in which Kasienska speaks about past family memories, Crossan establishes a slight contrast between two family situations which correspond with two different countries – a ‘complete’ family in Poland and a broken, presumably irreparable, family in England.

In general, the book is divided into three parts. Within those parts, the different chapters of the book comprise individual, short poems which describe different situations in Kasienska’s life. The representation of her inner perspective can be described as extensive, as some of the poems are exclusively dedicated to feature Kasienska’s internal, emotional and cognitive, processes. This is, for instance, the case in the poem “Oh, to be Musical” (Crossan 111–112), which is entirely dedicated to Kasienska’s contemplation of the sensation of kissing and its ease or unease. The same is true for the poem “Dear William” (124), in which Kasienska addresses William in her imagination, describing what sort of romantic gestures she wants him to show, like “carry[ing] [her] book bag”. In combination with the title, the poem gives the impression of being an imaginary letter from Kasienska to William. Therefore, on a very general level, the close representation of Kasienska’s inner perspective and, due to its composition of individual poems, fragmentation can be named as key characteristics of the novel. As a result of this combination, the novel gives the impression of being a diary entirely written in verse, despite not being marked as such by the use of formulaic expressions like ‘Dear Diary’ or date designations.

On a visual level, the form of the poems, which are written in free verse, allow the author to reflect or underline the meaning of the text through their layout, making the text more immediate. One way this is done is by placing

single words or phrases into separate lines and by highlighting those pieces of text by means of indentation. Those indentations serve various purposes. For the most part, indentations have the function of emphasising the respective passages in the text. This is, for instance, the case in the following example:

Again,  
No one talks to me  
    At all.

So I sit  
    On my own  
At the front of the classroom  
Furiously trying to keep up  
With the bored teachers  
Who don't seem  
To notice I'm new. (69)

In this passage, the indentations of the phrases "At all" and "On my own" serve to set those apart from the rest of the text and to put an emphasis on the words which indicate the social isolation and loneliness Kasienska faces at school. Another example can be found in the poem "Dalilah" (175-176), in which Kasienska talks about the arrival of a new girl in class:

You are the new girl in the class  
And maybe they will hate you  
    Instead of me. (175)

This passage occurs two times within the poem. While the repetition of the phrase is meant to demonstrate the strength of Kasienska's wish for the bullying to stop, the indentation of the phrase "Instead of me" should emphasise the phrase and, thereby, underline the fact that Kasienska only wants Dalilah to become the new victim of bullying because she hopes that, then, Kasienska herself will cease to be a subject of humiliation. By using this format, it is highlighted that Kasienska's wish of Dalilah being a victim of bullying does not spring from any spiteful intentions, but only from the wish that, once Clair and her friends find someone else to humiliate, the bullying against herself will stop.



reflection and emphasis of the meaning of the word 'wide' itself. Within the novel, however, the instrumentalisation of the positions of words or phrases even goes beyond the scope of single lines:

I am sitting on the  
Front steps of our  
Building, chewing on a  
Peperami, waiting for William,  
When Kanoro arrives  
Without warning. (219)

In this example, individual phrases of the sentence are placed within single lines and indented. The width of the indentation decreases with each line, starting with a very wide indentation and resulting in no indentation at all in the last line of the text passage. Due to this positioning, the text passage assumes the shape of a stairway. As the text describes the situation of Kasienska sitting on the stairs of their house when Kanoro arrives, the form of the text passage reflects the form of an object involved in the event described. Furthermore, as can be seen in the next example, the formatting of text passages in the novel does not only reflect the shape of objects, but, in some instances, also movement:

I drop the towel and let the water  
Take me.  
  
And I do lengths:  
Up and  
Down,  
Up and  
Down [...] (95)

In the text passage, which describes Kasienska's movement in the water, the individual phrases indicating a direction, are positioned in individual lines and are indented. This indentation varies with each line. It starts with the first line not being indented at all. With each line, the widths of the indentations increase. Thereby, like in the former example, the passage takes on the shape of a staircase. Unlike before, however, this shape is not meant to reflect the form of any physical object, but Kasienska's up-and-down movements, which are

described in the passage itself. A final function of indentations in the novel is the one of signalling commentary:

Mama doesn't care about the lamp:  
For the first time in a month  
She laughs  
    and runs to hug Kanoro.

My feelings are untidy:  
I am happy  
    to see Mama this way,  
I am sad  
    Kanoro must leave (202)

It has already been mentioned that, in many cases, indented phrases within the poem appear to be emphasised. Here, however, the indentions seem to serve the opposite purpose, namely to comment. The individual phrases expressing moods and emotional reactions are split into two parts and each part is positioned in an individual line. While the parts of the phrases which name the emotions or emotional reactions do not show any particular formats, the parts which describe the reason for the emotion, or, as it is the case in the first indented phrase, an accompanying action, are indented. Therefore, it can be said that, in this particular example, the emphasis lies on those fragments which show a regular format, while the indented fragments only serve to describe the respective mood or action in more detail. Additionally, the irregular form of the poem appears to reflect the "untidy" manner of Kasienka's feelings.

The technique of arranging text in a meaningful way, however, is not only used to underline or reflect the meaning of the text passages, but also to add meaning to those. An example for this can be found in the poem "Anyone Else" (77-79):

I am the best runner in the class.  
It's not arrogance, it's a fact:  
When I am in a team  
    We win.

But Clair doesn't pick me any more.  
She looks past me,  
    Through me  
To anyone else. (77)



The indentations in this passage might serve two purposes. On the one hand, the phrases “We win” and “Through me” might be indented only in order to emphasise them. On the other hand, the positioning of these words seems to add meaning to the passage. This is because the indentations of those phrases cause them to be positioned below each other and, thereby, suggest a connection between the phrases. Being joined together into one utterance, the phrases would blend into the phrase “We win [...] [t]hrough me” (77). In the text passage in question, Kasienska mentions her exceptional running skills and that her team always appears to be the one winning. Therefore, the meaning that would result from the connection established between the indented phrases correlates with the content expressed in the text passage itself. A similar contribution to the meaning through the layout is made in the following text passage, in which Kasienska talks about her father’s new girlfriend, Melanie:

She asks about me:  
About school,  
Swimming,  
Poland –  
    Never about Mama,  
Of course.  
[...]  
And when Tata’s around  
She leaves us alone.  
She knows she isn’t welcome,  
Isn’t a part of this history  
    Or of us. (157)

Again, it appears perfectly plausible to argue that the phrases “[n]ever about Mama” and “[o]r of us” are meant to be emphasised by indentation. On a closer look, however, it becomes apparent that the phrases which are not indented concern Melanie, her actions and the topics she talks about. The indented phrases, however, both refer to Kasienska and her family. While, in the first phrase, Kasienska mentions her mother, the second phrase includes a reference to Kasienska and her father with the pronoun “us” (157). By arranging those two phrases in this particular manner, a visual opposition of Melanie and Kasienska’s family is established. This opposition is also reflected in the text itself, in which Kasienska mentions that Melanie “[i]sn’t a part of [them]”(157) and, therefore,

does not belong to her family. Additionally, this opposition is stressed by the use of personal pronouns. In general, the use of personal pronouns can contribute to immediacy by evoking the sense of communality or opposition. By using the personal pronouns “she” to refer to Melanie and “us” to refer to Kasienska and her father, an additional emphasis is laid on the aforementioned opposition. An example in which a sense of communality is established by the use of certain pronouns can be found in the poem “Snow Meal” (66-68), which will be analysed in the last chapter of the analysis.

On the textual level, Crossan uses a variety of rhetorical devices in order to increase the immediacy of the text. Mostly, those devices include metaphors, similes and anaphora. Notably, in the novel, metaphors are mostly employed in order to convey emotional states. This can be seen in the poem “Blame” (150), in which Kasienska describes the anger she feels for her father by saying: “I am so angry that/ My stomach is a stone/ I wish I could throw at Tata” (150). This metaphor denotes two characteristics of Kasienska’s anger. First of all, by mentioning that her stomach feels like a stone she refers to the common tight feeling in the stomach in which anger frequently manifests itself. As it can be assumed that a majority of the readers have experienced similar physical manifestations of anger, this metaphor makes Kasienska’s emotional state more immediate. Secondly, Kasienska’s urge to “throw” this “stone” at her father, denotes the aggression which accompanies her anger, the urge to vent this anger and to confront her father with it. A rather different feeling, which is, however, mediated in a very similar manner, is described in the poem “In Mama’s Absence” (179-183): “Music fills the small room as/ A firework explodes inside my belly and/ Colour spins and sparkles in my gut” (181). Again, Crossan chooses a metaphor in order to mediate Kasienska’s feeling of happiness and being in love. The “firework” and “colour” in her belly should indicate the tingly feeling, commonly known as ‘having butterflies in one’s stomach’, which is generally associated with the state of being in love. Again, by using this metaphor, which refers to physical manifestations of the feeling of being in love, the author makes Kasienska’s happiness and excitement more immediate.

Other than that, Crossan includes a powerful allegory, in the sense of an extended metaphor, in order to illustrate Kasienska's perception of her situation of being a victim of bullying:

They are hunting,  
Circling me to prevent my escape.  
They yap and snuffle,  
Jostle to be close to Clair,  
Covering their mouths  
To stifle laughter.

I am a fox surrounded by beagles.  
They will eat me alive and spit out the fat.

I am their prey and there is nothing  
I can do to stop them pouncing. (88)

In this example, an incident in which Kasienska is bullied by Clair and Clair's friends is presented by means of the allegory of a foxhunt. Thereby, Crossan draws heavily on terms from the semantic domain of foxhunting for the description of the situation. She does this by using words like "hunting", "escape", "yap", "snuffle", "fox", "beagle" and "prey". In the first six lines, the connection between the incident and the foxhunt is designed to be more implicit, by blending terms, predominantly verbs, specific to humans with such specific to animals. While terms associated with the domain of humans are "mouths" and "laughter", terms specific to the domain of animals are "yap", "snuffle" and "pouncing". Since, in the seventh line, Kasienska and the other girls are explicitly ascribed the roles of "fox" and "beagle[]", the connection becomes definite from there. Generally, in its entirety, the allegory appears to have been included in order to illustrate Kasienska's feelings of anxiety, defencelessness and helplessness resulting from the bullying. Just as the fox is unable to escape the dog's bite, Kasienska appears to be unable to act against the humiliation by Clair and her friends. Her helplessness becomes most apparent in the last two lines of the poem, in which she explicitly mentions her inability to act against the bullying. Furthermore, the line "They will eat me alive and spit out the fat" might serve as an allusion to the severe effects bullying can have for the victim. Unlike in a foxhunt, the damage which is done to Kasienska is not of physical, but of

mental and emotional nature. Her 'predators' do not kill her physically, but on the inside by using psychological violence against her and, thereby, by shattering her self-esteem and by fostering anxiety. Finally, the foxhunt allegory is characterised by exceptional intensity and the capacity to mediate the severe mental and emotional burden in which bullying can result in all its viciousness and fatality. Through this powerful representation, it is strongly suggested that the situation of Kasienska in specific and victims of bullying in general becomes more feasible for the reader.

A very similar function can be attributed to the simile included in the poem "Dalilah" (175), by means of which Kasienska describes what the mental effects of being bullied on a continuous basis are: "It feels like you're walking uphill/ Carrying a giant boulder on your shoulder" (175). In specific, the simile appears to allude to the difficulty of enduring bullying on a daily basis. The "giant boulder" Kasienska mentions denotes a substantial amount of weight and is suggested to refer to the scope of the emotional burden which results from bullying. Still, however, similes are also used in order to convey sentiments of positive nature, as the following example shows: "When he smiles it is like having a torch/ Shine right at me/ Lighting up all the dark corners" (181). These lines are part of a text passage in which Kasienska talks about her love for William. The text passage itself belongs to a poem which features one of the very few days in which Kasienska experiences pure happiness and joy. In specific, those lines refer to the uplifting effect William and the love between him and Kasienska has on her emotional and mental state. The simile presented in those lines appears to establish an opposition of light and darkness by setting a "torch" against the "dark corners". While the light stands for William and the love between him and her, the darkness might stand for the numerous challenges Kasienska is confronted with, among those the bullying at school, poverty, homesickness and family problems. She describes how William's smile and his love for her fill Kasienska with joy which is of such strength that, if even only for a short while, all her worries are gone.

Another frequent rhetorical device in the novel itself is the anaphora. In the text, anaphoras are predominantly included for emphasis, as the following example shows. The upcoming text passage is taken from a poem in which

Kasienka describes her mother's depression and her hostile and cold behaviour towards her daughter:

And then she goes to sleep  
Without saying  
    goodnight,  
Without turning off the light,  
Without checking I'm all right. (197)

In this passage, the anaphora emphasises those things Kasienka's mother neglects doing before they go to sleep together. The fact that Kasienka puts such a strong emphasis on those actions indicates that her mother used to do those regularly before going to bed. Furthermore, the repetition, which appears to have an emphasising function, suggests that the fact that her mother ceased to adhere to her bedtime routine bothers Kasienka. In the light of the context given in the poem, her mother's behaviour might either be caused by her disappointment with Kasienka or her depression, which results from the news she has recently learned about Kasienka's father. Thus, Kasienka's concern might be caused by emotional pain resulting from the rejection she is subjected to by her mother. It might, however, either simultaneously or alternatively, also be provoked by Kasienka's worries about the scope her mother's depression has reached. So, despite the appearance of the function of the anaphora as being rather simple and straightforward, in the previous example, the emphasis resulting from this rhetorical device also adds meaning to the text itself and, therefore, contributes to the immediacy of the text even more than it would by merely adding emphasis.

Finally, when a novel can be classified as including a highly immediate representation, like it appears to be the case with the novel in question, the issue of reliability has to be considered in the reading process. This is especially necessary if the text features a first-person narrative situation. In those cases, the narration is inevitably influenced by the highly subjective nature of the narrator's perception and, thus, "his or her limited knowledge, emotional involvement in the events and [...] norms and values" (Nünning and Nünning 120). While reading the *The Weight of Water*, the reader perceives the world entirely through Kasienka's eyes. This is a characteristic which contributes

considerably to the immediacy of the text. However, it has to be considered that the representation of the events in the novel is highly subjective. This, for instance, becomes apparent whenever Kasienska blames her father for leaving herself and her mother, for ruining their family and for having started a new family. Possible reasons behind her parents' separation are only indicated in the poem "Before England" (27-29), in which Kasienska talks about the fights her parents used to have in Poland. Therefore, Kasienska appears to know nothing more about the reasons for their separation. In the same poem, Kasienska talks about how painful the separation was and, as indicated in throughout the novel, still is for her mother. Thus, it seems that Kasienska's opinion on who to blame for her current family situation is strongly influenced by the experience of watching her mother suffer, rather than any facts on the background of her parents' separation, which would enable her to arrive at an objective conclusion.

To sum it up, characteristics of the novel which contribute to the immediacy of the text can be found on multiple levels, going far beyond the direct narrative perspective and the explicit description of Kasienska's thoughts, sentiments and desires. Rather, the intensity and manner of those is mediated primarily by relying on connotations added by rhetorical devices like metaphors, similes and anaphora. In the novel, the former two devices in specific are employed in a manner which allows the reader to grasp Kasienska's emotions in all their intensity and multifacetedness. Besides, due to the possibilities grounded in the general form of poems, the author manages to involve the format of the poem in the process of emphasising and creating meaning. Thus, it can be concluded that Crossan relies on an exceptional variety of techniques in order to convey Kasienska's experience as immediately as possible. Thereby, a promising basis for the process of the adoption of the protagonist's perspective is provided.

### 6.3.2. Hybridity and Other Qualities Beneficial to a Transcultural Approach

As it has already been established in the theory part of the thesis<sup>4</sup>, just as in Austria, the sociocultural reality in Great Britain is not a mono- but a multicultural one. This condition can be attributed to the phenomena of migration and globalisation. The multicultural character of British society and culture is reflected in the ethnic and cultural composition of its population. In the following, the extent to which this hybrid nature is reflected on a public as well as on an individual level in the novel in question, will be discussed.

#### 6.3.2.4. *Hybridity of British Society and Culture*

The multicultural nature of British society becomes apparent in its ethnic and cultural diversity. This diversity has contributed to the hybridity of British culture due to the fact that a major part of those people who migrated from other countries or descendants of those introduced foreign cultural elements, which, altogether, have shaped today's British culture on a large scale.

As far as the diversity of Britain's population is concerned, *The Weight of Water* can certainly be considered as providing an accurate portrayal of this phenomenon. First references to Britain's multicultural character appear in the representation of Kasienska's initial experiences at her new school in Britain. In the poem "What I Try Not to Hear" (15-16), Kasienska talks about two boys in her class who exchange obscene comments about the teacher in Polish, which makes Kasienska feel uncomfortable. The fact that, including Kasienska and those Polish speaking boys, there are at least three Polish students in Kasienska's class indicates that the Polish community in Great Britain is one of a considerable size. Furthermore, in the poem "Pale" (17-18), Kasienska points out that there are "brown", "white" as well as "black" children at her school. On a broad level, by referring to the ethnic diversity existent in Kasienska's school, the ethnic diversity of British society is indicated. Other characters who contribute to the representation of Britain's diverse population are part of Kasienska's private social life. First of all, there is Kanoro, a dark-skinned paediatrician from Africa

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<sup>4</sup> see chapter "Multicultural Reality in Great Britain and Austria"

who is Kasienska's next-door neighbour and also a close friend of Kasienska's mother and herself. Further, there is Dalilah who is new in Kasienska's class and later becomes Kasienska's best friend at school. Due to her reported habit of wearing a veil, it can be assumed that Dalilah is of Islamic religion. There are, however, no further specifications concerning her ethnic, religious or cultural background in the novel. With Kanoro and Dalilah, Crossan included representatives of a major ethnic community, namely the Black British community, and of a major religious community, the British Muslim community, respectively. Through giving an account of Britain's multicultural reality as well as of major national, ethnic and religious minority groups by including representatives of the Polish, Black and Muslim communities in Great Britain, Crossan features a realistic portrayal of Britain's multifaceted social reality.

While Britain's multicultural character is reflected in the novel, representations of the manifestations of cultural hybridity in public life, for instance in public amenities or institutions, events or the choice of products in supermarkets, are very scarce. One of the very rare instances which comes at least close to such, is featured in the poem "Treat" (220-221). In this poem, it is described that Kanoro and Kasienska's mother go out for dinner and that, when they come back, they appear to have eaten "too many/ Tacos" (220). Owing to the fact that, as commonly known, a taco is a Mexican dish, it appears likely that Kasienska's mother and Kanoro went to a Mexican restaurant. In this sense, the situation described, a Polish and African immigrant go dining at a Mexican restaurant in England, already carries connotations of cultural hybridity and indicates the multicultural reality that exists in Great Britain.

However, the reference to this apparent lack is not to be mistaken for critique. With regard to this category, two aspects should be considered. First of all, multiculturalism is indicated in various instances, like in the poem "Pale" (17-18), in which Kasienska refers to the wide ethnic variety in her school, to which she is constantly exposed, even if this is hardly explicitly addressed. Secondly, it should be considered that, as will be shown in the following chapters, the novel appears to concentrate on more complex and higher levels of transculturality. In this sense, the repeated reference to more obvious and simple manifestations of transculturality which, within the context of modern societies, cannot be



considered as extraordinary anymore, could easily distract from more complex transcultural references, which give the novel its unique character.

#### 6.3.2.5. *Hybridity of (Cultural) Identity*

As it has been noted in the theory part of this thesis, the transcultural reality suggested by Welsch does not only exist on a macrolevel, in the relationship among cultures themselves, but also on a microlevel, in individuals, making them “cultural hybrids” (71–72). The manner in which the transcultural notion of cultural hybridity manifests itself in Kasienska’s (cultural) identity will be analysed in the following.

A way to determine cultural hybridity in Kasienska’s life is to analyse the variety of cultural elements manifested in her everyday experience. Thereby, the extent to which Kasienska is exposed to multicultural influences is meant to be revealed. Being a Polish girl in England, it stands to reason that some of those cultural elements are of Polish and British origin. However, in Kasienska’s context, the origin of these elements even goes beyond those two cultures.

One level on which Kasienska constantly appears to experience multicultural influence is the one of language. Generally, English and Polish, being the primary language of the country of migration as well as of her home country respectively, are of highest importance in Kasienska’s life. The book itself is written in English, sprinkled with a few Polish words. Those Polish words, of which short English definitions are given in the “Glossary” (Crossan 231) at the end of the book, can be assigned to three main categories, namely family members, places and food. Some examples would be “Mama” (“Mum”), “Tata” (Dad) or “Babcia” (“Granny”), “Gdańsk” (“a seaport city in Poland”) and “Bigos” (“traditional Polish stew”) (231). All throughout the novel, however, it is hardly ever explicitly mentioned whether English or Polish is spoken in the respective conversations between characters. Nevertheless, there are two exceptions. In the poem “Mama’s Mama” (62-65), in which Kasienska refers to a conversation between her mother and her grandmother, she points out that they speak Polish with one another. A second exception can be found in the poem “Cold Hot Chocolate” (147-149), which describes the first encounter between Kasienska and her father since he left Poland. With reference to their

conversation, she stresses that her father answers one of Kasienska's questions by saying "[e]ventually", "[i]n English" (149), as she points out. Thereby, she indicates that the use of English between them is unusual. On a broad level, the fact that Kasienska uses Polish indicates that her Polish origin is a part of who she is and stresses her Polish identity. Notably, the Polish words used in the book, referring to her Polish family, Polish places and Polish dishes, are all connected to her home country, Poland. Therefore, the practice of referring to those entities in Polish signals that certain entities will, even when transferred into a foreign context, in this case England, always be associated with her home country Poland as well as its culture and serve to uphold her connection with them. Further, based on the previous two examples, it can be assumed that she uses Polish regularly with her family, which represents a way of performing her Polish identity. Finally, in the novel, it becomes apparent that, in England, Kasienska encounters two more languages, namely French and Swahili. While the former is, as indicated in the poem "The Odyssey" (40-43), acquired in an institutional context, namely school, she encounters the latter while playing Scrabble with Kanoro, as described in the poem "Guilty" (163-164). In this poem, Kasienska refers to the game as having the purpose of practising their English. Yet, at the same time, they occasionally allow the use of Polish and Swahili. Those rules turn the game itself into a context in which linguistic boundaries are constantly transcended, just as Kasienska appears to transcend such in her everyday-life, be it actively by using various languages in everyday contexts (Polish, English) or passively by being exposed to such (Swahili).

It might also be Kasienska's multicultural circle of friends which contributes to the hybridity of her cultural identity. After all, those friends featured in the novel all appear to carry cultural elements other than Polish. First of all, there is William, Kasienska's boyfriend who is, for all that is known, an English boy. Further, there is her school friend Dalilah, who is suggested to be part of the British Muslim community. Finally, there is Kanoro, a paediatrician from Kenya who migrated to England for unknown reasons. In the course of Kasienska's friendship with him, she encounters various elements of the African culture that go beyond the Swahili language. Through Kanoro, Kasienska becomes accustomed to African food. Again, this accustomation happens on an active

and passive level. The passive experience manifests itself in the poem "Meal Times" (54), in which Kasienska mentions that "He uses sharp spices/ Which [they] taste in [their] dinner/ Through the walls". Notably, the habit of seasoning food with "a variety of spices, mostly hot", is one that is considered as characteristic of Kenyan cooking (Lee). Kasienska's active experience with African food is featured in the poem "Late Nights" (118-119), in which she spends time with Kanoro in his room. In the poem, Kasienska mentions that she eats "meat rolled in flat bread" and "peppery lamb", "[c]hewing on the gristle"(118-119). Those dishes can be characterised as traditional Kenyan foods, with the "flat bread" being called "chapatti" and the "roasted meat", mostly including "[f]at and grizzle" from "[g]oat and beef", carrying the name "nyama choma" (Wiens). In the course of the evening, Kanoro also tells Kasienska about "stories/ Of elephants and tribal chiefs", "myths and stories/ Meant to entertain" (118). The given elements of the stories, "elephants and tribal chiefs" (118), suggest that those tales are of African origin. Therefore, it is assumed that Kanoro introduces Kasienska to African stories, which form a part of African culture. While Kanoro contributes to Kasienska's cultural hybridity by introducing her to the Swahili language, Kenyan food and African tales, similar cultural influences are not explicitly shown to come from Dalilah and William.

Living in England and being a student of an English school, Kasienska gradually becomes familiar with elements of the British and, in one instance, American culture, in the course of her daily life. In line with Kasienska's exceptionally low level of alienation with British culture, there are hardly any British cultural elements featured to which Kasienska is introduced. The first domain of British culture Kasienska is reported to encounter is, if only on a very passive level, literature. At the very beginning of Kasienska's first semester in England, her mother mentions the necessity of being able to read Austen in order for Kasienska to advance to a higher school level (12). By 'Austen' she refers to the British author Jane Austen and, thereby, introduces Kasienska to one of the most important British writers. Later on, in the poem "The Bell Jar" (152), Kasienska mentions reading in the respective novel written by the American author Sylvia Plath and describes the way the text inspires her. Through both encounters, Kasienska gradually becomes familiar with English

language literature. Other encounters with British cultural elements are featured in the poem “Kenilworth Castle” (140-141). In this poem, two trips to two different British castles are described. The first one is a school trip to “Warwick Castle”, which, due to the spotless appearance of the castle, dissapoints Kasienka and William. The second trip is of private nature and takes Kasienka and William to “Kenilworth Castle”. Kasienka adores the latter and is fascinated by its history, which involves the former queen “Elizabeth and her favourite” (141), assumingly her lover. By visiting those castles, Kasienka is introduced to two British historical buildings and, thereby, to a part of British history and culture.

All in all, the representation of elements of British culture which Kasienka becomes familiar with is exclusively limited to the domains of literature and history and, therefore, to elements which are, at least at her age, most likely to be encountered in formal, educational settings. Inexplicably, there is no mention of more informal British cultural elements, which a teenage girl is more likely to encounter in her everyday life, such as elements of British youth culture, British customs or traditional British food.

In the course of analysing a character’s cultural identity, it appears indispensable to consider the manner in which the protagonist positions him- or herself or is positioned by others in this respect. It is suggested that, in some situations featured in the novel, the ways in which other people position Kasienka or in which she positions herself with regard to her (cultural) identity, are shaped by racist tendencies. In the following, I will present in which ways the hybridity of (cultural) identity as well as the influence of racial tendencies on the positioning of Kasienka are accounted for.

The first instance, in which a cultural positioning of Kasienka is featured is the poem “First Day” (10-11), which includes Kasienka’s first conversation with her teacher on her very first day at school in Coventry:

‘My name is Kasienka’, I say,  
embarrassed to use my  
crooked English.

[...]

‘Well...Cassie, welcome!’

I want to point out her mistake,  
Give her a chance to say my  
Name properly.

But Mama touches my shoulder.  
A clear caution. (10-11)

Within the context of the scene, Kasienska, as a Polish girl who is to become a student of an English school, finds herself in an inferior position in relation to the teacher, Mrs. Warren, who is situated in a superior position due to her authoritative role as a teacher. After Kasienska introduces herself as “Kasienska”, the teacher refers to her as “Cassie”, an anglicised version of her name. Thereby, Kasienska is invited to occupy the subject position of “Cassie”, an anglicised version of Kasienska, who subordinates to British cultural patterns. This invitation connotes an appeal to Kasienska to integrate into the British community by adopting British cultural elements, by anglicising herself and, thereby, by leaving parts of her Polish identity behind. Further, in this example, the teacher does not even attempt to use Kasienska’s actual name and exercises power over Kasienska by assimilating her name to the British context without any consideration of Kasienska’s (cultural) self-conception. This power appears to be grounded in the teacher’s role as a person of authority as well as in her position as a British citizen in a British context who intends to prompt the assimilation of immigrants into British culture. I would, therefore, not only label the teacher’s behaviour as disrespectful but also, assumingly, as fuelled by racist tendencies, which manifests itself in the intentional intrusion of Kasienska’s self-conception based on the teacher’s superior position. However, this intrusion is not necessarily based on malicious intentions. Just as Broden and Mecheril point out, even actions and statements which are not based on any racist intentions might have racist effects (12-13). At first, Kasienska feels inclined to protest against the offered subject position by correcting the teacher. Yet, she discards this intention when her mother holds her back. Thereby, the mother moves Kasienska to accept the subject position the teacher offers by showing silent consent. As a consequence, ‘Cassie’ comes to be the name by which Kasienska is referred to in the context of school.

In the example of Kasienska, the way in which the subjectivating effect of racist tendencies influences self-conceptualisations can be seen. This is, for instance, reflected in the poem “Pale” (17-18):

The brown children  
Play with the white children.  
The black children  
Play with the brown children.  
[...]  
I'm not welcome to play.  
The reason: I'm too white.

No one likes too-white,  
Eastern white,  
Polish winter white,  
Vampire-fright white.

Brown is OK – usually.  
But white is too bad. (17)

In the poem, it becomes clear that, within the school context, Kasienska sees herself placed in an inferior subject position, which manifests itself in social exclusion. She is called into this position due to her pale skin colour, which she refers to as “too white” or “Polish winter white”. Even more, she sees herself as inferior not only to the British white community, but to people of all other skin colours she can detect on the schoolyard. Still, within the novel, it is never explicitly mentioned that Kasienska has ever been humiliated because of her skin-colour. The passage discussed in the following paragraph, however, suggests that the feeling of inferiority due to her skin colour is something that she acquired in England. Therefore, her personal insecurities with regards to her skin colour can be seen as a result of racist tendencies against Polish immigrants in Great Britain. In the poem, those are shown to have a substantial influence on Kasienska’s self-conception.

Another instance in which Kasienska’s self-conception is indicated to be influenced by racist practices of subjectivation is featured in the poem “Mistaken” (47):

When Mama said,  
'We're going to England,'

I didn't see myself

Alone.

I knew I'd be different,  
Foreign.  
I knew I wouldn't understand  
Everything.

But I thought, maybe, I'd be exotic,

Like a red squirrel among the grey,

Like an English girl would be in Gdańsk.

But I am not an English girl in Gdańsk.  
I'm a Pole in Coventry.

And that is not the same thing  
At all. (47)

Here, Kasienska talks about her initial expectations concerning English people's reactions to her once she lives in England. She imagined herself as being regarded as extraordinary in a positive way, as "exotic" and, therefore, as being of special interest, just as "an English girl [...] in Gdańsk" would be. Subsequently, Kasienska mentions her actual position in British society, as "a Pole in Coventry". This position appears to be in contrast to the position of "an English girl in Gdańsk" in being a position which is characterised by inferiority and loneliness. As suggested by the poem, Kasienska sees her Polish origin as the reason for the exclusion and for the inferior subject position which she occupies in the British context. However, Kasienska's initial optimistic expectations prove that Kasienska's feeling of inferiority based on her Polish origin or pale skin colour is not a result of unfounded assumptions, but of the racism present in Great Britain. It becomes evident in both of the previous examples that Kasienska perceives herself as 'other' in the British context owing to the subjectivating influence of racist tendencies against Polish immigrants. This manifests itself in her conception of the order in British society and of her own position within this order.

Finally, the incomplete, dynamic and fragmented character of identities, which has been expressed in the theory part of the thesis, is explicitly referred

to by Kasienska in relation to her own identity. This condition is the main theme of the poem "Split" (170-171):

There are many Kasienska's now.  
[...]  
One Kasienska is Mama's girl –  
The Kasienska who chews quietly  
And sleeps with a teddy bear in her arms.  
She is muted and hidden and  
Wants nothing more than to run to Tata –  
To form a real family again.

Another Kasienska is Tata's pilgrim,  
The tight-lipped teenage Kasienska.  
She is frightening and moody.

She is also William's Cassie,  
Shy-eyed and broad-backed –  
A swimmer, but a girl before anything else:  
A girlfriend with a mouth and breasts.

Cassie belongs to Clair too,  
She smells of cabbage and fear.  
She is a dumb, defiant victim.  
But she is easily demolished. (170-171)

In this poem, it becomes evident that Kasienska sees herself as occupying different subject positions in different contexts, that is, in connection with different people in her life. While, in relation to her mother, Kasienska perceives herself as a quiet, well-behaved and childlike Kasienska, she sees herself as a temperamental, pubescent teenager in relation to her father. In relation to William, Kasienska refers to herself as a lover, as a young woman with feminine body features. Finally, Kasienska regards herself as an unwilling, yet helpless victim in connection with Clair. Through this representation of Kasienska's self-conception, the poem illustrates her fragmented identity and the manner in which the context, in this case determined by the respective persons in her life, determines the subject positions she occupies and, thereby, her identity itself. Moreover, the way these positions are shown to shift according to the person she sees herself in relation to demonstrates the inherently fluid, relational nature of identities. In this respect, the poem can be referred to as an implicit reflection of the concept of subject positions by Laclau and Mouffe. Notably, the



names Kasienka uses to refer to herself in the poem differ according to the person she sees herself in relation to. While, in relation to her mother and her father, she refers to herself as “Kasienka” (170), she calls herself “Cassie” (170) in relation to William and Clair. The use of both names, the Polish and anglicised version, within one poem might be meant to illustrate the Polish and British cultural influences which have formed and continue to form Kasienka’s identity as well as the fluid, hybrid character of her cultural identity resulting from a constant transcendence of cultural boundaries.

To conclude, the novel proves to give an account of the hybrid character of Kasienka’s identity on a cultural as well as on a general level. Kasienka is presented as a cultural hybrid who constantly transcends cultural boundaries by the representation of a variety of cultural influences Kasienka experiences as well as the alternate use of her Polish, original name ‘Kasienka’ and its anglicised version, ‘Cassie’ which, in the end, she acknowledges to be a part of her identity by referring to herself as such in the poem “Split” (170-171). Further, while the relational character of the concept of identity is acknowledged, the way in which Kasienka positions herself or is positioned by others in relation to her cultural affiliation is shown to be strongly influenced by common racist tendencies in Great Britain, which also exist in reality. Therefore, *The Weight of Water* captures the complexity and instability of the concept of (cultural) identity, which are even more prevalent in the process of migration.

#### 6.3.2.6. *Further Transcultural Tendencies*

Despite the novel’s apparent shortcomings on the level of representing cultural hybridity, at least when it comes to manifestations in the public sphere, the text still proves to promote transcultural ideas on different levels. Throughout the novel, the text repeatedly breaks with common dichotomies which are often established within the context of migration and, simultaneously or alternatively, emphasises commonalities rather than oppositions. This becomes evident in multiple, rather diverse situations.

In this regard, the poem “Noise” (23-25), in which Kasienska reflects on the people in the building she lives in, appears to be a highly significant and interesting:

There are nasty people in our building.  
Mama tells me not to talk to  
    Anyone.  
Or look at  
    Anyone,  
Especially when she’s at work.

If they stop me on the stairs,  
Or try to get into the room,  
I’m to pretend I don’t speak English  
‘Because there are nasty people here.’

They are not English people.  
English people do not live in this building –  
It could not be home for them  
Because they wouldn’t fit here,  
In a place infested with aliens. (23)

First of all, in the poem, an opposition is established between the people who live in her building - in her opinion they are not English - and the English. This opposition builds on the characterisation of those people as “nasty people”, “not English people”, “aliens” and, in one instance, as “a barbarian” (24). These terms clearly indicate the alienation and discomfort Kasienska feels in relation to those people. Notably, however, Kasienska only feels alienated in connection to her neighbours, who are presumably immigrants who find themselves in a similar social situation as herself, never in connection to English people. With this representation, the novel breaks with a common opposition established in connection to the concept of immigration, namely the one between ‘non-migrants’ and ‘migrants’. This opposition appears to suggest that, in the country of migration, immigrants solely, or at least predominantly, feel alienated by the country they immigrate to, its people and culture. Therefore, with this poem, Crossan relativizes the concept of alienation in the context of migration, by indicating that alienation felt by an immigrant is neither restricted to nor inevitably felt towards the country of migration along with its culture and people.

Other manifestations of transcultural tendencies are to be found in the representation of the friendship between Kanoro, Kasienska's mother and herself. The manner in which Crossan imparts those tendencies through their interpersonal relationship will be demonstrated in the discussion of the following two examples.

The first example is taken from the poem "Snow Meal" (66-68), in which Kasienska and Kanoro are waiting for the forecasted snow to fall:

Kanoro watches with me;  
He's never seen snow  
And never built a snowman,  
So we'll make it  
    Together –  
And it will remind me of home  
For the few hours it lives.

When they say it might snow  
We sit by the window,  
Our fingertips against glass,  
Waiting.  
[...]  
A few flakes are falling.  
They melt into the ground  
Like stones thrown into a lake.

Kanoro pulls on my elbow.  
'Let's go. It's snow!' he says.  
[...]  
Outside he opens his mouth  
To taste the snowflakes.  
And I do the same.  
A cool dusting fills  
My mouth with memories  
Of winter:

We look up at the night sky  
And eat our snow meals. (66-68)

Initially, again, an opposition is established, namely with regard to Kasienska's and Kanoro's experiences with snow, which is determined by their respective country of origin. As Kanoro comes from Africa, a continent far too warm for any chances of snow, he has never seen it. Kasienska, on the contrary, being a Polish girl, is well acquainted with this weather condition. This opposition also

becomes apparent in their reasons for waiting for and looking forward to the snowfall. For Kanoro, the sight, feel and taste of snow are entirely new and exciting experiences which, to him, are connected to his host country, England. However, for Kasienska, it is an experience which is connected to her country of origin, Poland, which alleviates her homesickness and reawakens memories of home. Still, the sense of commonality and community appears to be more dominant in the poem than the one of dichotomy. This manifests itself in two ways. First of all, the sense of community between the two characters is underlined by the use of the personal pronouns of “we”, “our” and the adverb “together”, which is emphasised by being positioned in an individual line and by indentation. Further, the elements in the poem which seem to be most prominent are those which establish a connection between Kasienska and Kanoro. Such elements are their common excitement for the snowfall as well as their appreciation of the snow when it finally falls. Moreover, commonality manifests itself in their shared actions of waiting for the snow in front of the window as well as in catching and tasting the falling snowflakes in order to maximise their sensual experience with the snow. Therefore, while acknowledging the considerable differences between Kanoro and Kasienska in this respect, Crossan still manages to give prominence to their friendly connection, shared experience and common sentiments in this remarkably charming scene. Thereby, she places commonality and unifying elements over opposition and difference.

A similar pattern, though expressed more implicitly, can be found in the second example, which is an excerpt from the poem “Reunion” (219), in which Kasienska’s explains her mother’s as well as her own reaction to Kanoro’s unexpected visit for her mother’s birthday:

I jump to greet him  
And he takes me  
Into his arms without embarrassment

‘Where’s the birthday girl?’ he asks.

Mama was standing at our window  
Watching me and is down the stairs  
Before I have a chance to answer.

Mama runs to Kanoro.

They look stupid together:

Mama is bright-white.

Kanoro is too-black against her.

And yet, the picture is pretty good. (219)

Clearly, the opposition established in this poem is of visual nature. In this sense, Kasienka defines her mother as “bright-white” and Kanoro as “too-black against her”. The opposition therefore lies in the sharp contrast between their respective skin colours, a very pale ‘white’ and a very dark ‘black’. Still, in this representation, it is again a sense of commonality, their interpersonal connection and their affection for each other which are in focus and seem to be stronger than the difference inherent in their appearance. This prominence is explicitly stressed by the last line, in which Kasienka ensures the reader that, when she sees Kanoro and her mother together, “the picture is pretty good”.

It can be concluded that the novel stresses transcultural tendencies even beyond the representation of hybridity on a macro- and micro level. This is achieved by subverting certain oppositional structures which are frequently established in connection with the process of migration. Further, while, in the novel, Crossan does not deny but rather acknowledges certain differences between people with different cultural backgrounds, she gives prominence to commonalities and interpersonal connections between them. Thereby, she appears to promote a transcultural rather than an intercultural conceptualisation, which, according to theory, is more likely to support dichotomous structures.

## **7. Transcultural Learning with *The Weight of Water***

In order to provide a higher level of accessibility of the previous analysis for attempts of didactic applicability, final links with and thoughts concerning the practical implementation of the approach to transcultural learning envisioned in this thesis will be established. This approach is meant to serve as an introduction to transcultural learning in the fourth grade of lower secondary level in the subject of English. As such, it is meant to target the dimension of 'attitudes', which is included in the most prevalent models of intercultural competence, like the one by Byram, which has been introduced in at the beginning of this thesis.

A more specified model which appears to be suitable for the two main purposes of the approach, namely the focus on the domain of 'attitudes' and the introduction of the students to the process of transcultural learning, is the one by Rösch, which, likewise, has been introduced in the theory part of the thesis<sup>5</sup>. I attribute its utility for those purposes to two characteristics. On the one hand, the model appears useful due to its focus on the ethical and political domain of intercultural competence (Rösch, „Interkulturelle Kompetenz im Deutschunterricht“ 96) and, therefore, its specification of the domain of 'attitudes'. On the other hand, the model lends itself perfectly for planning the introduction of students to the process of transcultural learning. This is because the subskills named within the respective skill-domains of the model are arranged in a way that suggests a progressive approach to developing intercultural competence (96), starting with the most basic skills and moving up to more advanced ones.

As this approach is meant to be an introduction, it will only focus on the most basic skills of the model. Therefore, the suggested approach to transcultural learning is meant to contribute to the following skills in Rösch's model:

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<sup>5</sup> See: chapter „Attitudes and the Ethical, Political Dimension of Intercultural Competence”

### **Kognitive Fähigkeiten/Wissen erwerben und konstruktiv umsetzen**

- über kulturelle Allgemeinheiten, Besonderheiten, Interdependenzen und Hybridisierung
- über Migrations- und Globalisierungsprozesse sowie migrationsbedingte Lebenslagen  
[...]

### **Kognitive Fertigkeiten/methodische Grundlagen**

- Stereotypen, Kulturalisierungen und Ethnozentrismus aufbrechen
- Perspektivenwechsel/Empathie (kulturelle Selbst- und Fremdrelexion)  
[...]

### **Motivationale und volitionale Bereitschaften und Fähigkeiten**

- reflektiertes Verhältnis zu Migration, Globalisierung u. migrationsbedingten Lebenslagen  
[...]

(„Interkulturelle Kompetenz“ 96)

Notably, the model also includes transcultural tendencies by addressing the awareness of cultural interconnectedness and hybridity as well as of processes of globalisation.

In the following, an explicit connection between Rösch's model and the pervious analysis will be established by assigning special features of the novel, referred to in the analysis, to the subskill of intercultural competence for the development of which the respective feature is believed to be useful. Besides, I will include additional considerations and implications concerning the teaching of the novel in the specific context of the Austrian EFL classroom.

### **Kognitive Fähigkeiten/Wissen erwerben und konstruktiv umsetzen**

- *über kulturelle Allgemeinheiten, Besonderheiten, Interdependenzen und Hybridisierung*

As I have already mentioned, the focus of this thesis is a transcultural one and, therefore, includes the endeavour to mediate the phenomena of cultural interdependence and hybridisation. The hybrid character of cultures today and its manifestations on a macro- and micro- level have been shown to find acknowledgement in the novel. By an explicit reference to and discussion of the representations of this phenomenon, the development of the students'

awareness of it can be supported. In order to establish a connection to the students' own real-life contexts, it appears even more important to refer to the cultural hybridity manifested in their own home-country, in their own cultural identity and its status as a global phenomenon. Therefore, the representations of cultural hybridity in the novel can be used as a starting point for initiating the learning processes in question. Due to the scarce representation of cultural hybridity on a macro-level, the use of additional material concerned with this topic is advised, such as other texts, or visual material like pictures or British films, which give an account of the hybrid nature of British culture, before its manifestation in the Austrian context is discussed.

- *über Migrations- und Globalisierungsprozesse sowie migrationsbedingte Lebenslagen*

Based on the representation of cultural hybridity referred to in the previous paragraph, the phenomena of migration and globalisation can be introduced as causes for this condition. While the former is presented as such in the novel itself (multicultural British society due to migration; Kasienka as a cultural hybrid due to migration), references to the latter are not explicitly featured in the novel. Therefore, its discussion in the classroom would require the inclusion of additional material about this matter. This gap could also be filled by organising collaborations with teachers of other subjects, in which the topic of globalisation can be addressed, like geography or history. Problems and certain living conditions commonly resulting from the process of migration, however, are accounted for by thorough and accurate representations in the novel. Those representations seem to provide enough depth to raise awareness of migratory issues among the students. However, within a classroom context, it appears necessary to explicitly address all three aspects within the Austrian context, in order to establish an awareness of those phenomena in the students' own environment.



## **Kognitive Fertigkeiten/methodische Grundlagen**

### ○ *Stereotypen, Kulturalisierungen und Ethnozentrismus aufbrechen*

As referred to in the theory part of the thesis, it seems that negative attitudes and stereotypes concerning migrants in general are very likely to be challenged in the course of adopting and identifying with the perspective of a migrant in the reading process. The teenage reader experiences commonality with the other, which is suggested to result in perceiving the other as more familiar. Due to its thorough, multifaceted representations of teenage-specific aspects, the novel provides excellent prerequisites for fostering students' identification with the protagonist, which is also an imperative process for the following skills of Rösch's model. Finally, the painful and demeaning effects racist tendencies are shown to have, for instance on the self-conception of Kasienska, might initiate a reflection process on the part of the students with regard to the existence and effects of racist practises in their own environment.

### ○ *Perspektivenwechsel/Empathie (kulturelle Selbst- und Fremdrelexion)*

It has already been mentioned that fostering an understanding of the other requires the skill of adopting a different perspective. In order to adopt the inner perspective of the protagonist, a cognitive and emotional reproduction of the person's feelings, thoughts and attitudes is vital. The high level of immediacy with which Kasienska's inner perspective is represented provides a high accessibility of her thoughts and feelings. This accessibility is believed to facilitate the adoption of Kasienska's view substantially for the reader. Despite the accessible representation of Kasienska's inner perspective and the beneficial effects of the automatic, unconscious adoption of perspective, it is suggested that a transcultural learning process would benefit even more from a conscious approach. A conscious adoption of perspective could be initiated, for instance, by a writing task in which the students are instructed to write an email from Kasienska's view to her friend in Poland, to whom she describes her situation in England and her emotional condition.

## **Motivationale und volitionale Bereitschaften und Fähigkeiten**

- *Reflektiertes Verhältnis zu Migration, Globalisierung und migrationsbedingten Lebenslagen*

As it has been shown in the theory part of the thesis, the spread of xenophobic tendencies against migrants poses a threat to the harmonic co-existence within Austria's multicultural society. Those tendencies often appear to stem from negative stereotypes towards migrants, which might be based on a mere lack of knowledge concerning the motives behind as well as the issues and problems that co-occur with the process of migration. As already discussed, the novel offers students the opportunity to adopt the perspective of a migrant roughly at the same age as themselves in the process of experiencing migration as well as corresponding difficulties. I believe that this experience bears the potential for providing students with insights which might move them to develop a more reflective and informed stance towards the process of migration and migratory living conditions. Such developments might be prompted by a classroom discussion concerning the representation of those. Subsequently, it is advised to refer to such issues within the Austrian context, in order to establish a connection with the students' real-life contexts. Additionally, I suggest that the awareness of cultural hybridity on a collective and individual level as being a manifestation of the influences of globalisation contributes to a more reflective conceptualisation of the process of globalisation itself. This is because of the students' resulting ability to detect those varied manifestations in their everyday contexts. This might also enable them to capture the immense scope of the influences of globalisation.

Finally, there are two further traits of the novel, outside Rösch's model, which I suggest to be beneficial in an ELT-context. On a more ELT-specific level, the representation of the multicultural nature of British society might serve as a starting point to introduce the students to a realistic conceptualisation of British society as being characterised by an ethnic and cultural variety, which manifests itself in British culture on various levels. Again, I advise teachers the use of additional material on this issue. This material ideally provides a

connection to the non-fictional British context and, thereby, moves students to realise the accuracy of the novel's representation. Another beneficial feature of the novel concerns its format, which is a compilation of various short, self-contained poems which, together, form Kasienska's story. This format gives the teacher the opportunity to use individual poems in order to raise awareness of specific issues. Provided that the context of the respective poem has been established sufficiently for the students to understand Kasienska's situation, there appears to be no necessity of reading the entire novel with the students for the purpose of contributing to transcultural learning processes with the text.

## 8. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to determine the potential of British young adult fictions of migration for the purpose of introducing a transcultural learning process in the Austrian EFL classroom at the end of lower secondary level. For this purpose, the novel *The Weight of Water*, an example of the genre in question, has been analysed.

Based on the preceding theoretical discussion and considerations, the framework and categories for the analysis were developed. As a framework, the goal of introducing students in the fourth grade at lower secondary level to the process of transcultural learning by targeting the domain of attitudes through reading British young adult fictions of migration, can be named. Being referred to as a precondition for intercultural learning processes, the domain of attitudes appeared suitable as a starting point for transcultural learning. The first set of categories for the analysis was concerned with the process of adopting the perspective of the other in order to foster *Fremdverstehen* and, therefore, consisted of the representation of teenage-specific issues, of migration-specific issues and the immediacy of the representation of the protagonist's inner perspective. The second set of categories focused on transcultural notions within the novel and addressed the representation of cultural hybridity on a collective and on an individual level.

I consider the novel's potential for stimulating identification with, the adoption of the perspective of and for fostering an understanding of the other as its most valuable traits for contributing to transcultural learning. Throughout the novel, Crossan includes a variety of teenage- and migration-specific issues. With reference to the former, the most prominent aspects are social exclusion, bullying, friendship and first love. Concerning migration-specific issues, the topics of insecurity with the new language and culture, poverty and social decline as well as xenophobia and racism find exceptional emphasis in the novel. The representation of those problem areas appears to be well-balanced, providing the reader with a fairly equal amount of familiar and unfamiliar elements and, thus, with a favourable basis for fostering an understanding process. What seems to be even more influential in the context of the adoption

of perspective is Crossan's manner of representing those issues. The corresponding representations can be described as thorough, multi-faceted and genuine all throughout the text. In the course of Kasienska's everyday life as a teenager, she is shown to gradually undergo significant personal developments and to grow into a more reflective and confident girl. In her representation of migratory issues, Crossan gives a profound account of the difficult reality migrants face in Great Britain and elsewhere by providing a portrayal of the causes and effects of as well as the dynamics underlying those matters. Moreover, the intense immediacy with which Kasienska's inner perspective is presented throughout those experiences considerably facilitates the adoption of the protagonist's perspective, especially on an emotional level. This immediacy can be partly attributed to the direct narrative situation of the text, but extends this feature considerably. In order to make Kasienska's experiences, thoughts and sentiments accessible, Crossan varies the form of the poems for the purpose of reflecting and adding meaning to the content of those. She further uses rhetorical devices, such as metaphors, similes and anaphoras in her representation of Kasienska's emotional and cognitive inner life. While the latter predominantly serve to emphasise, the former two figures are employed in order to render a compelling, apprehensible and poignant account of Kasienska's emotions. Thus, based on the combination of the multifaceted and well-balanced portrayal of familiar and unfamiliar elements as well as the tangible and intense representation of Kasienska's thoughts and sentiments, I regard *The Weight of Water* as a particularly suitable text for initiating the process of adopting perspectives and, therefore, for fostering a better understanding of the other.

The analysis demonstrated that the novel exhibits transcultural tendencies of numerous kinds. On a broad level, the text gives a distinct account of the ethnic and cultural variety in British society. Also, as an individual, Kasienska is presented as a cultural hybrid on various levels. Most notably, she is shown to encounter a multitude of multicultural elements of a linguistic, historical, culinary and literary kind and to regularly transcend cultural boundaries. Further, her self-conception is presented as fragmented and relational and, as such, reflects the fluid nature of identity itself. At some

instances, however, Crossan shows Kasienska's self-conception to be considerably effected by racist tendencies against her. As a result, Kasienska experiences herself as being assigned to inferior subject positions within the British context, based on her ethnicity or nationality. Beyond the concept of cultural hybridity, however, Crossan's novel indicates transcultural notions by rejecting and breaking with prevalent cultural and ethnic dichotomies as well as by emphasising communality and community over opposition.

In the final chapter I briefly outlined how certain subskills of the ethical and political domain of intercultural learning could be targeted with the novel, making its potential for contributing to transcultural learning even more obvious. However, it should be considered that for the development of some subskills, the use of additional material is strongly recommended. Further, it appears necessary to discuss the phenomena of migration and cultural hybridity in terms of their manifestations in the student's immediate environment to make their relevance more distinct to them.

Finally, I conclude that British young adult fictions of migration indeed appear to be suitable for introducing students to transcultural learning by fostering attitudes necessary for the further development of transcultural competence. Considering the findings of the analysis, I also regard my initial assumptions about the nature of this potential as mainly confirmed. After all, the example analysed proves to bear a considerable potential for identification for the target group and, at the same time, provides an intense and multifaceted representation of elements which characterise the protagonist as the other, namely the experience of migration and its accompanying difficulties. Due to its representation of Britain's diverse society, I also believe that the novel lends itself well for raising awareness of Britain's multicultural character, which can then be used to elaborate on this topic with additional material. However, as the theory of developing *Fremdverstehen* through the process of adopting perspectives by reading literary texts, on which this thesis builds, is not based on empirical evidence, a practical implementation of the suggested approach of transcultural learning would be required in order to determine its effectiveness and, thus, to secure or challenge my findings. It should also be considered that the specific results of the analysis are based on the reading of one particular

novel and will not be true for the entirety of examples of the genre. Therefore, the analysis of more British young adult fictions of migration would be required to arrive at more general findings. Other examples for this genre would be Benjamin Zepaniah's *Refugee Boy*, Beverly Naidoo's *The Other Side of Truth*, Sita Brahmachari's *Red Leaves* and many more. Unfortunately, such endeavours would have extended the scope of this thesis.

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## 10. Abstract

Clearly, modern societies have been considerably shaped by the phenomena of globalisation and migration and are now characterised by cultural and ethnic diversity. As a reaction to such developments, xenophobic and racist tendencies tend to increase. Thus, it appears to be of high relevance to foster transcultural learning in the sense of educating tolerant and socially competent individuals with informed attitudes towards the phenomena of migration and globalisation. Also within the vivid and theoretical discussion evolving around the concepts of transcultural learning, intercultural learning and *Fremdverstehen*, the significant relevance of those learning processes remains undebated. In connection to those concepts, literature is frequently claimed to be a suitable tool for contributing to inter- and transcultural learning processes. However, corresponding research rarely focuses on the potential of specific genres for more specific purposes. Hence, the purpose of this thesis is to determine the potential of British young adult fictions of migration for introducing a transcultural learning process in the Austrian EFL-classroom at the end of lower secondary level. On the basis of a thorough theoretical framework, the young adult novel *The Weight of Water* by Sarah Crossan is analysed as an example of British young adult fictions of migration with regard to its potential to contribute to the domain of 'attitudes'. In a final step, the results of the analysis are explicitly connected with a model of intercultural learning. The results of the analysis suggest that British young adult fictions of migration indeed have a considerable potential for initiating transcultural learning processes on the part of young adults. For the specific example analysed, this potential lies primarily in its immediate representation of the inner perspective of the protagonist, the well-balanced portrayal of familiar (teenage-specific issues) and unfamiliar (migration-specific issues) elements, its account of cultural hybridity as well as its evident support of transcultural tendencies in general.



## 11. Zusammenfassung

Moderne Gesellschaften sind klar von kultureller und ethnischer Diversität geprägt, welche infolge von Globalisierung und Migration zustande kam. Als eine Folge solcher Entwicklungen steigen Fremdenfeindlichkeit und Rassismus an. Dieser Umstand verdeutlicht die Notwendigkeit Jugendliche zu toleranten und sozial kompetenten Individuen zu erziehen, die über ein reflektiertes Verhältnis zu den Themen Migration und Globalisierung verfügen. Auch in der lebhaften theoretischen Diskussion verbunden mit den Konzepten des transkulturellen Lernens, des interkulturellen Lernens und des Fremdverstehens bleibt die aktuelle Relevanz dieser Lernprozesse unbestritten. Im Zusammenhang mit diesen Konzepten wird oft behauptet, dass Literatur sich gut eignet, um inter- und transkulturelle Lernprozesse zu unterstützen. Jedoch gibt es wenig Forschung, die sich in diesem Zusammenhang mit enger gefassten Themen wie dem Potenzial einzelner Genres oder mit spezifischeren Zwecken beschäftigen. Deshalb setzt sich die vorliegende Diplomarbeit zum Ziel, das Potenzial von Texten des Genres *British young adult fictions of migration* zur Hinführung von SchülerInnen am Ende der Unterstufe einer AHS im Fremdsprachenunterricht Englisch zum transkulturellen Lernen zu eruieren. Basierend auf einer einschlägigen Darstellung des entsprechenden theoretischen Rahmens wird ein Beispiel des Genres *British young adult fictions of migration*, nämlich der englischsprachige Jugendroman *The Weight of Water* von Sarah Crossan, hinsichtlich seines Potenzials zur Entwicklung der Teilkompetenz ‚Haltung‘ im Fremdsprachenunterricht der vierten Klasse Unterstufe beizutragen, analysiert. In einem letzten Schritt werden die Ergebnisse der Analyse mit einem Modell des interkulturellen Lernens zusammengeführt. Die Ergebnisse der Analyse suggerieren ein wesentliches Potenzial des Genres Jugendliche zum transkulturellen Lernen hinzuführen. Im Falle des analysierten Textes liegt dieses Potenzial vor allem in der unmittelbaren Darstellung der Innenperspektive der Protagonistin, in der ausgewogenen Darstellung von bekannten (Jugendthematik) und unbekanntem (migrationsbedingte Probleme) Elementen sowie in der klaren Befürwortung transkultureller Tendenzen im Allgemeinen.

