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Literary Theory in Upper Secondary School: Should It Be Used Before Higher Education?

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Abstract

This essay examines the use of literary theory when teaching literature before higher education. The objective is to see how and if the integration of literary theory facilitates students' engagement with and understanding of literature. The study is conducted with the qualitative method of interviews. Four teachers, certified for upper secondary school, were deemed appropriate to interview about their current use of literary theory, as well as their attitudes towards an increased use of literary theory. Besides the data collected through interviews, this study finds its theoretical foundation in the literary theories feminist, Marxist and postcolonial theory as well as in the Swedish curriculum for English at upper secondary level. Presently, the teachers do not use literary theory distinctly; however, they do consider the use of literary theory together with literature to be beneficial for the students' understanding of literature and the world around them. Teachers stated that while some students only will grasp the idea of the theories, other students will be able to use and apply them. The curriculum supports the use of literary theory in the core values for students of upper secondary level.

Key words: literary theory, feminist criticism, Marxism, postcolonial theory, teacher attitudes, literature, teaching and learning

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1. Introduction

According to statistics collected by Statistic Sweden (SCB), it is proven that young adults read less nowadays compared to 2008. This implies that the significance of working with literature is now more crucial than ever. Society is changing and developing every day, and if school and education are to remain relevant, it is necessary that new strategies of teaching and learning should be developed. There are different ways of learning and, as a teacher, one needs to find a way to keep the students interested while providing them with the skillset required to succeed. This requires that the teachers have great knowledge of the subject, but also that they are able to explain it in a way that makes it possible for the students to understand and apply what is being taught. This project argues for the need of incorporating literary theory in upper secondary school to facilitate students' ability to interpret literature.

Literary theory is usually not studied until university level. One could argue that literary theory would require further theoretical knowledge which would exceed the level of requirement expected of students at upper secondary schools. The theories may be considered very complex and extensive; however, introducing them on a smaller scale may provide the basis a student needs for future higher education. This project aims to examine if the literary theories that are in focus in this essay can help students understand the fiction they are reading, studying and analyzing in school.

The National Agency for Education states in the core values of the curriculum that the education must portray and convey the value of equality and solidarity between all humans and an equality between women and men. Equality between men and women is a topic that is discussed and dealt with in feminist criticism; and therefore, feminist theory could be considered a relevant connection to the core values in the curriculum. It is stated in the curriculum that schools should promote the ability to empathize and understand other people, as well as not subjecting others to discrimination or other offensive treatments on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religion or other beliefs, transgender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age or disability. Marxists want to deny class in society and do this by critically reviewing the world, therefore, the Marxist theory seems appropriate to teach. This is due to the fact that it is stated in the curriculum that the school's mission is, among other things, to teach students to think critically, to review facts and conditions and to recognize consequences of different alternatives.

The curriculum presents a perspective in teaching, called the historical perspective, where it is stated that the education should develop the students' understanding of the present and what is to come in the future with the help of the past (National Agency for Education, 2011, p. 5-10). One might argue that the postcolonial theory would be in direct correlation with this perspective. This is due to the re-introduction of historical events from another point of view and how it may affect the future and today's society.

Literary theory is a part of literary history as it reflects literary perspective. Using literary theory, however, is not something that is stated in the curricula for English at upper secondary schools in Sweden. In the aims for English, it is stated that students should develop their ability to understand written English and the ability to interpret the content of different texts (National Agency for Education, 2011, p. 54). They are also expected to read different types of fiction and work with different strategies when reading (National Agency for Education, 2011, p. 55). However, even if one usually works with analyzing texts in English 7, it is not unusual that "literary analysis" is linked with the traditional book reviews one wrote in the earlier stages of school. Furthermore, it is important to use literary theory before attending higher education as it will bridge the gap that exists between studies in upper secondary school and higher education.

2. Background

One of the hardships teachers will face is that every class and every individual are different, and they are therefore required to approach teaching in several ways to ensure that students learn and hopefully enjoy learning. As a teacher, it is important to show students that it is acceptable not to know and have the answer to everything and thereby, make students comfortable during their learning process. At the same time, it is of great importance to have enough knowledge to teach and give students skills that they can rely on. As mentioned before, literary theory may not be expected to be studied until higher levels of education, but if a teacher can incorporate it in earlier stages of education it would both provide students with the knowledge to analyze literature, and prepare them for future higher education.

Rains (2015, p. 3) states that it would be of preference to teach students literary theory, as it gives the students the tools to draw inferences from what they read. She states that "it provides them with a set of different frameworks with which to view the world around them, as well as the world of the text" (Rains, 2015, p. 3) which goes hand in hand with promoting

the ability to recognize other people and to identify oneself with them (National Agency for Education, 2011, p. 5). Xerri (2013, p. 209) states that using literary theory when working with literature before higher education may further promote students' critical thinking. The National Agency for Education (2011, p. 10) has clearly stated that it is the schools' responsibility to ensure that students have the capacity to critically review and assess what they see, hear and read in order to be able to discuss and take a stand on various issues.

In "Building Bridges Between Literary Theory and the Teaching of Literature", Blau (1993) explores the possibility of using literary theories and teaching together, and states that teachers may feel liberated when realizing that they can make use of literary teaching practices when working with other language focused subjects. She argued that "[t]heory also relieved [teachers] of the academic responsibility they had thought to be theirs for leading students to the 'correct' or authoritative readings of canonical texts" (Ibid., p. 17).

Furthermore, deeper understanding of literary theory may lead to teachers finding new ways in their pedagogical practice (Ibid., p. 17).

Xerri (2013) has studied the role of literary theory when teaching poetry, aiming towards a "rethinking of the way poetry is approached in the A-level English classroom" (p. 205).

During this study, he realized that the aim was unreachable since literary theory had not been adopted by teachers and syllabus developers; instead, he decided to study the views teachers and examiners have regarding this agenda. Xerri (2013, p. 205-206) states that using literary theory previous to higher education is a relevant topic to discuss since theory has become institutionalized. He refers to Collingborn (1989, p. 10), who states that using literary theory would encourage readers to engage in a multiplicity of perspectives, meanings and even in incomplete interpretations.

Carter and Long (1991, p. 195) state that the teaching methods that are used when working with literature are representing "a pedagogical disadvantage" (Xerri, 2013, p. 207).

Furthermore, they (1991) imply that the teaching methods concerning literature lack a distinct method, and that the methods that are used are "tightly controlled by the teacher, either in the form of directed questions accompanied by teacher-led commentary, or in the form of a demonstration exposition in a lecture or seminar" (p. 181). This way of working with literature, does furthermore result in students' inability to analyze literary works since they lack the knowledge on what procedures to use and how to implement them for themselves

(Xerri, 2013, p. 207). Peim (2009) discusses the role of teachers in this, what he refers to as a “relatively narrow concept of textual literacy” (p. 154), as he recognizes teachers’ own unwillingness to integrate literary theory with their literary teachings.

According to Exton (1984), reading activities in connection with literary theory will allow students to have the knowledge to examine the constituent parts of a text and how it makes meaning (p. 74), and would therefore provide students with the ability to analyze their surroundings. Furthermore, Burton (1989, p. 6) stated that using literary theory is advantageous since it allows the text to be examined in more than one way. He refers to Twist (1989) who states that using literary theory is “far more enriching and creative than a didactic approach [...] and [it] allows pupils a variety of viewing points from which to consider and respond to” (p. 30).

Xerri (2013, p. 208) also refers to Furniss and Bath (1996) as he states that every reader is governed by their assumptions about literature, as the assumptions are shaped by the time we live in and the “unconscious theories about literature which our particular culture hold and disseminates” (p. 21). Therefore, it is of interest to use literary theory when teaching literature as it will allow students to be observant of the theoretical connotations existent in each text (Xerri, 2013, p. 208). Literary theory should be used since it provides a view on literatures; shaping, interacting and reflecting on the world, which then enables students with alternative ways of observing literature and giving them the opportunity to question literature from different perspectives (Ibid., p. 209). Hence, exposing students to literary theory would allow them to understand a text in various ways, and “this facilitates the development of higher order critical thinking skills” (Ibid., p. 209). Xerri (2013, p. 209) argues that the lack of literary theory creates a gap between studies in upper secondary school and higher education, since students often are “unsure about how to use criticism saliently in their assessed essays” (Ballinger, 2002, p. 100) and that it would “help ease the transition to university” (p. 104) if it was introduced in the second year.

Xerri’s (2013) study showed that teachers view literary theory as too difficult and complicated to introduce for students at upper secondary school as they do not believe that they are “ready for it” (p. 211). The teachers stated that the students are not “cognitively and intellectually ready for it” and, hence, it is inaccessible to them (Ibid., p. 211). Another teacher expressed that this issue may depend on the teachers’ inability to use literary theory, which results in the discouragement of using literary theory in their lectures. A few teachers

and examiners acknowledged that literary theory should be used in a superficial way because the basic knowledge of the theories is a requirement to understanding the overall rules of society. Xerri (2013) concluded that being open to teaching different approaches would “foster a view of reading as a process involving the adoption of multiple perspectives [that] enables students to develop the necessary critical thinking skills expected of them in higher education and the world beyond” (p. 213).

Ebele et al. (2011) discuss the importance of teaching literature properly to awaken emotions and critical thinking in a learner. They argue that using the right strategies for teaching literature are crucial for students’ interests and would teach them to “question the author and the text critically” (p. 261) as well as interact with the text. Their study shows that teachers of literature “teach every text using stereotyped strategies” (Ibid., p. 261), which results in “poor performance of students in English Language and Literature” (Ibid., p. 261) since “the students lack the skills needed to read and understand literature” (Ibid., p. 261). Ebele et al. (2011, p. 263) discovered that teachers are complacent with using methods that are out of date.

Furthermore, they state that being able to question an author’s literary work, not only allows the reader to think critically and to gain deeper understanding of a text, but it do also “help the reader move meaningfully along the text with the author” (p. 263). They conclude that using effective strategies when teaching literature prepares students for literacy and provides them with skills covering critical thinking to skills for life-long learning; hence, they stress the fact that it is crucial that teachers use effective strategies to enable students to maximize their potential (Ibid., p. 263).

In an article by Eaglestone and English (2013), they analyze what initial and developing perceptions students have of literary theory, and how students create an identity as literary critics when they have the tools to do so. They argue that theories should not be seen as channels through which information is conveyed, but that the use of them as pedagogic tools will allow students to become practitioners in the subject (Ibid., p. 19). Eaglestone (2000) states that students have a difficulty with familiarizing with literary theory, as the theories are rarely taught at secondary education. Eaglestone and English (2013) used weekly topics and an informal journal to keep track of the students’ developing perception of literary theory. However, even if the course had a clear plan, “[m]any students express[ed] anxiety, fear, and

skepticism at the beginning of the journal, [...] in terms of the challenges that the course material posed” (Ibid., p. 22). Furthermore, they “appeared to acknowledge [...] that the course would challenge them and that this kind of stimulation, however nerve-wracking, was a necessary part of their learning and development” (Ibid., p. 22). According to Eaglestone and English (2013), the journals showed that literary theory encourages students to question their identity and to connect literature to their everyday life, and it could be seen explicitly when they worked with feminist and postcolonial theory. They also found it exceptional that “students used the world around them, from current affairs to popular culture, to make sense of theory and vice versa” (Ibid., p. 26). One of the students stated that with the help of literary theory he or she has “begun to work out and realize [his/her] take on the world” (Ibid., p. 27).

Eaglestone and English (2013) argue that by using journals, they “enable students to engage with or practice theory rather than repeat it, by applying its ideas to the world around them and their lives” (Ibid., p. 32). Furthermore, McCormick (1992, p. 115) states that using literary theory is not about teaching theory, but about teaching how to theorize and Campbell (1997) claims that “it should be the issues of textual analysis, not what particular theorists say [...]. Theory then becomes a resource to aid the investigation [and] not a set of rules to follow” (Ibid., p. 154).

3. Aim

The objective of this essay is to examine teachers’ attitudes towards using literary theory when analyzing literature in upper secondary school, to see how and if the integration of literary theory facilitates students’ engagement with and understanding of literature. In order to examine the use of literary theory in an upper secondary classroom the following questions will be considered:

1. To what extent are teachers of upper secondary level using literary theory in their language and literature teaching?
2. What attitudes do teachers have towards using literary theory before higher education?
3. In what way is the use of literary theory significant for educational purpose according to the teachers?

4. Method and Material

To be able to examine teachers' attitudes towards using literary theory in upper secondary school, interviews were conducted. The interviews were then set in relation to the chosen literary theories and the curriculum for the subject of English in Swedish schools.

The literary theories of feminist criticism, Marxism and postcolonialism have a foothold in the curriculum and is, therefore, the aspects of literary theory that this project aims to examine. Other literary theories, such as Queer studies, could also be supported by the curriculum. However, this study has chosen to limit its research to three central theories, i.e. feminist, Marxist and postcolonial theory. The curriculum (National Agency for Education, 2011) states that equality is a key value that needs to be present and taught in school. Equality between women and men is certainly applicable when one examines and teaches the literary theory of feminism criticism, for the reason that the theory "asks us to examine [...] the ways in which our personal identity is formed by our culture's definitions of what it means to be a man or a woman" (Tyson, 2011, p. 139). The next literary theory that is suitable to use in school would be the Marxist theory, as it elucidates the relation between the socioeconomic system and our personal identity. Tyson (2011) states that the socioeconomic system determines "how we are educated, and it influences our religious beliefs, which together control [...] how we perceive ourselves and our world" (p. 110). This perspective is then supported by the curriculum (National Agency for Education, 2011, p. 7), as it states that students need to think critically and evaluate facts and conditions and how they affect us. The final literary theory is the postcolonial theory that will deepen our understanding of literary works and enable us to understand racial and ethnic issues (Tyson, 2011, p. 206). The use of this literary theory is supported by the curriculum as the education is supposed to develop students' awareness of the present and the future, with the help of the historical context and cultural difference (National Agency for Education, 2011, p. 7).

As this study derived from a hypothesis that had to be tested, it qualifies as a deductive study. The main source of collected data were gathered through interviews which is a qualitative research method. Qualitative research refers to "the meanings, concepts definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and description of things" and not to their numerical results (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 3). According to Berg and Lune (2012) qualitative research "answers how and when a certain phenomenon occurs" (p. 3). The aim with the interviews is to study teachers' attitude towards literary theory and if they are or could imagine using them

when teaching literature. The interviews will either support or disapprove the questions of how to use literary theory, and why one would or would not use it in upper secondary school.

The researcher did not know the teachers that participated in the interview and received their contact information through acquaintances. Fifteen teachers were contacted, however, due to inability to participate, either as a consequence of not being certified or because of time constraints, the number of respondents came to four. They were contacted through email, containing information about the research and that an interview was asked of them. All the teachers involved were certified and had been working with students for over five years. What the teachers did not have in common was the school level they currently work at, hence giving this essay a wider framework for examination.

The interviews were held in English, in a semi-structured way, indicating that questions were prepared but the interviewer asked follow-up questions depending on what the interviewee answered (Berg & Lune, 2012). In preparation of the interviews taking place, four ethical requirements needed to be established. These requirements concern: information, consent, confidentiality and use of the data collected (Swedish Research Council, 2002).

To fulfill the requirement of consent the teachers that were interviewed were informed about the purpose of the research. This also included the fact that the participants were free to participate and could always interrupt their participation in the project (Swedish Research Council, 2002, p. 7). The participants had also agreed to be recorded as the interviews needed to be saved and transcribed. This gave them the possibility to decide on their own and, since the teachers are of age, their own consent was enough for the requirement of consent to be fulfilled (Swedish Research Council, 2002, p. 9). The confidentiality requirement regards the fact that information received should be given the maximum possible confidentiality; therefore, the participants were informed that the data they provided would be anonymous to everyone except the one conducting the interviews. As the participants agreed to the interview a confidentiality agreement was in order (Swedish Research Council, 2002, p. 12). The participants were also informed that the data would only be used for this project (Swedish Research Council, 2002, p. 12).

5. Theoretical framework

5.1 Postcolonial theory

Postcolonial criticism became an independent theory in the 1990s and a significant fallout of this theory is to weaken the universalist claims by liberal humanist critics (Barry, 2009, p. 185). The universalists mean that literature is timeless and has a universal significance and, therefore, they disregard cultural, social, regional and national differences in experience. Hence, they choose to examine all literature by a universal standard. Postcolonial writers reject these Eurocentric norms and practices since they promote and elevate the white social position in historical and cultural events. “[C]haracteristically, postcolonial writers evoke or create a precolonial version of their own nation, rejecting the modern and the contemporary, which is tainted with the colonial status of their countries” (Ibid., p. 187). Postcolonial literature concerns writers reclaiming their own past while the postcolonial criticism is the theoretical perspective of it (Ibid., p. 185-186).

A second area of postcolonial criticism is the double or hybrid identity the writers face. Since postcolonial literature is just that, post-colonial, the writers are making their voices heard after the impact the colonizers made on their identity. According to Barry (2009, p. 192) a postcolonial critic wants to celebrate this hybridity by showing the situation whereby individuals and groups belong to more than one culture at the same time, but it is of importance to be aware that the hybridity is not always celebrated and it depends on each individual.

By rejecting universalism that is present in the Western canon, postcolonial critics want to show that it has limitations concerning cultural and ethnic differences. They examine the representation and treatment of other cultures in literature and further foreground questions regarding diversity and cultural differences to show these limitations and inabilities literature has (Barry, 2009, p. 192). Since the postcolonial literature treats the effects and consequences of colonialism, a postcolonial critic aims to show how literature often fails to raise its voice concerning the events and subjects affected by colonization and imperialism. The postcolonial perspective is not only applicable to postcolonial literature, but is also relevant for other literature where marginality, plurality and “otherness” are sources of energy and potential change. (Ibid., p. 192)

5.2 Feminist theory

The 'women's movement' in the 1960s led to feminism reappearing in the world of literature. There already existed books on women's inequality in society, portraying unequal treatment when seeking education and wanting to determine their own future. The 'women's movement' led to the rise of feminist literary criticism. How women were portrayed and illustrated in books was of importance for the movement which led to the feminist theory being a basis of feminism (Barry, 2009, pp. 116-117). The way women were represented in literature was perceived as important for the social structure since it indicated to women, and men, "what constituted acceptable versions of the 'feminine' and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations" (Ibid., p. 117). This made feminist theory further examine the issue of female and male identity in psychoanalysis and also to recognize how language could be used to normalize the socially constructed views of the female and male role (Ibid., p. 128). The basic concepts of feminist criticism are the patriarchy, traditional gender roles, the objectification of women, sexism and a 'true woman'¹ (Tyson, 2011, pp. 141-144).

Feminist critics want to reevaluate the canon of literature with the intention to reclaim texts written by women. They want to protest against the portrayal of women in literature, and "revalue women's experience" (Barry, 2009, p. 128). The feminist theory aims to show the extent of patriarchy by seeing literature as a political subject, with a wish to investigate what power relations that are present in both text and life, and how to break down power relations. Female critics also want to examine the *écriture féminine*, which may be labeled the female language. The female writing is seen as unaffected by social and gender codes and is "able to issue forth a pure essence of the feminine" (Ibid., 2009, p. 123). However, this is questionable as it contradicts the feminist perspective that femininity is socially constructed and not a given entity that supposedly just exists. (Ibid., p. 123)

5.3 Marxist theory

The aim of Marxism is to attain a society without class, that is based on ownership of production, distribution and exchange. Marxism is a materialistic philosophy that seeks to change the world rather than understand it; it seeks to do this by trying to explain phenomenon "without assuming the existence of a world [...], and the society we live in"

¹ A 'true woman' is a woman that is fragile, submissive and sexually pure according to patriarchal ideologies (Tyson, 2011, p.143-144)

(Barry, 2009, p. 150). Marxists believe that “[t]he more the opinions of the author remain hidden the better the work of art” (Ibid., p. 152) and, hence, they acknowledge ‘the death of the author’², for the reason that they presume that a writer’s social class and dogma has an extensive bearing on what they write. Furthermore, they see writers as being constituted by social context and thus both the content of their work and the formal aspects of it have political connotations (Ibid., p. 152).

Marxists divide the content of literary works into ‘overt’ and ‘covert’, where the overt part represents the storyline that is present on the surface, and covert is the hidden content that presents themes such as class struggle and progression of society through history. The Marxists assume that authors are unaware of what information is exposed in their work and that they interject their social class unintentionally. Marxists believe that every literary genre is a product of the social period it is formed in. Another practice Marxists implement is that there is a relation between the time a text is read and when it is written, which brings us to the Marxist claim that “literary forms are themselves determined by political circumstance” (Barry, 2009, p. 161).

6. Results

6.1 Interviews

All interviews were conducted according to the ethical requirements of the Swedish Research Council (2002) and the teachers were selected according to the requirements of this study. The requirements were that they had to be certified teachers in the subject of English for upper secondary school, and with more than five years of experience in order to be able to draw conclusions from their experience.

6.1.1 Teacher A

Teacher A, who will be referred to as TA, has been a teacher at lower secondary level for thirty years. TA is a certified teacher in English for upper secondary school. Prior to the interview being held, TA had not thought about using literary theory in earlier stages than higher education. Furthermore, TA expressed that she was not fully familiar with the specific literary theories of feminism, Marxism and postcolonialism, and that they never had been

² See: Barthes, R. (1967). “The Death of the Author”. London: Fontana (pp. 142-148)

implemented specifically in her lectures. TA found it interesting and beneficial to use literary theory when working with literature. Furthermore, TA thought that “it would be a great idea to make students more aware of [...] what the theories actually convey in their meaning” (Interview, 04/26/19) and that it would provide students with more than one perspective. TA stated that “some students would benefit a lot from it and maybe get more of a challenge in school, than they do otherwise” (Interview, 04/26/19). However, TA discussed that all students are not intellectually mature enough for this kind of work, which is why a teacher needs to adapt their teaching of literary theory to the “year group, maturity and the intellectual capacity” (Interview, 04/26/19) of the students. Moreover, TA stressed the fact that even if literary theory could be backed up by the curriculum, it is first and foremost the teachers’ obligation to carry out what the curriculum states. Therefore, according to TA, it is important to consider if literary theory should be used and to what purpose, since it is a subject that can be very time consuming.

6.1.2 Teacher B

Teacher B, who will be referred to as TB, has been teaching English at upper secondary school for about twenty-five years. TB explains that literary theory is used to a greater extent when teaching religion, rather than English. TB states that she is familiar with the theories, mostly feminism and postcolonial theory and “not so much the Marxist” (Interview, 04/29/19), and that they “teach a lot of it in English 6 and 7” (Interview, 04/29/19); hence, she “use[s] a lot of them consciously” (Interview, 04/29/19). TB explained that they have an assignment in English 7 where the students work with literary epochs when writing a research paper, and that it is based on literary theory. TB give examples of books such as *Wuthering Heights* and *Pride and Prejudice* together with the feminist theory and *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart* for the postcolonial theory.

When explaining that the curriculum does not specifically state that literary theory should be used, but rather could be used to meet the requirements in the core values, TB defined the use of literary theory as “a pedagogical tool” (Interview, 04/29/19). TB expressed that “it is almost the only way for them to see [...] how we read with our colored glasses on (Interview, 04/29/19) and, while “some get a taste of it and some are acquainted with the knowledge” there will be other students that will be able to apply it. TB mentions that some students might experience the literary theories as incomprehensible; however, she also implies that introducing the theories will give those students a tool to base their knowledge on.

6.1.3 Teacher C

Teacher C, referred to as TC, has been teaching English for about eight years. TC is familiar with the three theories of feminism, Marxism and postcolonialism. TC explains that they are not used regularly but, when they are, they are rarely labeled as theories due to TC feeling that the students would not understand them. However, TC argues that it is of importance to teach students that there are different perspectives. This teaches them to step out of themselves and to broaden their mindsets, in order to understand more than one perspective. TC discusses that some teachers approach theory directly, whilst others approach it as a supplement to ordinary lectures and that this may depend on each teachers' confidence regarding the theory in question.

TC mentioned that "it might be a bit too much" (Interview, 05/09/2019) to use the theories in depth and that "talking about it and making sure that they see that one text on one subject can be seen from many different perspectives, will help them" (Interview, 05/09/2019) be prepared for the future and higher education. TC stated that, if one did not use literary theory, the students would feel unequipped for higher levels of education. However, TC also stated that, even though the use of it would be beneficial for students' learning, it would demand a great deal from the teacher in terms of balancing the content of each course. Overall, TC considered incorporating literary theory to be a "a good idea to do, not always, sometimes you just need to do grammar, words, all the standard basic stuff" (Interview, 05/09/2019).

6.1.4 Teacher D

Teacher D, referred to as TD, has been teaching English for fifteen years, with a wide spectrum of experience as TD has been a teacher at high school, upper secondary school and nowadays, adult education. Having written her own Master's thesis on postcolonial theory, TD is familiar with postcolonial theory as well as feminist and Marxist theory. TD states that literary theory is not used frequently, but if they "study a text that is representative for a certain theory then I will bring up questions or discussion of sort on that matter" (Interview, 05/13/2019). TD states that when teaching literary theory, it "is important as with everything as a teacher, that you have to open up for different views and I think that a challenge is not to bring up a certain theory but to balance the discussion that follows, and that requires a lot of practice and preparation" (Interview, 05/13/2019). Furthermore, TD maintain that a teacher

must be prepared, but “regardless of how much you prepare, you will never know where the discussion ends up, and [therefore] you might want to leave it and bring it up again at later occasion or in other constellations” (Interview, 05/13/2019).

According to TD, literary theory is about perspectives and identity, and therefore, TD states that it might be beneficial to approach the theories from an individual standpoint before going through the basis of each theory. TD considers that literary theory should not be about teaching students to understand and agree with the theories, instead it is about teaching students to theorize and have the right to their own perspective within the theories. TD states that students are intellectually mature enough to be taught literary theory in upper secondary school and that it would be beneficial for their learning; however, TD is unsure if it is possible to teach literary theory in depth without the consequences of losing too much time. TD proposes interdisciplinary collaboration between subjects and courses as a solution to this obstacle. Overall, TD states that “[u]sing literature in teaching can cover a lot of [...] the core of the subject” (Interview, 05/13/2019), which would inspire students to “develop themselves [...] as human beings” (Interview, 05/13/2019).

7. Discussion

The teachers that were interviewed gave a similar account of their use of literary theory when teaching, as they gave the impression of not previously thinking about using literary theory to widen the educational spectrum for students and prepare them for higher education. All teachers stated that they used literary theory in a limited manner, as they only used it when the content of the course was represented by the perspectives of a specific theory. One of the teachers stated that the reason for not using literary theory was due to the feeling of uncertainty in regards to the theories, which was also described as a reason stated in Peim’s research in 2009 (p. 154). Another teacher used the feminist and postcolonial theory purposely with the students who chose the English 7 course as an option. The reasoning behind this was because of the literary works that were included in the course and because the teacher wanted to prepare the students for higher education by asking them to write a degree project. The majority of the teachers linked literary theory with the subject of social sciences as much as they did with English as a subject, and gladly discussed that literary theory could be used in any subject.

The overall attitude towards using literary theory before higher education was positive, as the teachers believed that it is of importance for the students to be aware of the different perspectives that exist in the society. Furthermore, this would result in giving the students the possibility of analyzing a literary work in several ways. They agreed with previous research (Xerri, 2013, p. 211) on the knowledge gap that is present when approaching higher education because of the lack of literary theory in upper secondary education. However, the teachers were all unsure if using literary theory to a greater degree would affect and leave out other parts of the course that are clearly stated in the curriculum. This is due to the fact that they considered literary theory to be time consuming if taught in depth. Furthermore, all teachers stated that they should and could use literary theory more than they currently do.

While previous research (Xerri, 2013) stated that some teachers do not consider students to be cognitively and intellectually ready to study literary theory until higher education, the teachers that were interviewed all recognized that the students would all be able to benefit from being taught literary theory at upper secondary school. They discussed that some students, in general those with lower motivation in school, might have a hard time grasping how to use the theories; however, knowing that they exist might give them a reassurance and a footing to rely on when analyzing literature. Furthermore, those students that find literature and literary theory accessible would then be able to make use of the theories.

Using literary theory would affect the students' way of working with literature if it is done through a distinct method. Previous research by Carter and Long (1991, p. 181) show that the methods that are used more frequently when teaching literature usually are controlled by the teacher, thus, not giving the students an opportunity to explore diverse ways of analyzing literary works. Xerri (2013, p. 207) implies that this teacher-controlled method usually results in students' inability to analyze literary works, since they lack the knowledge of what procedures to use and how to implement them for themselves. However, as Peim (2009) discusses the role of the teacher, it is clear that if a teacher is confident in the concept of literary theory, it would benefit students by giving them the tools to analyze literature and the world around them. Thus, allowing them a deeper understanding of their everyday life and their surroundings.

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9. Appendices

Appendix 1

Consent for participation in research

Degree project, English for upper secondary school

My name is Nazanin Alvandi and I am studying at Jönköping University to become a teacher in Swedish and English for upper secondary school. I am writing this to inform you about a study that I am going to carry out for my degree project during the spring term of 2019.

The objective of this study is to examine the use of literary theory when analyzing literature in upper secondary school to see how and if the use of literary theory together with literature facilitates students' interpretative ability.

To be able to collect data of teachers' attitudes towards using literary theory in upper secondary school, interviews will be conducted. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The content collected through the interview will solely be used for this study and all data collected will be anonymized and stored in a safe place until the end of the course. After the course has ended, all data and recordings will be deleted.

Participating is voluntary, which means that you as an interviewee can interrupt your participation of the study at any time without any penalties.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me

I hope to hear from you soon.

With kind regards

Nazanin Alvandi

Appendix 2

Interview guide – Semi structured interview questions

- **How long have you taught English?**
- **Are you familiar with literary theories?**
- **Have you ever used literary theory, such as feminist theory, theory of postcolonialism or Marxist theory in your lectures?**
- **If not, have you ever thought about using it?**

The curriculum does not state that literary theories should be used but it states that all education must portray and convey the value of equality and solidarity between all humans and an equality between women and men. It is stated in the curriculum that schools should promote the ability to empathize and understand other people, as well as the fact that no one should be subjected to discrimination or other offensive treatment on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religion or other beliefs, transgender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age or disability”

- **What opinions do you have on incorporating the literary theory of feminism to start a discussion about equality?**

Postcolonialists want to disregard the universal standard in literature and reclaim their past by evoking or creating a precolonial version of their own nation, rejecting the modern and the contemporary, which is tainted by the colonial status of their countries. They also discuss hybrid identity that exists because of the colonialism.

- **With the world looking like it does nowadays, with open and integrated borders, would you consider postcolonialist theory to be beneficial in discussions of hybridity in the society or not?**

Marxists have a strong belief that every literary work is influenced by the political powers during the time they were written and that the political powers that exist when a text is made known to a reader; the texts, in other words, are always products of their own political circumstance.

- **How do you think students could benefit from these perspectives when reading a text?**

Some argue that students are not cognitively and intellectually ready for literary theories until higher education, while others argue that not using literary theory generates a gap between upper secondary school and higher education.

- **What are your thoughts about this?**
- **What benefits and drawbacks do you believe would occur if literary theories would be used when working with literature?**