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Supplementing Narratives

A Pedagogical and Norm-Critical Discussion of How To Teach James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* in the EFL Classroom

Niklas Johansson, 811005
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Supervisor: Ron Paul
Examiner: Chloé Avril

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Author: Niklas Johansson
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Abstract: The aim with this essay is to examine the implications of norm-critical pedagogy in language education. The novel *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin is used as an example of how supplementing narratives, both in the sense of adding 'othered' stories but also reading in challenging ways, can be suitable for this aim. In relation to this, paradoxes behind literary instruction and norm-critical pedagogy in the EFL classroom are discussed. In relation to both these aspects of language teaching there is a risk that the way teaching is carried out might contradict what such teaching aims for. Within the context of literary instruction the advantages of the concepts of 'creative reading' and 'envisionment building' are discussed in order to create a greater involvement of students' reader response in teaching. In relation to norm-critical pedagogy, a double strategy is used, with the aim of strengthening marginalized groups or voices, at the same time as the norms that create their marginalized position are criticized. Regarding the choice and value of literature in the EFL setting, the potential of the literary text as representation of a particular voice among the many voices of a society is emphasized rather than its assumed authenticity, since the former points out the positionality of both text and reader. The essay concludes that teaching can benefit from acknowledging the paradoxes behind literary and norm-critical teaching and examining the norm-critical strengths and weaknesses of teaching certain texts in certain ways.

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Introduction

Although we might believe that education is equal for all students regardless of background or social status and that such equality is maintained by teaching in a democratic, unbiased and tolerant way, education is always shaped by the social context in which it takes place. This means that inequalities regarding gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and disability, which shape our society, also influence the social arenas for teaching and learning. If teachers and students do not critically examine and question how such aspects shape the exchange within the classroom and in schools, there is a risk that some voices are marginalized while others are privileged.

Educational research and evaluation reports from the National Agency for Education have suggested that in order to create more equal opportunities for learning there is a need for teachers and schools to use norm-critical pedagogy for understanding, criticizing and counteracting the norms behind such privileging[1]. This has wide implications for schools, ranging from how they deal with discrimination and harassment to examining teaching methods and material. In this essay the focus will be much narrower: to examine what the implications can be when teaching literature in the English as a foreign language classroom. More specifically, focus is on the need to supplement the narratives commonly used in education, both in the sense of adding other stories but also by reading in challenging ways.

My claim is that *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin is a text that has several strengths in teaching literature in a norm-critical way since it deals with male same-sex relations – a theme which often is silenced in language education. However, from a norm-critical perspective it is problematic to just add stories about that which is *other than* the norm. This might simply reinforce the structures that create privilege. For that reason the essay contains a discussion about both strengths and weaknesses with the novel and how the norm-critical potential in literature can be reached or obscured in certain ways of teaching, learning and reading.

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[1] See for example the research anthology *Normkritisk pedagogik* (2010), published by The Centre for Gender Research at Uppsala University, or the reports *Diskriminerad, trakasserad, kränkt?: Barns, elevers och studerandes uppfattningar om diskriminering och trakasserier* (2009), published by Skolverket, and *"Man kan ju inte läsa om bögar i nån historiebok"* (2007), published by Friends.

Related to both literary instruction and norm-critical pedagogy is an underlying paradox that we seldom want to acknowledge: how to support certain kinds of thinking about literature or norms without simply imposing our own beliefs and notions on students. Because of this the main part of the essay consists of a pedagogical discussion rather than a literary analysis. Furthermore, the main motivation for the essay is to provide a theoretical background into these issues and briefly examine some possible pedagogical implications. These implications are mainly intended for the upper secondary school level, but working norm-critically with literature in language education can be equally relevant in earlier or later school forms and with other kinds of language material.

The first chapter of the essay consists of a theoretical and pedagogical discussion regarding the way literature is read or studied in school and some thoughts on its relevance in the foreign language classroom. There is also a brief presentation of the novel and a discussion of some potential difficulties when using this particular text. The second chapter briefly examines the relation between norms and education together with a discussion regarding norm-critical pedagogy and its implications. In the third chapter there is a pedagogical and literary analysis of how to work with *Giovanni's Room*. In the final chapter are some concluding reflections and remarks regarding the results of the essay.

1 Teaching *Giovanni's Room* in an English as a foreign language classroom

When students and teachers enter the language classroom at upper secondary school, they already have notions about literature and reading. These may be shaped by experiences of reading (or not reading) outside the educational context but also how literature is used in other subjects and in earlier school forms. This first chapter examines some of the possible conflicts that might occur between ideas of reading in different contexts and especially in relation to the analytical kind of reading teaching aims for. Theoretical and pedagogical aspects are discussed with the aim of examining possible consequences for the practice of teaching literature. Although the main interest in this essay is the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), some brief connections will also be made to how literature is used in other parts of the educational system that might influence students' experience of literature, for example school subjects such as Swedish, Swedish as a second language and Mother tongue tuition.

1.1 The use of literature in school

The use of literature is a well-established tradition at all levels of the school system, from nursery rhymes at preschool to narrative texts for children in primary school. Maybe literature is so commonly used in education that it seems slightly odd to question why and how we read literature in school and what ways of reading teaching should aim for. However such questions become more apparent when students enter higher levels of education, roughly from year 7-9 and in upper secondary school, where they are introduced to ways of reading that often constitute new and different modes for approaching literature compared to what most learners are used to. Already at this level, the syllabus for Swedish[2] stipulates that teaching should aim for an ability to "read and analyse literature" (Skolverket *Curriculum for the Compulsory* 211), and it goes on to mention quite specific aspects such as "literary genres and

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[2] Equivalent passages can be found in the syllabuses for Swedish as a second language (Skolverket *Curriculum for the Compulsory* 231) and Mother tongue tuition (86).

how they differ from each other in terms of style and content" and "[l]anguage features, structure and narrative perspective in fiction for youth and adults" (215) as the core content of the course. When it comes to teaching English as a foreign language we have to move to the somewhat more advanced level of upper secondary school to find similar literary references. The syllabus at this level mentions literary aspects such as "[c]ontent and form in different kinds of fiction" for English 5 and "[t]hemes, ideas, form and content in film and literature" for English 6 as core content that should be covered during the course (Skolverket *Curriculum for the Upper* online resource). What these syllabus-quotes have in common is that they require a basic introduction to more analytical and interpretative ways of reading.

Although at an elementary level, these ways of reading build on methods and theories used in higher education within the field of literary criticism. The progression to such analytical forms of reading is not always unproblematic, and during my own teacher training periods at upper secondary school, I have sensed a certain amount of tentativeness or apprehension among students regarding why and how literature should be read in school. While such confusion can be viewed as expected when students are introduced to new ways of thinking about literature, it can also be explained as a result of the disparity between the way literature is read in everyday life compared to how it is read in formal education.

Paradoxically, students undergoing this kind of progression might experience that, although they are already competent readers, they do not really know how to read a text as literature. A contributing factor might also be an increasing unfamiliarity among both students and teachers with the traditionally privileged cultural forms of expression such as literature. Especially since there is a widening range of cultural expression available in popular culture, together with new digital arenas for expression and entertainment such as social media, online gaming etc. Whatever the reason might be, the tension between different ways of reading literature has already been a source of debate within the field of literary studies. What can teachers learn from this and is there a need to rethink what kind of engagement with literary texts educators should aim for?

1.1.1 Conflicting views of reading and studying literature in school

> There is no goal in this process in the form of a single true interpretation. The goal for creative reading is instead an ever more deepened and multidimensional experience and, in the long run, a development of aesthetic experiences and the literary repertoire. (Persson 188)

From a theoretical viewpoint, literary scholars have presented a number of different models for understanding the conflict between everyday reading and the formal study of literature in higher education and research. In a recent article by Persson, some of the assumptions and contradictions behind such models are examined while the concept of "creative reading" is suggested as a means of bridging the gap (178). Although maintaining that the examined models provide insights into the phenomenon of reading, e.g. specifying various reading competences or how the activity of reading is shaped by surrounding circumstances, Persson views them as over-simplistic and inapt when describing the intricate ways that readers experience literature. As an example he delves into the distinction made by sociologist John Guillory between *professional reading* – as an ascetic, distanced, and essentially collective activity carried out as a form of paid labour within literary institutions – in contrast to *lay reading* – as a consumerist, pleasurable and essentially private activity performed by ordinary people as a spare time activity. Although distinguishing the importance of context, this model according to Persson, neglects the fact that reading is an intrinsically multi-layered activity. Pleasurable reading does not necessarily exclude reflective or analytical reading and vice versa. Neither do these supposedly opposite ways of reading restrain themselves neatly to the arena of literary institutions or spare time activity respectively. On the contrary, the occurrence of reading groups outside the academy, internet-based forums for literary discussion, etc., seems to suggest that there are contexts where reflective and pleasurable reading can coincide.

Another theoretical approach, which is scrutinized in Persson's article, originates from the field of reception theory and examines differences in the way readers respond to literature. An important aspect in this field of research, which was first introduced by literary theorist Jonathan Culler, is the distinction between linguistic competence – that is, simply "being able to read a text" – and literary competence – "being able to read a text as literature" (Persson 181). The latter competence involves reading literature according to the interpretative reading conventions of literary institutions, i.e. the meanings of literary texts are constructed in relation to such assimilated reading conventions (e.g. "the rules of metaphorical context and thematic unity" 181). However, Persson is highly critical of this model, because of the dismissal of subjective responses to literature – these are seen as irrelevant simply because

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they do not adhere to the prevalent conventions of literary interpretation – which he views as the consequence of such a narrow definition of literary competence. Not only are there disciplinary aspects of such a dismissal of subjectivity, which ought to be further discussed and theorised if the model is to be accepted, but more importantly, such a dismissal is detrimental if we really want to understand how a wider range of readers outside the academy read and use literature. Arguably, it is hardly possible to even conceive the act of reading without some sort of subjective response. By eliminating such vital parts of the reading experience from the theoretical model, a deeper understanding of the phenomenon is obscured. Rather than something that hinders reading, "subjectivity is not just about private associations in a narrow sense but also about making connections between the text and one's own experiences" (185). Consequently, Persson stresses that such a model leaves out "[c]entral forces and mechanism behind reading, such as empathy, identification, distance, getting lost in a text, desire, disgust and provocation" (185).

The argument in Persson's article goes in two directions: he claims that literary criticism as a field should include more research into non-professional reading and other ways of engaging with texts than the traditional interpretative or analytical approach. Teaching in schools on the other hand should not uncritically adopt literary analysis as the sole correct and authoritative way of approaching literature in language education, instead literary analysis should be part of an engagement with literature that aims for an explorative inquisitiveness moving between the subjective response of learners and more abstract levels of the text.

Persson suggests the concept of *creative reading* as a way of doing this. Since this model accepts subjectivity and emotionality as equally valid aspects of reading, teaching can centre on the interplay between the text and the response from learners. This does not mean that teachers should avoid teaching literary analysis, instead such interplay can also include teaching traditional literary aspects such as form, genre, language, etc., and the intricate ways in which the literariness of texts influence and evoke a reaction by the reader/learner. Through reflections about one's own reactions and by discussing them with others and also in relation to literary notions, the dichotomy between everyday reading and scholarly criticism can be undermined and a deeper understanding of literature made possible. Although it strikes a polemical tone, an advantage with Persson's discussion is that it helps teachers understand the tension between different views and uses of literature, while revealing the assumptions behind analytical or interpretative ways of reading and how they have been privileged in a traditional understanding of literature. In the following part of the chapter I will examine some

pedagogical issues if teaching is to move beyond the limitations of literary conventions and instead "recognize and use as its basis students' spontaneous reactions" (188).

1.1.2 Pedagogical implications of recognizing students' reader reactions

Envisionment building and reading stances

If we want to base our teaching on students' reactions to literature, we might need to examine the reading process in greater detail than the concept of creative reading does. As a basis for examining pedagogical implications, I will use a model presented by Langer, which is based on the concept of "envisionment building" in order to describe how individual readers find their way through literary texts (10). This thought-provoking notion can be useful if teachers want to incorporate, support and centre on the literary understandings of students in their teaching. In her model Langer defines the concept of envisionment as:

> text-worlds in the mind that differ from individual to individual. They are a function of one's personal and cultural experiences, one's relationship to the current experience, what one knows, how one feels, and what one is after. Envisionments are dynamic sets of related ideas, images, questions, disagreements, anticipations, arguments, and hunches that fill the mind during every reading, writing, speaking, or other experience in which one gains, expresses, and shares thoughts and understandings. Each envisionment includes what the individual does and does not understand, any momentary suppositions about how the whole will unfold, and any reactions to it. An envisionment is always either in a state of change or available for and open to change. (10)

With its emphasis on the complexity of readers' internal text-worlds this view of reading can help teachers understand the dynamics of the literature classroom, especially how students may understand and react to the same text very differently. Furthermore, envisionments are defined as dynamic concepts subjected to change as thoughts and ideas develop during and after the reading process. Such building of envisionments can be understood as the way readers make sense of a text both during the interaction between reader and text, and more importantly how sense-making changes in interaction with other readers and over time.

Langer's model also gives a detailed description of how readers, during the process of envisionment building, engage with the literary text from several distinctive points of reference or "reading stances" (16). These reading stances are not to be understood as steps in a linear development. Instead they can occur and vary throughout the reading process, and the reading of a particular text in a particular context might only involve one of them. In the first reading stance, "being outside and stepping into an envisionment" readers are occupied with

meaning building in a very general sense, i.e. creating images of the fictional world based on their understanding of the descriptions in the text or how the different parts of the text are connected (17). During the second stance, "being inside and moving through an envisionment" readers are more familiar with the text and become immersed in their text-world, while in the third stance, "stepping out and rethinking what you know" they distance themselves from the text and think about what it means in relation to their own lives (18-20). The fourth stance, "stepping out and objectifying the experience" involves even further distance as readers reflect, analyse and compare the work with texts (20-21). The fifth stance, "leaving an envisionment and going beyond" describes what happens after the readers move away from their text-world into other texts and will not be addressed in any detail in this essay (21). The advantages with using the concept of reading stances is that it "provides us with a way to conceptualize a seamless process that occurs when students develop understandings", and furthermore, that it "permits us to think about ways to enter a dialogue with students, asking them about their envisionments and some of the ideas they might contain" (24). Asking questions which centre on students' envisionments provides an opportunity for discussions that acknowledge students' thoughts and ideas about literature while also enabling them to discover other interpretations. It is important to note that the third and fourth stances are of particular interest in teaching that aims at connecting literature with the values of readers or looking at literary analysis.

In a similar way as with Persson's idea of creative reading, the approach described by Langer constitutes a change from more traditional forms of literary instruction. Langer describes such teaching as based on an "idealized conception of what a lesson should look like" (100) where the aim is for students to summarise the text and move towards an interpretation of the meaning of the text, often guided by more or less leading questions that aim for a predetermined interpretation. With a focus on such "surface understanding and received interpretations" (68) teachers have control over the 'right answers' and interpretations while students ultimately might end up only trying to guess what it is that the teacher wants to hear. As a result, the process of reading becomes an issue of finding right answers, which might distance readers rather than engage them in dialogues that provoke their own reactions, thoughts and ideas.

As a contrast, Langer suggests that the goal of teaching literature could be to help students arrive at their own understanding of texts, their envisionment building, while in the process exploring "horizons of possibilities" in literary texts and moving from "initial understanding to more thoughtful interpretations" (100). In the didactic analysis of this essay

I will examine two aspects of creating envisionment building lessons when teaching *Giovanni's Room*: how to support envisionment building in the classroom and how to create lessons that move between different levels of understanding.

1.2 Using literary texts in the foreign language classroom

Why read novels in the EFL classroom?

There are many reasons for reading literature in the language classroom. Compared to ordinary textbooks, literature is more authentic in the sense that it is written within the social context of native speakers and not primarily in order to be used or adopted for language learning. From that point of view, literary texts can be seen as "more indirect routes to […] the way of life of the country" (Collie and Slater 4) and in effect as material for developing intercultural awareness among students. This makes literature suitable as supplements to textbooks, which as Hedge mentions often risk providing a stereotypical presentation of the cultures of native language users (38-39). However, using literature in this way can also be quite problematic if we claim that specific literary works can provide the complete picture of an entire culture. On the contrary we should acknowledge that literature is written from a certain perspective and viewpoint. Having a certain perspective can also be seen as a strength in literature. Kramsch mentions as one of the values with using literature in language education: "literature's ability to represent the particular voice of a writer among the many voices of his or her community and thus to appeal to the particular in the reader" (131). Furthermore, in literature it becomes more apparent than in other forms of language that linguistic content is intrinsically connected and shaped by its form. In discussions that centre on norms and values this becomes especially interesting.

Another advantage with the literary form is that such reading provides a different kind of experience compared to the reading material used in textbooks. Instead of just reading in order to find information and answer questions, so called "efferent reading" (Kramsch 122), students engage in an experience, which has the potential of involving their imagination, reactions, hunches, thoughts, ideas, opinions, so called "aesthetic reading" (123). This means that students are more likely to react in a personal and emotional way when they read literature. These reactions can be used in further activities that become more open-ended or authentic in the sense that teachers do not necessarily have predetermined answers for them. Furthermore, such activities can involve other language skills such as talking about what you

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read, listening to others' reactions or writing down what you think. Consequently, reading literature can be a starting point for teaching that involves a wide range of language competence.

As mentioned earlier the syllabus for upper secondary English specifies that "[c]ontent and form in different kinds of fiction" as well as "[t]hemes, ideas, form and content in film and literature" as core content that should be covered during the course (Skolverket *Curriculum for the Upper* online resource). However it does not specify what kind of texts should be used or whether authentic or abridged material should be used. This leaves considerable room for students' and teachers' interests and aims.

1.3 Why teach *Giovanni's Room* in the EFL classroom?

Choosing a text

When teachers select texts to teach we probably ask ourselves a number of questions: if the text is appropriate for the proficiency level of our students, if students will be interested in the themes of the book and maybe if we, as teachers, like the book enough to teach it. One way of informing ourselves of students' interests is to do a questionnaire at the beginning of a course, where we ask each student if they read, what they like to read and why. Based on that, teachers can decide whether they want to cater to such interests or challenge students with other types of texts. During a course there should be a variation of reading assignments, both where the same text is read together with the whole class, as in this essay project, but also opportunities for students to freely choose texts that they read individually. As mentioned before, it is also probably a good idea to acknowledge the importance of our own reactions and feelings about a text, since our "initial reaction to the text will be [our] most valuable asset in teaching it" (Kramsch 138). Although our own interest can be a good resource for teaching, teachers might also need to question if there is a risk that we provide a limited selection of reading, if we are guided too much by our own or students' interests. Maybe there is a risk of projecting our own views as teachers of who the students are and what they prefer to read and discuss, or that we uncritically adopt a too narrow or specific choice of literature if we only cater to students' interests? This issue will be further discussed in the analysis.

Why Giovanni's Room?

Reader interest and language proficiency level, are not the only things to consider, when choosing texts. The kind of activity we aim for should also guide our choice. Kramsch

suggests that we also consider if the text does "lend itself more to an efferent or an aesthetic kind of reading" and if the "narrative structure [is] predictable or unpredictable"(138). As a consequence, Kramsch means that reading a book with familiar themes and an unsurprising structure, might invite students to read only on a surface level. For this reason reading material that is a bit more challenging to read can awaken more curiosity and reaction among students.

The novel *Giovanni's Room* which was published by the American author James Baldwin in 1956 is an example of a literary text which has challenging themes and narrative structure but where the language level should not be to daunting. The novel is also relatively short (169 pages) with a limited number of characters. It can be described as a psychological novel with a narrative that shifts between two time frames. One, written in the narrative present during which David, an American living a bohemian life in 1950s France, spends a final night alone in a rented house in the southern parts of the country, before returning to Paris. In the second time frame David, in a confessional tone, recounts and re-enacts a passionate love affair he had with a barman named Giovanni, whose life has descended into chaos and death, since David abandoned him for Hella, his long-time girlfriend. When the novel begins David is alone since Hella has left him and is heading back to America and Giovanni is incarcerated and about to be guillotined for murdering his former employer. Intercepted with his recollections are flashbacks to David's earlier relationships with various men and his feelings and frustrations about not accepting his attraction to them.

The book deals with issues such as the consequences and responsibilities of love, the importance of self-acceptance, how gender and sexuality categorizations can have limiting effects and coming to terms with an identity which is shunned by the society one lives in. Although, some aspects of the story are quite harrowing, it deals with issues that can be of interest to both younger and older readers such as the power of love to transcend social categorizations and identities, together with social issues such as homophobia and social alienation. Although *Giovanni's Room,* which predominantly features white characters, was long considered as a detour from the social issues regarding racism in the US, which the African-American author had dealt with in earlier writing, it is now considered to be one of Baldwin's more important novels and it is included in Penguin's series of 'modern classics'[3].

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[3] http://www.penguinclassics.co.uk/static/minisites/minimodernclassics/download/catalogue.pdf

2 Challenging norms in ways that change student and society

2.1 Norms and power

Norms regulate what acts and behaviours are expected and viewed as acceptable within a society. They are visible or invisible rules to which we adjust ourselves and through which we understand other people and occurrences in society. Norms can be explicit and clearly defined as in the "fundamental values" which are mentioned in the curriculum (Skolverket *Curriculum for the Compulsory* 9). Norms can also be a more or less implicit part of social interaction, acting as the 'lenses' through which we define people as having different genders, sexualities, ethnicities etc. It is predominantly such implicit norms that are discussed in this essay. Furthermore, norms are understood as instruments of power that permeate society and manifest themselves in schools as well; they have the power to create and enforce the *categorizations* of people mentioned above, and the notions of *normalcy* and *abnormality* they build on.

In this process, norms establish a sharp line that distinguishes between that which is 'norm' and that which is *other than* the norm. That which is on the 'other' side of the line is marginalized and can be target for discrimination and harassment whereas that which is within the line is privileged as 'normal' and taken for granted. For example, without "a heterosexual norm that is repeated and imitated in everything from childcare, to novels and in the workplace there would not have been homophobia" (Martinsson and Reimers 9, own translation). Furthermore, as Martinsson and Reimers mention, without a heterosexual norm it would make no sense to categorize people according to what sex or gender they are attracted to, neither would it make any sense to 'come out' as a homosexual since there would be no norm to be *other* than. This shows how important norms are for how we identify others, and ourselves, and thus they regulate our feelings and our bodies to a greater extent than we might want to acknowledge. However, the relation between individuals, norms and power is a complex one:

> Although some individuals and groups without a doubt have more to gain from the dominance of certain norms, it does not necessarily mean that they actively support or reinforce them. And even though some are marginalized, oppressed and discriminated because of dominating norms, that does not mean that they are not involved in repeating the very same norms. (Martinsson and Reimers 20, own translation)

Hence, the power of norms lies in their ability to shape how we all think and interact, and not with a certain individual or group. Although they constantly are reinforced, they are also challenged and resisted, but their power persists as long as they still remain our point of reference or framework for interaction.

2.2 Norms in school

The discussion about norms might seem theoretical, especially if one has little experience of being on that 'other' side of the line of normalcy. However, in the social arena of schools, the workings of norms are far from hypothetical. On the contrary, in an evaluation project carried out by the National Agency for Education, schools were described as "central arenas for the socialisation of children, pupils and students into different norm systems" (Skolverket *Diskriminerad* 88, own translation). In this qualitative study, over 500 students at different levels of the Swedish school system were interviewed. The authors of the report claim that according to their findings, "certain norms dominate and characterize the power relations [in school]". They mention that:

> [b]eing a secular Christian, functions as a norm according to the statements of interviewees, as well as being white and heterosexual. The notion of gender differences as 'normal', i.e. viewing boys and girls as different and complementary, permeates the school forms. (Skolverket *Diskriminerad* 11, own translation)

Such findings indicate that norms are certainly real and part of the way learners experience everyday school-life in Sweden. In the same evaluation report, the National Agency for Education recommends teachers to "reflect critically on the methods they use and not least their *own* norms and values, as well upon their role as norm creators. They should apply a norm-critical perspective together with children, pupils and students and reflect on what values and norms exist in the school forms as well as what norms are possible to change" (99)[4]. Although, the main priority might be to examine and change how norms regulate the social interaction within schools, reading and discussing literature in a norm-critical way can at least provide one kind of starting point for a dialogue on the mechanisms behind norms.

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[4] The National Agency for Education also suggests that the norm-critical perspective should be included as a course objective in the Degree Ordinance for teacher education in Sweden (Skolverket *Diskriminerad* 99).

2.3 Norm-critical pedagogy and strategies for supplementation

There are many ways to understand and counteract oppression in school, and educators sometimes use several approaches or move between them depending on aim and situation. In order to assess their strengths and weaknesses, it is important to examine their relation to the issues of norms and power mentioned above. Problems concerning such oppression have been surveyed in a wide range of educational research. In *Troubling Education,* Kumashiro provides a lengthy examination where the findings and approaches within such research are summarized into four different ways of understanding and addressing issues of oppression: "education for the Other, education about the Other, education that is critical of privileging and Othering, and education that changes students and society" (31).

The first two are often labelled as 'tolerance pedagogy' since they recognize and support student diversity and enrich student awareness of difference, e.g. by adding specific lessons or material about 'the other'. However, some problematic aspects according to Kumashiro are that they focus heavily on the marginalization of 'the other' while overlooking the privileging of 'the normal'. Furthermore, they often entail a potentially limiting definition of 'the other'. The point is that knowledge about 'the other' within these two approaches never really disrupts the privileging power of norms.

On the other hand, education that is critical of privileging and 'othering' moves beyond the notion of individual difference and examines norms and other structural aspects of oppression. This approach does not only teach *about* oppression but also tries to change society by teaching pupils critical thinking and acting. This is what norm-critical pedagogy aims for. However, awareness does not automatically result in action and transformation. According to Kumashiro, becoming aware of oppressive structures might just as well lead to a reluctance or resistance to change, since such awareness points out how we all are participating in the creation and strengthening of oppressive structures, which of course can be quite a daunting thing to acknowledge. As a consequence, teachers need to recognize that in order to learn new ways of thinking, students as well as teachers might need to 'unlearn' other ways of thinking, which might lead to resistance.

The fourth approach – education that changes student and society – views oppression as a product of discourse. Especially the repetition of discourses that build on a way of thinking that privileges certain identities and marginalizes other. Such stereotypes or "harmful citational practices" (*Troubling* 51) change over time and depending on situation. To address this process, Kumashiro suggests the poststructuralist notion of 'supplementation' which

means "to cite, but also to add something new in the process" (52). According to this approach, simply reconsidering stereotypes or creating critical awareness is not enough to enable change, what is needed is to examine and supplement harmful associations and narratives. This involves examining how narratives on several and sometimes unexpected levels are partial and leave out certain aspects and perspectives. As an example, of how such narratives unexpectedly privilege certain identities while marginalizing others, Kumashiro mentions how most stories about the Second World War leave out the Nazi persecution of gays and lesbians or people with disabilities.

The point with Kumashiro's examination as I understand it, is that teachers need to consider that how they teach might actually contradict what they aim for. If we simply add stories about 'the other', we do not acknowledge the dominance and power of norms. From a norm-critical perspective we need also to challenge things that are taken for granted in the texts we usually teach. When teaching canonical 'love stories' such as Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* or Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, we probably rarely discuss how aspects that are taken for granted – such as whiteness, heterosexuality or able-bodiedness – are portrayed in them. On the contrary, such texts are viewed simply as love stories or classics and are not labelled as stories about straight, white or able-bodied characters etc. Together with this, literature that covers marginalized themes, such as male same-sex relations, also needs to be added into the selection of canonical texts or love stories traditionally read, in order to challenge their privileged position. Important to note however, is that adding such texts only as supposedly authentic representations of a marginalized group might risk strengthening that marginalized position and providing a narrow way of representing the diversity within such a group. Furthermore, if those stories are presented *only* to discuss norms we might convey that they lack literary value or complexity if we do not address such issues when we teach our 'usual' material.

In conclusion, if we want to teach in a norm-critical way that also challenges norms and power in school, we also need to acknowledge the paradoxes behind such an approach. One way of doing this is to employ a *double strategy* where marginalized groups or voices are strengthened at the same time as the norms that create their marginalized position are criticized (Bromseth and Wildow, 102-103). This strategy is what I build on when I argue that we need 'supplementing narratives' in the sense of adding other stories to the ones we already teach, but also to 'supplement' these narratives by reading both privileged and marginalized stories in norm-challenging ways. Education should provide a diverse choice of texts to read,

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and all texts within such a diverse choice of material should be resources for discussing literary themes and aspects as well as issues regarding norms and power.

3   Analysis

In this chapter I will examine some issues concerning the *practice* of teaching *Giovanni's Room* in a norm-critical way. In accordance with the approach of creative reading, more emphasis is placed on eliciting reader response from students rather than the teacher presenting a detailed analysis. The main part of the analysis consists of a pedagogical discussion on how to support and work with students in their envisionment building process. However, some themes and passages to bring up as starting points for classroom discussions are suggested. These are discussed in relation to the double strategy for challenging norms, especially regarding how this reading project is presented and how different aspects connected to norms and power can be addressed integrated with literary discussions. The main point is that although *Giovanni's Room* in many ways can be seen as story which covers silenced or marginalized themes such as male same-sex relations, the norm-critical potential lies rather in reading it on an equal footing with other canonical texts, i.e. reading it for literary value and discussing the novel as a love story rather than as a 'gay novel'. Nonetheless, this does not exclude discussions regarding discursive aspects of the text such as how gay men or male same-sex relations are represented and how such representations correspond to other fictional portrayals of love and sexuality and how they might relate to stereotypical notions and norms among readers or in society. Finally, the analysis concludes with a discussion regarding choice of literature and strengths and weaknesses with this particular novel when teaching literature in a norm-critical way.

3.1   Lessons that involve students in literary discussions in the EFL classroom

The first part of this analysis provides some suggestions when applying the *pedagogical* approach of envisionment building, with the aim of moving along the meaning building processes of students, and using these as a point of departure into more analytical or thoughtful interpretations.

3.1.1 Creating lessons that move between different aspects of the reading experience

As mentioned earlier, applying a more student-based approach means that we might want to base our lesson on other tasks than summarising the text and examining more or less predetermined interpretations. Instead tasks are needed that provide room for students to develop understanding and help them think about their own ideas. In her model Langer suggests a number of tasks that can help us when "beginning […and…] continuing the literary experience" (101):

- Easing access before reading
- Inviting initial understandings
- Developing interpretations
- Taking a critical stance
- Stocktaking

Some examples of tasks for easing access, developing interpretations and taking a critical stance in relation to *Giovanni's Room* will be presented. Since it, for obvious reasons, is impossible to hypothesise how students react to the text, the specific questions, quotes and task are suggestions that might need modification depending on situation. Still, I have tried to figure out tasks that invite to talks about the text without being too specific or based on the teacher's opinion.

Easing access

The point with *easing access before reading* is to "invite students into the literary experience" by "providing a signal to them that the primary experience will be a subjective one", but without "leading students to a particular interpretation" (Langer 101-102). The way I understand it, this is a method for conceptualising for students what the reading activity will be about and summon their envisionment building, i.e. both their reading skills and imaginative skills. What kind of tasks we choose for this depends largely on the aims and materials of the specific lesson and on what group of students is being taught. As the discussion in this essay is mainly intended for the upper secondary school level where

students are likely to have at least some familiarity with different kinds of reading material and literature, I am going to suggest tasks that are slightly more abstract.

First I would present *Giovanni's Room* simply by saying that we are going to read a novel that is considered to be a 'modern classic'. As I write those two words on the board, I ask students to silently and individually ponder what a modern classic is and what aspects make a novel a modern classic and if they come to think of any examples. The students are asked to do a 'quickwrite', i.e. jot down their ideas on a piece of paper during a couple of minutes. The quickwrite is a good way to get students to start thinking and provides time and opportunity for students, especially those who might be a little intimidated by voicing their thoughts immediately, some time to get ready for a discussion. When they have jotted down some ideas, I invite students to share and discuss their ideas, while writing down their contributions on the board, in the form of a 'mind-map'. Of course it is hard to hypothesise what students might say or not say but depending on what ideas they put forth I would try to make students aware of specific aspects of this particular novel. That there can be many literary aspects that makes people consider a text to be a classic, such as the way it is written, if it is an innovative novel, if there are unique or memorable characters, or if they portray specific events or eras in a memorable way. That classics bring up questions and ideas that are hard to answer and hence worth thinking about over and over etc.

Even if the aim is mainly to get students thinking about specific literary aspects of classics, e.g. that they are considered to be more 'artistic' with more elaborate narrative or language, this can also develop into a short discussion on who decides what a classic is, and if there are any particular biases for example in the lists of classics that certain literary critics or publishers produce etc., that there are classics in different genres such as horror classics, SF classics etc. Other ways of introducing *Giovanni's Room* in order to reach a similar aim would be to present it as a 'psychological novel' or a 'tragic love story'. After the introductory discussion, I would finish the session by reading the first couple of pages aloud.

Presenting *Giovanni's Room* as a modern classic, psychological novel or tragic love story rather than as a 'gay novel' is part of the norm-critical approach in the sense that it puts the text on an equal footing with other literary texts that treat similar themes or have similar status as classics but portray more privileged groups and identities. Furthermore it is a way of introducing the novel that puts emphasis on its literary qualities rather than only stressing its potential for challenging norms. Weaknesses might be that it builds on views of literary value and canonical status, which can be viewed as hierarchical and in a sense normative, and furthermore that students' reading might be influenced by these three different ways of

understanding the text. However, the literary discussion has to start somewhere and I believe that these ways of presenting the novel do not lead students too strongly to such interpretations of the text but that they instead can provide ways of initiating a dialogue that can include students' opinions and reader response.

Developing interpretations

During the following sessions students will have time for individual reading and will be encouraged to write down questions during the reading as a part of their envisionment building, but no specific task should be given during these 'reading session'. But as reading proceeds it is time for tasks that *develop interpretations*. The point with this is to discuss issues that students bring up as they have started to develop their own envisionments. It can be a good idea to give group assignments and specify how far the students should have read. For this particular novel I estimate that one week would suffice for introducing the novel and for initial individual reading time. During the second week of reading an assignment would be given to complete during that week: to finish the first part (pages 1-75), and bring *one quote* and *one question* to class, that students would like to discuss in groups.

During the group session each group is asked to bring at least one question that they want to discuss with the whole class. Langer suggests that students during these sessions are "invited to explore aspects such as motives, feelings, relationships, conflicts, and actions" in relation to the issues that are they want to bring up. In relation to the first part of *Giovanni's Room* such issues could involve how David and Giovanni meet and how David's attitude to Giovanni changes, or the talks about love and relationships that David have with the more 'openly' gay but older friend Jacques. If I would suggest a topic to the students it would be 'love at first sight', I would read the following quote and ask them if they have any ideas how 'love stories' portray flirting and love at first sight. The quote is from a scene when the two meet for the first time at the bar where Giovanni works, and at this particular passage they have been joking and teasing each other for some time:

> …Giovanni poured my drink. *'Vive l'amerique,'* he said.
> 'Thank you,' I said, and lifted my glass, *'vive le vieux continent.'*
> We were silent for a moment.
> 'Do you come in here often?' asked Giovanni suddenly.
> 'No,' I said, 'not very often.'
> 'But you will come,' he teased, with a wonderful, mocking light on his face, 'more often *now*?'
> I stammered: 'Why?'
> 'Ah!' cried Giovanni. 'Don't you know when you have made a friend?'
> I knew I must look foolish and that my question was foolish too: 'So soon?'

> 'Why no,' he said, reasonably, and looked at his watch, 'we can wait another hour if you like. We can become friends then. Or we can wait until closing time. We can become friends *then.* Or we can wait until tomorrow, only that means that you must come in here tomorrow and perhaps you have something else to do' He put his watch away and leaned both elbows on the bar. (Baldwin 37)

One or maximum two more weeks of individual reading, with similar group assignments and discussions, will follow this session.

In the same way as with the introductory session, I believe that there is a norm-critical potential in putting the story of David and Giovanni in connection with other love stories regardless of gender and sexuality. Such connections can be used for discussing similarities and differences and how norms and power structures in a specific context might limit or encourage what kind of love is possible to feel and express. This more critical discussion will be further developed in the next part of the reading process.

Taking a critical stance

As mentioned earlier, Langer describes how one part of the reading process is to step out of one's envisionments and objectify what one reads and how one reacts to it. Teachers can help students do this by examining issues related to the text that can be of historical, literary, social or political nature. Students can also be invited to think about alternatives, for example by considering the perspectives of different characters in the text. Furthermore Langer suggests that one invites "students to recognise their own biases and to step back from them for a moment and see the characters from other perspectives" or "to extend their understanding by looking at social and political issues beyond the one that initially comes to mind" (104). This is also the time to bring up literary elements and analysis. Consequently, this is where norm-critical perspective can be addressed more directly. The task to prepare for this session would be first of all to have finished reading the novel, secondly to write a very short paragraph (50-200 words) based on one of the following questions and bring a question to class: In your opinion what does or does not make this a 'modern classic' or 'psychological novel', How did you find this as a 'love story'?

During the session I would invite students to sum up their impressions, thoughts and questions during the reading of *Giovanni's Room*. Depending on where the discussion goes, some of the following themes, passages and questions could be addressed:

Love and its limitations

The character David is in many ways both within the norm and other than the norm. He has a girlfriend but while she is away, he falls in love with a man. This is one of the main psychological tensions in the novel, which also to some extent disrupts the idea of stable sexual identities. However, the relationship between David and Hella is portrayed as more respectable or 'normal', for example David mentions Hella but not Giovanni in a letter to his father, and when staying in the house in southern France, David similarly only talks about Hella with the landlord. These two different relations put David in two very different positions: one within the norm and one on the other side. A theme in the novel is the question of how the character David deals with and expresses these two love affairs and what the consequences and implications are of acknowledging a love that puts the individual outside the limit of the norm. Throughout the novel there are many statements about such difficulties. For example the character Jacques, one of David's older and more 'openly' gay friends says:

> 'Love him,' said Jacques, with vehemence, 'love him and let him love you. Do you think anything else under heaven really matters? And how long, at the best, can it last, since you are both men and still have everywhere to go? Only five minutes, I assure you, only five minutes, and most of that, *helas*! in the dark. And if you think or them as dirty, then they *will* be dirty – they will be dirty because you will be giving nothing, you will be despising your flesh and his. But you can make your time together anything but dirty, you can give each other something which will make both of you better – forever – if you will not be ashamed, if you will only *not* play it safe.' He paused, watching me, and then looked down to his cognac. 'You play it safe long enough,' he said, in a different tone, 'and you'll end up trapped in your own dirty body, forever and forever and forever – like me.' And he finished his cognac, ringing his glass slightly on the bar to attract the attention of Madame Clothilde. […]
> I smiled. 'Things my father never told me.'
> '*Somebody*,' said Jacques, 'your father or mine, should have told us that not many people have ever died of love. But multitudes have perished, and are perishing every hour – and in the oddest of places! – for the lack of it.' (Baldwin 56-57)

Another aspect of love and its limitations is the question whether it is possible to choose whom one falls in love with or if it is a matter of fate and the role of accepting what life brings or takes away. Early on in the novel, David states:

> But people can't, unhappily, invent their mooring posts, their lovers and their friends, anymore than they can invent their parents. Life gives these and also takes them away and the great difficulty is to say Yes to life. (Baldwin 5)

In connection to these quotes I would invite students to discuss how they interpret such statements about love and how they think they relate to the rest of the novel.

Considering other topics than the ones that initially come to mind

Another way of taking a critical stance, could be to invite students to "extend their understanding by looking at social and political issues beyond the one that initially comes to mind" (Langer 104). In relation to *Giovanni's Room* it could be the role of France and Paris for an American character in the 1950s, or possibly a general discussion if 'different rules apply when you are visiting or living temporarily abroad'. Do people feel more 'free' to do things they would not normally do 'at home'? What does such 'freedom' entail? And what people have opportunity to live or travel abroad? This could be connected to two quotes in the beginning of the text, where the narrator David, looks back at his two years in France:

> And these nights were being acted out under a foreign sky, with no-one to watch, no penalties attached – it was this last fact which was our undoing, for nothing is more unbearable, once one has it than freedom. […]
>
> There is something fantastic in the spectacle I now present to myself of having run so far, so hard, across the ocean even, only to find myself brought up short once more before the bulldog in my own backyard – the yard, in the meantime, having grown smaller and the bulldog bigger. (Baldwin 5-6)

Fictional representations of a 'gay man' in Giovanni's Room

In many ways, David is a literary character that is unsympathetic and mean to others, including himself. One way of interpreting him is that he suffers from internalized homophobia. But rather than discussing whether David is a good guy or bad guy, it can be more interesting and potentially norm-critical to discuss him for what he is: a literary character.

If we describe the character David as a gay man that is struggling with accepting his attraction and love for men, I would invite students to discuss how this particular representation of a 'gay man' is similar or different to other representations of a 'gay man' that they have encountered in literature, films or TV shows. Further questions to discuss with students could be what stereotypes they believed before reading this novel and how those stereotypes did influence their reading. Or how the novel complicates students' understanding of sexual identities, discrimination and love. Or what the social consequences of this book could be in changing or strengthening stereotypes today or when it was published in 1956?

We can further problematize David as a representation if we consider how he as the narrator of the story describes two of the visitors at Giovanni's bar and discuss through what kind of 'lenses' David sees these characters?

> There was the boy who worked all day, it was said, in the post-office, who came out at night wearing makeup and earrings and with his heavy blond hair piled high. Sometimes he actually wore a skirt and high heels. He usually stood alone unless Guillaume walked over to tease him. People said that he was very nice but I confess that his utter grotesqueness made me uneasy; perhaps in the same way that the sight of monkeys eating their own excrement turns some people's stomachs. They might not mind so much if monkeys did not – so grotesquely – resemble human beings. (Baldwin 27)

> Now someone whom I had never seen before came out of the shadows toward me. It looked like a mummy or a zombie – this was the first, overwhelming impression – of something walking after it had been put to death. And it walked, really, like someone who might be sleep-walking or like those figures in slow motion one sometimes sees on the screen. It carried a glass, it walked on its toes, the flat hips moved with a dead, horrifying lasciviousness. […] It glittered in the dim light; the thin black hair was violent with oil, combed forward, hanging in bangs; the eyelids gleamed with mascara, the mouth raged with lipstick. The face was white and thoroughly bloodless with some kind of foundation cream; it stank of powder and a gardenia-like perfume. (Baldwin 38)

These are certainly some of the more problematic passages of the book, especially in the way the characters are described as non-human or sub-human by David and even reducing the latter character to the pronoun 'it'. But these passages also show the workings of norms in the sense that they are clear examples of how David is a character that certainly reinforces violently normative images at the same time as he is haunted by a love affair that puts him on that same 'other' side of the norm as the character he describes with such vehemence.

If we further consider the many occurrences of mirrors, windows, and other forms of reflections that David sees himself through, we might ask the challenging question: When David sees his own reflection, what does he see? And through what kind of 'lenses' does he see himself?

The norm-critical aim with examining fictional depictions of different sexual categories such the character David as a gay man, is to move the discussion from whether these are authentic representations of such groups and instead focus on how all representations are constructions that are shaped by the particular voice of the author and the context wherein the novel is produced. Aspects of this have been brought up in previous research. As an example, Nelson has found that when teachers present material with fictional representations of gay or lesbian characters, there is a risk that classroom discussions focus on whether students liked these particular characters and if they correspond to how gays or lesbians 'really' are. As a result, she finds that teachers hesitate on what kind of representations they should include in teaching, and that teachers generally opt for representations that are positive and mainstream in order to strengthen tolerance among students. If the aim instead is to invite students to examine normative assumptions or "the making of normal" (210), Nelson suggests "making representation processes themselves the focus in class" (211). One way of doing this is to ask students to compare this novel to other portrayals of gay men.

Another issue, which has been brought up by Kumashiro, is that when teachers try to raise awareness among students by asking them to make connections between what they read and their own lives, there is a risk that such questions do not challenge the way students think about themselves. He points out that such questions fail to "raise awareness of why students might have subconsciously desired thinking about social differences in only certain ways" (*Against* 74). Instead Kumashiro suggests that teachers ask questions that make students reflect on how their own views, expectations, assumptions or stereotypes might influence how they read the novel. These two approaches by Nelson and Kumashiro have inspired the kind of questions that I have suggested above. Such questions can help us read marginalized stories such as *Giovanni's Room* in norm-challenging ways since they put emphasis on the lenses through which students and teachers understand such texts rather than adding them simply as authentic representations that although they might strengthen tolerance also might strengthen the marginalized position of such stories.

3.1.2 Supporting envisionment-building in the classroom

During lessons that aim to encourage envisionment building, how do we support an explorative dialogue in the classroom? First of all, Langer means that teaching must start where the students are in their reading process. From a teacher perspective this constitutes a considerable shift both in focus and control over the interaction in class. If we acknowledge and invite students as competent readers and thinkers, teachers need to listen more carefully to their envisionments and provide room for students to examine them in class. Instead of following more or less carefully laid-out lessons plans teachers might need to provide opportunities for students to develop the thoughts that might come up spontaneously. But the aim is not only to talk about students' envisionments but also to challenge them and expose students to the interpretations of others. Langer especially states the importance of treating questions "as a part of the literary experience" and using "multiple perspectives […] to enrich interpretation" (69-71).

However as Langer mentions, students are not always willing to ask questions openly in the classroom since they might feel exposed as 'bad readers' or showing a lack of knowledge. But in an envisionment-building classroom, asking questions about what has been read is evidence that the open-ended process of reading is taking place. For that reason teachers have to put an effort on helping students asking good questions and use these questions to develop

their understanding. One way of doing this is ask students to come up with questions in the reading assignments teachers give. Another way is to support questioning during classroom discussions. Often teachers do this without thinking about it, but nevertheless it can be useful to consider what we do more specifically when helping students to engage in fruitful discussions. Langer suggests that teachers provide two kinds of support: helping students to participate in discussions and helping students to think through ideas. She gives examples of how participation can be supported by *inviting* students in the discussion, asking them to *clarify* their points, *orchestrating* how the discussion proceeds in order to support *turn-taking* and asking students to *connect* to the ideas of others (91-94). Similarly, Langer describes how students are supported in their thinking when teachers help them *focus* their ideas, *narrow down* the topic, *sharpen* the discussion or *up the ante* by presenting less obvious ways to think about a subject (93-94). When providing such support for interaction and discussion, questions do not only involve resolving uncertainties about what has been read but also "considering alternatives, weighing evidence, and developing yet other questions" (69).

In the lessons plans described previously I would actively use these supporting ways for creating a collaborative atmosphere. As students become more and more accustomed with these ways of interacting it can be a good idea to encourage students to take more and more responsibility over turn-taking, idea-sharing and connecting to ideas of others themselves. However, initially it might be necessary to assign group-leaders who orchestrate interaction during group discussions.

3.2 *Giovanni's Room* and norm-critical pedagogy

Norm-critical aspects on the choice of literature

As mentioned in the first chapter there is considerable room within the Swedish school system for both students and teachers in the EFL classroom to choose reading material that caters to or challenges their interests. From a norm-critical perspective it is important to ask ourselves if there is a risk that we as teachers project our views of who the students are when we imagine what they like to read. For example if we think that all students are heterosexual, we might think that a story with gay or lesbian themes would be uninteresting or too sensitive. By this I am not suggesting that students, teachers or anybody else for that matter, only would want to read stories that directly reflect their background. What I am suggesting is that by

providing a more or less diverse choice of reading, teachers, in a way, provide the 'frames' for what kind of reader interest is possible to express in the classroom. Furthermore, in classrooms that are permeated by different kinds of norms – where students might feel hesitant to display an interest for reading literature which presents topics that are considered 'strange' or on the 'other side' of the norm – it is up to the teacher to show that having an interest in such marginalized topics is accepted and supported. This could be done quite easily, for example by adding a diverse choice of topics and literature when we compose reading lists or suggest topics for the students to choose from. However, the starting point must be that teachers examine the lenses through which they themselves view the world and whether their choice of literature really provides a diverse and wide range of perspectives. One way of doing this is to examine strengths and weaknesses with different novels from a norm-critical perspective and this analysis ends with such a brief examination regarding the novel *Giovanni's Room.*

Strengths with Giovanni's Room

The main strength with *Giovanni's Room* is its complexity. Despite its brief format, the novel features challenging literary aspects such as its narrative structure together with nuanced and thought-provoking characters. The main character can be described as a person who is struggling to come to terms with his self-image. As a gay man with internalized homophobic notions about himself and other gay or queer men, he is a character that is reinforcing violently normative images at the same time as he is haunted by a love affair that puts him on the 'other' side of the norm. Such a complex voice could provide an interesting starting point for norm-critical as well as literary discussions. The novel also asks challenging questions about love and its power to transcend the limitations of normative structures, while in the meantime showing the cost of not acknowledging love in one's own life.

Furthermore, the fact that it is an historical text can provide a sense of continuity for gay, lesbian or questioning students. Reading and experiencing the struggles with identity of its main character can also help readers get a perspective on their own struggles.

Weaknesses with Giovanni's Room

The main character David describes other homosexual or queer men in a denigrating and grotesque way. In many ways this makes the text challenging and potentially harmful for students.

Death is associated to the story in a similar way as in a long tradition of literary representations where gay or lesbian characters are connected with misery and exclusion. However, the death of Giovanni does not occur because of his sexuality but rather as a result of his poverty and vulnerability in a hostile environment. Furthermore, one might ask if stories about marginalized people always must be positive with a 'happy end' in order to be suitable for teaching? Arguably, we do not for example find tragic love stories about heterosexual characters problematic in the same way. But at the same time we need to acknowledge that there is a risk that reading a text such as *Giovanni's Room* might make students believe that the character David is feeling bad simply because he is gay, and thus jump to the conclusion that being gay is a bad thing. Such unintentional ways of teaching and how to address them must constantly be considered in a norm-critical approach

A possible weakness with this text is its distance from students' lives since it was published such a long time ago. A risk with this could be that students think that the kind of oppression and homophobia featured in the novel could not occur today.

4 Conclusions

Whether we like it or not schools are places that are influenced by norms and power structures in society, and as a result some voices remain within the privileged position of the norm while other voices are marginalized and 'othered'. In this essay some ways of employing a norm-critical approach are suggested, with the aim of challenging such power structures within the context of teaching literature in the EFL classroom. The novel *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin – with its story about male same-sex love – is presented as a literary text that features marginalized themes and characters. In relation to the question of how to teach this novel, paradoxes and unintentional effects of such teaching are examined both regarding how issues of power and norms are addressed and in relation to literary instruction in general.

The main advantages with using literary texts in language education are the opportunities that such reading enables for subjective reader reactions, aesthetic experiences, and making connections to one's own views and the assumptions that permeate our society. However, when teaching literary analysis, there is a risk that subjective responses to literature are devalued or disregarded. Since I find that these aspects are essential to the reading experience, a theoretical background is provided that centres on the concepts of creative reading and envisionment building. These are presented in order to shift the focus of literary teaching from traditional interpretative reading conventions and instead move along the meaning-building process of students. Especially when considering how sense-making is formed in interaction with teachers, other students and in relation to other texts. As a pedagogical implication of this, the importance of supporting inquisitive dialogues that move from initial understanding to more thoughtful interpretations – both within and beyond traditional literary analysis – is emphasised rather than making students provide right answers to teacher-led questions.

Applying a norm-critical pedagogy has wide implications ranging from how schools counteract harassment and discrimination to examinations of pedagogical material and methods. Within the narrow context of teaching literature in the EFL classroom the main argument of the essay is that there is a need to add literary texts that feature marginalized or 'othered' themes and voices, and examples are given of how this can be done in relation to *Giovanni's Room*. Questions are suggested that can help teachers facilitate an exploration of norm-critical aspects as well as literary features of the novel. These focus on discursive aspects of the text and puts it in context with other literary representations of love as well as representations of different sexual categories or groups such as gay men.

However, although addition of such texts is a way of acknowledging diversity and strengthening tolerance, only adding 'othered' texts fails to challenge the privileged position of the texts we usually teach and the supposed normalcy of the identities and themes they feature. In that sense this approach might only strengthen the marginalized position of such texts. Further paradoxical effects are mentioned in the essay, such as the risk of diminishing the literary value of 'othered' literature if it is only addressed in order to discuss norms, or the risk of providing a limited image of the diversity within marginalized groups if these texts are seen as authentically representing such groups.

Although stressing the importance of providing a diverse choice of literature, I argue that in order to deal with these paradoxes there is a need to ask norm-challenging questions not only about texts which feature marginalized themes – such as *Giovanni's Room* – but rather to question the norms or 'lenses' through which both privileged and marginalized literature is viewed. In conclusion, supplementing narratives are needed both in the sense of adding 'othered' stories but also by reading all texts in challenging ways. This is in line with a double strategy that strengthens marginalized groups or voices, while at the same time criticizing the norms that create their marginalized position.

The concept of envisionment building provides detailed tools for recognising how students' literary understanding move from initial reader response to more developed interpretations. In further research it would be interesting to examine if this process can be observed among students. Such observations could be analysed in order to examine if the tentativeness towards literary analysis that I have sensed among students really is related to a lack of acknowledging the importance of the meaning-building process of students or if it is related to some other factor. Furthermore, a question to examine in relation to norm-critical pedagogy could be whether such teaching should move beyond enabling awareness of norms and values. Since the power of norms lies very much in how they shape our way of thinking, it could be argued that teaching should aim for disrupting and replacing such normative frameworks altogether. However, these two approaches involve different teacher roles, where the latter puts far greater emphasis on teachers as agents for social change in society in general. Implications of such a teacher role could need further examination.

In conclusion, as evaluation reports carried out by the National Agency for Education indicate, issues of norms and power influence the interaction in schools. Although this essay aims at challenging such norms by examining the prevalent narratives in language education together with an inclusion of 'othered' narratives, teachers should not imagine that such supplemented reading lists could be defined once and for all. Instead we need to acknowledge

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that all forms of teaching are partial and only include certain voices while excluding others. Instead of finding an ultimate choice of texts, teachers together with students should aim for examining their own lenses when reading and choosing literature. Questioning aspects that are taken for granted and examining portrayals of both marginalized and privileged groups can be ways of doing this. In this process, teaching can benefit from analysing the norm-critical strengths and weaknesses with certain literary texts and acknowledging the paradoxes behind both literary instruction and norm-critical pedagogy in order to reflect on the choice of material and methods. Hopefully this essay has provided a useful framework for such examinations together with examples that show the relevance of reading, teaching and examining James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* in a norm-critical way within the EFL classroom.

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