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The Classic Dilemma

EFL Teachers' Attitudes, Motivations and Methods
When Teaching Literature

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Abstract

As the communicative approach to language learning is adopted throughout Europe, the value of some aspects of foreign language teaching is put to question. One of these aspects is the study of literature and literary canons. This study aims to examine English as a foreign language-teachers' (EFL) perspectives, attitudes and motivations concerning literature, literary canons and their implementation in the classroom. This is achieved through interviewing five EFL-teachers, all of which are active at various upper secondary schools in Sweden. The study finds that all respondents view literature as containing an inherent aesthetic value, and see reading literature as beneficial to students due to it conveying valuable second-hand experiences and perspectives. In contrast, respondents' views on literary canons, as well as teacher-student roles when teaching literature are more varied. Finally, the majority of respondents report a difference between their own and their students' views on literature, with students questioning the purpose of reading literature at all. From these findings, a few areas of future research are identified. Firstly, more in-depth survey research must be carried out with regard to teachers' motivation behind chosen methods for teaching literature. Secondly, the incongruence between teacher-student views on reading warrants further study. Notably, any such studies should include both students' and teachers' accounts of the phenomenon.

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1 Introduction

As many European language teachers are no doubt aware, the communicative approach to language teaching and learning has gained a strong foothold in steering documents throughout Europe these past decades; this approach focuses on an appropriate use of language, rather than strict grammatical and linguistic instruction, where communication, fluency and mutual understanding is key. Indeed, many language teachers today may not have experienced any other form of language teaching. In light of this, one aspect of language teaching in particular has come into question: teaching literature in the target language in the classroom (McKay, 1982). While many proponents of the communicative approach shunned the practice at first due to, among other things, literary language being seen as inappropriate and overly academic, this attitude has mellowed as of late. In fact, the case is now being made for granting literature a role in the communicative classroom (Savvidou, 2004). That said, this positive outlook is not necessarily shared by all language teachers.

Literature has traditionally played an important role in second language (L2) teaching; in particular, the reading, study and analysis of literary works from the culture of the target language were quite common (Tornberg, 2009, p. 35). The aforementioned communicative changes to European language education (Hedge, 2000, p. 46) have arguably affected this practice in particular, putting into question the nature of literary canons and whether they are relevant to modern L2 teaching.

According to the corresponding steering documents, teachers of English in Swedish upper secondary school are allowed a great deal of freedom in not only choosing what literature to teach, but also how they want to teach it. The current curriculum for Swedish upper secondary school states that it is every school's responsibility that students "can use non-fiction, fiction and other forms of culture as a source of knowledge, insight and pleasure" and "can obtain stimulation from cultural experiences and develop a feeling for aesthetic values" (Skolverket, 2013, p. 8). Herein can be found an issue: Teachers are likely to interpret these terms and concepts differently from each other, questioning the possibility of equal education and whether the intents behind the relevant curricula are truly put in practice. In addition, teachers are likely to differ in their definition of literary canons, if there is one in particular that should be taught and how to go about doing so.

In order to review, revise and discuss the role of literature and literary canons in the EFL classroom, and if any changes to current curricula are made in this regard, it seems prudent to examine and gain an understanding of how teachers themselves process and

interpret these phenomena. One could reasonably assume that perspectives on these topics will vary to some degree between teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL), L2-researchers and the Swedish National Agency for Education, Skolverket. It is thus important to ensure that mutual understanding can occur between these actors regarding e.g. the definition of a literary canon and canonical literature, what constitutes literary qualities in a work or, as shown in aforementioned quote, what is meant by aesthetic values.

The aim of this study is to examine Swedish EFL-teachers' perspectives on literature, literary canons, and their worth and implementation in the EFL-classroom, in particular with regard to upper secondary school. Further, it seeks to map out the thought process among teachers concerning the teaching of English literature. Thus, the research questions are threefold:

1. How do EFL-teachers in Swedish upper secondary school perceive literature and literary canons?
2. How do they motivate the use of literature and literary canons in their teaching?
3. How do they implement literature teaching in the EFL-classroom, and why have they chosen that method?

The study consists of interviews with 5 teachers from 4 upper secondary schools in western Sweden. The views and opinions expressed therein are analysed through themes inspired by two major theories on literature and literary canon formation, as well as four approaches to literary analysis detailed in the paper. In doing so, this study aims to provide perspective on and understanding of how teachers interpret and perceive an area of EFL-teaching which may be considered questionable in the modern communicative classroom. The paper begins by providing an account of the debate regarding literary canons, their formation and purpose, as well as approaches to teaching literature in the EFL-classroom. Following this, the rationale behind the chosen research method is covered, as well as the procedure followed when collecting and analysing the data. This is in turn followed by a presentation and analysis of the collected data, as well as a subsequent discussion. A summary of the paper is then given in the concluding chapter.

2 Background

2.1 Defining Literary Canon

The debate regarding canonicity and literary canon formation is primarily split between two schools of thought: the aesthetic view of the canon and that of Critical Theory. While these two are very broad and varied, with many proponents advocating various ideas and theories within them, only a handful of the more prevalent ones will be presented here, so as to provide a succinct yet sufficient overview of the debate. The use of the definite article in “the literary canon” notably refers to the Western such at large.

2.1.1 Aesthetic View

Within the debate concerning canon formation, the aesthetic view holds the belief that literature contains an inherent, objective aesthetic attribute which, depending on its value, bars or allows for canonical inclusion. Due to this phenomenon, supporter Harold Bloom (1994) argues that canonical inclusion is inevitable for literary works containing this aesthetic value. He states that literature deserving of canonical inclusion exerts a certain “strangeness” (p. 4) and further notes that this quality can be experienced by the reader. Frank Kermode (2004), another proponent of the aesthetic tradition, echoes this statement by arguing that literary works must invoke pleasure in the reader in order to be canonically included. While Bloom shares the sentiment that canonical works do provide pleasure to their readers as a natural side effect of their high aesthetic value, this does not necessarily equal his idea of strangeness in literary works. Furthermore, he explicitly states his belief that not all readers can appreciate or recognize either of these two qualities (Bloom, 1994, p. 17). The exposure of students to canonical literature and trying to convey their aesthetic values to those who may not be able to experience them can thus lead to boredom, indifference or, more damning, resentment. He therefore argues that canonical literature should only be taught selectively to those with an affinity for aforementioned literary qualities, and that it would be futile to push such instruction to all students.

Another defining characteristic of a literary canon as put forward by Bloom (1994) is its autonomy. In his view, and many others’ within the aesthetic tradition at large, canon formation is not simply a matter of tradition or, as some opponents would argue, a subjective selection of literature by societal norms, educational institutions and powerful individuals within them. A canon is also not formed by political means, or in school curricula. Rather, it

is formed and perpetuated by a process within the literary canon itself, something Bloom calls the “process of literary influence” (1994, p. 8). In this intra-canonical phenomenon, authors compete with, reference and critique both their peers and their precursors when writing. Since no one can write a novel in a creative vacuum, and can be reasonably expected to have read literature beforehand, the literary work will be shaped from these influences. This is notably defined as purely taking place in the realm of writing and literary response, and not affected by ideological or societal factors.

When authors produce literature, their original vision is thus susceptible to the anxiety of influence: a writer’s struggle not to be overshadowed by their peers’ and predecessors’ influence, but to carve out their own niche within their chosen genre (Bloom, 1994). Bloom argues that this explains the fairly limited size of what he calls the Western literary canon, relative to the immense amount of literature produced throughout history. The only way for an author to achieve canonical inclusion is by breaking free from the anxiety of influence and producing a literary work with a certain original quality to it.

Another cause of canonization put forward within the aesthetic tradition is that of the popularity of genres. According to this argument, the accessibility and popularity of various forms and genres of literature have changed throughout history, affected by societal changes or mere happenstance. Literary works within a genre that was unpopular or shunned at a certain time in history would rarely have been read, and thus unavailable for the aforementioned process of literary influence among aspiring authors. Only once the genre becomes popular can these literary works be rediscovered. Bloom (1994) seems content with merely humouring the implications of this idea while not necessarily subscribing to it, calling it “illuminating” (p. 20). Kermode (2004), however, places a greater emphasis on this line of thought, arguing that for literary works to be canonically included, besides providing pleasure for the reader, they must also be provided with a certain change in how they are perceived:

Reception history informs us that even Dante, Botticelli, and Caravaggio, even Bach and Monteverdi, endured long periods of oblivion until the conversation changed and they were revived. (Kermode, 2004, p. 33)

Kermode further claims that the perception of literature and literary genres in society, in order for them to remain in a literary canon even after being included, must continuously undergo this change. Literary works can thus leave the canon if a shift in priorities occurs among the reader base. As such, he seems to believe that literary canons are inherently open;

that literary works can enter and leave depending on how we value and perceive them at the time. This contrasts greatly with Bloom (1994), who believes canons to be more closed and static, unreachable by those literary works that do not fulfil the necessary criteria of aesthetic qualities.

2.1.2 Critical Theory

Critical Theory is a general school of thought which emphasises critical reflection and assessment of societal and cultural phenomena. When applied to the study of literature and canon formation, it differs from the aesthetic view in several crucial ways. The first of these concerns the actual purpose of literary canons: while supporters of the aesthetic view would argue that the primary purpose of canons is to convey artistic qualities and literary value to the reader, proponents of Critical Theory believe that, since canons are in many ways a staple of cultural reproduction and common education, they should be representative of all aspects and layers of society, both modern and historical (Kolbas, 2001, p. 25). This can be brought about either by the nature of the author or the subject matter itself. These aspects can concern matters such as sex, sexuality and ethnicity, by reading with a feminist or postcolonial perspective, or matters such as social class through a Marxist lens. The traditional, Western canons are seen as inherently elitist phenomena, in which only the upper echelons of society have been represented. Proponents of Critical Theory thus wish to open up the Western canons for more diversity in terms of represented authors, allowing for, among other things, the use of literary canons for conveying democratic principles and education (Guillory, 1993).

While these views do not necessarily reject the importance of artistic and aesthetic qualities in canon formation, a greater emphasis is placed on the role of socially and politically influential factors in canonization; as described by Kolbas (2001), canonization is never carried out in a social vacuum. It is thus believed that if literary canons are left to their own, presumably autonomous devices as prescribed by Bloom (1994), this will only serve to uphold the status quo and preserve a cultural domination by certain societal classes and groups. These influential factors forms canons both directly, in the form of conscious revisions by elite institutions and individuals (Guillory, 1993), or indirectly in the form of unconscious bias towards authors of similar social class, sexuality, sex and ethnicity. Guillory (1993) argues that institutions of learning in particular, by distinguishing between authors and literature with and without literary credentials (i.e. deemed worthy of canonical inclusion by literary critics) and incorporating them into their curricula, regulate access to the literary

establishment. Thus, if an author or literary critic seeks to gain validation from these institutions, they must accept and conform to the literary canons that those institutions have defined.

Guillory further argues that literary canons can be seen as “cultural capital” (Guillory, 1993, p. 6), originally a Marxist concept. Much like material goods or currency in a capitalist system, cultural capital in the form of e.g. knowledge or social assets allows an individual mobility and freedom within a class society. By acquiring cultural capital, one can be privy to privileges and information otherwise unattainable and move up the social hierarchy. As an example, a reference to canonical literature in a political debate or speech might very well be lost on certain parts of the audience, should they come from socioeconomic backgrounds in which the reading of literature was scarce, or if they have been enlisted at a less prestigious school. These individuals are effectively shut off not only from the event and on-going narrative, but also the democratic process itself. Guillory goes on to state his belief that

the distribution of cultural capital in such an institution as the school reproduces the structure of social relations, a structure of complex and ramifying inequality. (Guillory, 1993, p. 6)

Thus, opening up the canon for more diversity and representation is not so much a question of literary values as it is one of democratic principles, equal opportunities and ensuring social mobility.

In addition to the aforementioned aspects of literary canons, proponents of Critical Theory also advocate new methods for analysing and criticizing literature (Kolbas, 2001). The traditional approach to literary analysis meant reading literature as a self-contained text, largely disregarding contextual and external factors. Alternatively, one would read literature comparatively, as defined by Bloom (1994); reading literary works through the lens of their respective process of literary influence, namely their contemporary peers and inspirations, thus either shedding new light on a work’s aesthetic value and possibly strengthening it, or diminishing it. He exemplifies this by stating that “a Shakespearean reading of Freud illuminates it and overwhelms the text of Freud; a Freudian reading of Shakespeare reduces Shakespeare” (Bloom, 1994, p. 25). This description ties back to his idea of the anxiety of influence; comparative reading seems concerned with identifying the aforementioned sense of originality in literature and analysing the process from which it was given form. In response, Critical Theory focuses on two primary aspects when analysing and criticizing literature; firstly, the historical, social and political context in which the work was written (Kolbas,

2001). Secondly, the interpretation and reaction of the reader, which is often deemed just as important as the author's original intent and message in literary analysis. This stands in sharp contrast to the aesthetic tradition, in which many believe literary works to have an objective artistic quality, independent of the reader.

Supporters of Critical Theory have criticized the aesthetic view of canon formation and the Western canon in particular; for instance, they question the presupposition that literary canons merely instill aesthetic values, instead claiming that they convey moral and cultural values in equal amount (Guillory, 1993). These values reflect the conscious or unconscious bias within educational institutions, implying an elitist, static cultural reproduction as previously mentioned. The opposite side of the debate has levered several issues in return; notably, Bloom (1994) has accused their opponents of politicizing the canon debate. By focusing too heavily on their own political motives, which he believes to be informed by their Marxist and Feminist ideologies (1994, p. 4), they diminish the artistic sentiment of literature, which encourages its study in the first place. He believes that if the Western canon were to be opened up and diversified, it may very well bring about its end. If canonical inclusion boils down to mere political and ideological meddling, rather than aesthetic expression and quality, the Western canon would soon lose its original purpose (Kolbas, 2001).

In summary, these approaches to canon formation reveal two perceived purposes of literary canons: on one hand, the celebration of artistic qualities, and on the other, a tool for teaching culture and the institutionalization of societal norms. In terms of education, however, they both seem concerned with using literary canons as a way to augment students' sense of self-awareness and all-round education (Kolbas, 2001). Bloom (1994) believes that the aesthetic is "an individual rather than a societal concern" (p. 16), thereby arguing that teaching the Western literary canon (such that he perceives it) strengthens the students' ability to experience and find joy in literature and consequently other forms of art, while the opposite side of the debate might consider an expanded canon to fulfil the role of a general education, giving an opportunity for students to develop a critical perspective and awareness with regard to art, as well as a habit of questioning societal norms and assumptions of knowledge.

2.2 Approaches to Literary Analysis

While these two perspectives on the literary canon debate can certainly help us understand teachers' underlying ideas and motivations regarding literature, they are arguably insufficient

with regard to the actual implementation of literary studies in the English classroom. Thus, it seems prudent to examine specific methods and approaches towards teaching literature and literary analysis. In particular, this study will examine four approaches as defined by Van (2009), in part because these are easily traced back to the aesthetic and critical traditions. While these approaches are useful for examining teaching methods in the EFL-classroom, it should be noted that this is not their original purpose; they were first designed to study literature teaching at a higher level, not the study of foreign language literature in upper secondary school.

2.2.1 New Criticism

New Criticism has its origins in the first half of the 20th century as a method for literary analysis; while its popularity has declined as of late, it is still of great significance (Van, 2009). It is foremost a method that emphasizes the objective literary quality within literature, by examining the aesthetic value behind each literary work (Spurlin, 1995a). Much as the aesthetic tradition from which it originates, it treats each literary work as a self-contained instance, as written in a vacuum to which outside influential factors are irrelevant (Alberti, 1995); in other words, contexts of historical, political and social nature are disregarded in favour of the work's process of literary influence as defined by Bloom (1994), betraying the approach's origins in the aesthetic tradition. Similarly, the reader's interpretation and past experiences as influences on the literary value are deemed irrelevant.

Within this approach, analysis and interpretation of a text is carried out by identifying various literary devices and linguistic elements in it, e. g. symbolism, metaphoric language, linguistic style, imagery and metaphors. Contrasting, discussing and analysing these elements then allow the reader to further understand the intent and meaning of the work as envisioned by the author (Van, 2009). Since focus is laid on literary works with perceived high aesthetic value, fitting literature is primarily comprised of works from the traditional literary canon of a target language's culture. Despite this, proponents of New Criticism have as of late argued that their method of close reading of the traditional canon should be expanded to include authors previously excluded, such as female and postcolonial writers. While this would open up the canon for more perceived diversity and representation, the approach would still adhere strictly to aesthetic value (Alberti, 1995). In this manner, New Criticism may avoid the criticism of perceived elitism commonly levered against it (Kolbas, 2001, p. 37).

The approach has been subject to much criticism over the years. Among other things, it has been argued that New Criticism unfairly disregards the importance of the reader, their interpretation and personal relation to the text (Spurlin, 1995a). Many issues have been put forward with regard to this neglect: Firstly, the lack of contextualization undermines the students' understanding of the text. Caricatures and contemporary references to social norms will be lost on the students, which means they have to rely on the teacher to explain many concepts and terms throughout the reading process; this is both time-consuming and inadequately autonomous learning. Secondly, finding texts that both fulfil the aesthetic and canonical criteria as well as appeal to young readers can prove difficult, which means that motivation might well suffer as a result. Similarly, Van (2009) argues that the language met by students in this approach may very well be difficult and time-consuming to partake of, while offering limited amounts of actual language learning. Although an expanded vocabulary of older English is to be expected, it would not help develop their modern English in a communicative manner.

2.2.2 Reader-Response

As calls were made for an approach to literary analysis that concerned itself more with the reader and their perspective on a text, rather than focusing on literary meaning unmediated by the reading process, the Reader-Response theory was born (Spurlin, 1995b). This theory disregards the idea of objective aesthetic value in literature, proposing that the true meaning of a work is only complete when experienced by a reader and shaped by their subjective interpretation. That is not to say that the author's intent is disregarded, but rather that the meeting of the two actors (reader and author) is what generates literary meaning. The reader thus takes on an active role in the creation of meaning, in contrast to New Criticism, in which they take on a passive role (Van, 2009). Criticism has been raised against this approach as well, with Spurlin (1995b) voicing his concern that proponents of Reader-Response

generally propose the radical displacement of the locus of interpretive authority from the text to the reader and by extension to the reader's interpretive community. (Spurlin, 1995b, p. 233)

By this, he argues that it is not necessarily the actual, unfiltered thoughts of the reader that have the final say on the creation of meaning, but rather the methods, attitudes and ideological agendas of the readers as influenced by their environment (e.g. their school, university,

upbringing, political affiliation). The author's intent would then run the risk of being irrelevant in the creation of meaning, as the reader can interpret it any way they want.

As for application in the EFL-classroom, Van (2009) argues that Reader-Response can be considered much more motivating for the students, as their own input, knowledge and experiences are vital; language learning as well as study of literature thus becomes a much more engaging and personal activity (Ghaith & Madi, 2008, pp. 20-21). This also makes it easier for the teachers to assess their students in various areas, as students can more easily convey what they have read; in part because they are more motivated, and in part because their subjective reaction is sufficient feedback. In addition, with a focus on the students' own experiences these will have to be conveyed somehow, which opens up possibilities for communicative activities in the classroom.

2.2.3 Critical Literacy

Critical Literacy is an approach to literary studies with roots in Critical Theory, which emphasizes not only the importance of the reader's relation to the text, as in Reader-Response, but also the contextual factors and influences with regard to the work's writing (Van, 2009). Wallace (1992) defines it as a "methodology for interpreting texts which addresses ideological assumptions as well as propositional meaning" (Wallace, 1992, p. 62). The approach builds upon Reader-Response with regard to the collaboration in the creation of meaning; it states that there is a balance of power between the author and the reader, wherein the intent of the author threatens to overwhelm the interpretation of the reader. This depends on the stance taken by the reader, which can be either submissive or assertive. The more knowledgeable students are on the topics brought up in the work as well as the author's assumptions and ideological conviction, the more they are able to criticize them. As such, Critical Literacy seeks to teach students to question how assumptions about knowledge and facts are presented, the contextual factors behind them and the naturalization of claims in literature (Van, 2009).

While Critical Literacy seems well suited not only for teaching historical and social factors related to literature but also augmenting students' sense of critical awareness, Wallace (1992) warns that there should be a balance in the students' assumed stance; if they are too assertive, the original meaning is lost, while if they are too submissive, no critical view is adopted. Criticism has also been raised regarding its lack of focus on language learning (Van, 2009), giving it a narrow and specific niche in EFL education.

2.2.4 Language-Based Approach

In this model for working with texts in the language classroom, the primary purpose of reading literature is to facilitate language learning and its use in meaningful contexts. Focus is not on interpretation of any kind, other than that which naturally arises in the students' interaction with the literature. Rather, it is an attempt to encourage a variety of classroom activities with a focus on language production, as well as increased learner independence and peer interaction (Van, 2009). The teacher is less a conveyor of knowledge in the form of historical context or literary interpretation, but instead takes a supporting role preparing and overseeing classroom activities. Van (2009) argues that this approach is well-suited for teaching communicative skills in tandem with literature, and strengthens learner autonomy. Unlike other approaches, the selection of literature for teachers of this approach concerns only the level of language present in the work; as such, it is less likely that students reject the chosen texts. Rather, this can be more motivating for the students (Van, 2009). Although communicative ability is at the forefront, other aspects of language learning are often integrated as well, including reading proficiency, learning strategies, vocabulary and stylistics.

2.3 Previous Research

In general, studies regarding the attitudes and methods of EFL-teachers with regard to teaching literature are few and chronologically far between. While no such studies have been conducted in Sweden, two have been published with regard to other European countries.

Akyel and Yalçın (1990) carried out a study in Turkey by surveying teachers and students at five high schools. Through questionnaires the respondents were asked about their views on literature, its role in learning English, students' preferences with regard to chosen texts and teachers' overall goals of literature teaching. A clear majority of surveyed teachers, 19 out of 22, had similar views regarding the role of literature in EFL-teaching; through teaching literature, and canonical literature in particular, they hoped to instil an appreciation of such works with their students, as well as improve their general cultural awareness (Akyel & Yalçın, 1990). The classrooms were described by the authors as teacher-dominated, in which the teachers acted as conveyors of information crucial to the texts; group activities and language-based exercises were uncommon, showing a distinct lack of communicative design. Notably, the study identified a discrepancy between teachers and students; while teachers

concerned themselves mostly with teaching the art and study of literature, their students preferred to use literature as a means of developing their language proficiency, revealing a more instrumental approach to literature study.

More recently, a study by Bloemert, Jansen and van de Grift (2016) conducted in the Netherlands aimed to identify the various methods and approaches employed by Dutch teachers of English, as well as other foreign languages, at upper secondary schools with regard to teaching literature; through questionnaires, 106 teachers were surveyed. Once the answers had been categorized according to Text, Context, Reader- and Language-based approaches (these being the rough equivalents of New Criticism, Critical Literacy, Reader-Response and the Language-based approach, respectively), it was surmised that the Text approach was by far the most commonly used among the teachers (Bloemert, Jansen & van de Grift, 2016). Common aspects of the Text approach in respondents' teaching were the ability to recognize and distinguish text types, analysing character development and, notably, the reader's personal reaction.

3 Method

Due to the nature of the topic area, and the attempt of the study to uncover underlying thoughts and preconceptions regarding literature and literary canons, a qualitative approach was adopted. Quantitative measures were not deemed to provide sufficient depth and nuanced data to answer the research questions (McKay, 2010). Although a combination of both quantitative measures (preferably surveys) and qualitative interviews would provide a more balanced and complete study, as well as more reliable conclusions, it was not strictly necessary for answering the research questions, nor did the time constraints permit it. The goal was not to gain perspective on the situation in Sweden as a whole, but to examine the various ways in which teachers might reason and define literary concepts. This is supported by Edwards & Holland (2013), who argue that qualitative interviews are

methods that can give insight into the meanings that individuals and groups attach to experiences, social processes, practices and events, for example, by policy decision makers. (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 90)

3.1 Participants

The collected data consists of five transcriptions of interviews carried out with active EFL-teachers at various upper secondary schools in the Västra Götaland region. The number of interviews conducted was restricted by time-constraints, lack of available teachers and the aim of the study itself. As for the teachers available, a sample of convenience (McKay, 2010) was used; inquiries for interviews were emailed to 85 teachers at schools around Västra Götaland, of which 4 answered and agreed to partake in the study. The reason for the low number of available teachers is most likely due to the time at which the study was carried out: the teachers were emailed in April, a time at which many schools begin preparing their students for the national exams. In addition, a previous acquaintance to the researcher was contacted, who subsequently also agreed to participate. Due to the purely qualitative nature of the study, neither a randomized nor a sizeable sample was strictly necessary; Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) mention that the common number of interviews in a qualitative interview-study usually number between 5-25, and that the amount varies depending on the scope of the study, as well as the time and resources available. Here is some information on the participants:

- Teacher A is a 66 years old teacher of English and Latin, who has taught in upper secondary school for 41 years. Before working as a teacher, he studied English, Latin and entered teachers' college, for a total amount of 5 years. He is primarily associated with the Humanities programme and its students.
- Teacher B is also a teacher of English and Latin, at 47 years of age; she has completed 7 years of university studies in total, in a similar manner to Teacher A. Further, she has worked as a teacher for 20 years, and is most often responsible for students of the Humanities and Social Studies programme.
- In contrast, Teacher C has taught English and Social Studies for 7 years, and is 32 years old. He is associated with the Social Studies programme, and has studied linguistics, sociology, and English as a part of a teacher education programme at university.
- Teacher D is 61 years old, and has been a teacher of English and Spanish for 18 years. She graduated after 5 years from a teacher education programme, and is not currently affiliated with any upper secondary school programme in particular.
- Finally, Teacher E is 36 years old and has worked as a teacher of Swedish and English for 10 years. In addition to having studied at a teacher education programme, he also

has a Master's degree in literature studies. He mostly teaches students from the Finance and Social Studies programmes.

3.2 Data Collection

The procedure followed was the “interview guide approach” (McKay, 2010, p. 52) in which the researcher crafts a list of questions to ask the respondents (see Appendix A) . While the phrasing of these questions may differ, all questions and their corresponding topics are covered with each interviewee in some way. Although McKay mentions that this approach typically disallows researchers to pursue new topics that may arise in the conversation, this was a regular occurrence in the conducted interviews, implying that some aspects of the “informal conversational interview approach” (McKay, 2010, p. 51) may have been adopted. Since the aim of the study was not to map any generalized tendencies among teachers, but rather to provide descriptions of how the respondents define and discuss certain concepts, this flexible method seemed more prudent in contrast with a more standardized, rigid one. The approach to interviewing adopted in this study is arguably better portrayed by the “semi-structured phenomenological interview” as defined by Kvale and Brinkmann (2014, p. 45). This approach has its roots in phenomenology, a school of philosophy which attempts to understand social phenomena through the perspectives of the actors themselves (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). Thus, they operate under the assumption that the only relevant reality is the one that people perceive and apprehend. The focus of qualitative studies with this approach is to be purely descriptive, and provide nuanced and thorough descriptions of the interviewees' experiences, motivations and definitions. That being said, this study is not purely phenomenological in nature.

Moreover, the interviews were recorded and later transcribed, in order to accurately portray the conversation as well as reduce the possible anxiety from excessive note-taking by the interviewer (McKay, 2010). This had the added benefit of allowing more focus on the interview answers, thus allowing more follow-up questions to be asked. The participants were given a choice as to what language they would wish to use in the interview, English or Swedish; this was done to ensure that their responses were as unhindered and accurate as possible, while also allowing them to employ terminology from both their mother tongue (and by extension their peers and teaching community) and any English research or debate on the topic that they may have taken part of. Throughout the interview, care was taken only to ask for clarification while recasting their answers and asking follow-up questions, thus utilizing the strengths of qualitative interviews (McKay, 2010). Edwards & Holland (2013) describe

the relationship and interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee as an imbalanced one, arguing that an asymmetry of power threatens the validity of the answers given. An interviewee may e.g. attempt to placate the interviewer with answers they believe are appropriate, or fear humiliation at giving the wrong answers. Kvale & Brinkmann (2014) echo this line of thought, warning that the interviewer usually possess an “interpretive monopoly” (p. 51) and that the interviewer must acknowledge this fact and attempt an unbiased stance. This informed the aforementioned recasts of the interviewees’ answers and requests for clarification.

3.3 Data Analysis

The approach adopted for the data analysis was a theoretical thematic analysis. While a content analysis approach is more concerned with acquiring quantifiable data, a thematic one attempts to construct themes through which patterns in the data can be identified and analysed; the focus is to create themes that follow the research questions of the study as closely as possible, subsequently representing meaning within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theoretical thematic analysis implies that the themes were constructed with underlying theory or theoretical background in mind, as opposed to inductive thematic analysis, which constructs its themes as they appear in the data. The themes in this study were formulated with the previously covered literature review in mind, and wound up as the following themes and sub-themes.

- Perception of literature
 - Literary value
 - Benefits of reading
 - “Meaning” in literature
- Definition of literary canons
 - Formation
 - Use and purpose
 - Literary selection
- Classroom application
 - Student-teacher discrepancy
 - Classroom activities
 - Teacher’s role
 - Goals of teaching literature

3.4 Study Integrity

In a review of the topical literature, Larsson (2005) presents a number of criteria for qualitative studies to achieve in order for them to be considered good research. One of these is internal logic: namely, that the various components of the study should inform one another. According to Larsson, “harmony should prevail between the research question, suppositions of research and the nature of the studied phenomenon, the data collection and the method of analysis” (2005, p. 21). This concerns both the actual content and decisions made in the study, as well as the disposition and language used. With regard to this study, the idea of adding quantitative data in the form of survey forms was disregarded as it was not deemed sufficiently relevant to the research questions, even though that would have led to a more balanced and well-rounded study. Likewise, the choice of what methods for literary analysis to describe and use in the data analysis was informed by their relevancy to the literary canon debate and previously covered methods of literature teaching.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Validity refers to the accuracy with which the study extracts its data and controls surrounding variables, and can be separated into three categories: construct validity, internal validity and external validity (McKay, 2010). Construct validity refers to how well instruments used in a study are used to measure what is actually supposed to be measured; in this study, the instrument in question would be the interview guide and its questions. In order to ensure high construct validity, pilot interviews were conducted with two teachers at an upper secondary school after which the interview guide was deemed accurately worded and designed.

With regard to qualitative research, McKay dubs internal and external validity “credibility” and “transferability” (2010, p. 13), respectively. Credibility is achieved by a fair and unbiased reporting of the research process, its data and results. Attempts were made to achieve this through e.g. the previously mentioned recasts of interviewees’ answers and frequent requests for clarification; the hope was thus that the reported data would be as accurate to the interviewees’ intended message as possible. Transferability, on the other hand, concerns how well the findings of the study can be applied in other situations. This is usually done by providing a rich and detailed description of the research participants as well as the context in which the study was carried out. With regard to this study, this aspect seems to be somewhat lacking; although some limited description of the participants themselves were

given, information regarding the schools at which they teach was severely limited. This was a conscious choice so as to ensure the confidential nature of the participants' identities.

Finally, McKay (2010) terms reliability with regard to qualitative studies as "dependability" (p. 14), describing it as quality determining how much trust can be placed in how the results were reported. If researchers wish to obtain dependability, they must not only detail their participants and research context along the lines of transferability, but their research procedure and methods as well. To this end, the rationale behind the choice of interview approach and the design of the interview guide have been extensively covered in this study, as well as the process behind contacting and interviewing the participants.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

In accordance with the guidelines set up by Vetenskapsrådet (2002), several ethical issues were considered when conducting the study. Before the actual interviews, care was taken to inform all participants of the topic and purpose of the study, the nature of the interview and who would be privy to the data and personal information gathered by the researcher; what data this concerned was also covered. While the interviews were not expected to yield any sensitive or incriminating information, the participants were nonetheless given a consent form as recommended by Kvale & Brinkmann (2014, p. 108) to sign, which stipulated how the information was to be handled and later destroyed (see Appendix B). They were also informed that the interviews were conducted on their terms, and that they could at any point refuse to answer specific questions or quit the interview entirely. The issue of confidentiality posed a minor problem; while the transferability and dependability of the study would have benefited from a deep and detailed description of the participants, the limited sample and geographical scope of the study meant that such accounts would have endangered the participants' confidentiality. Thus, these accounts were reduced to mere basic information.

4 Results

4.1 Perception of Literature

Teacher A began by emphasizing the importance of literature (defined as both prose and poetry, but little else) as a source of experience; that reading is a way to partake of other people's lives, both historical and contemporary. Personally, he enjoyed reading detective

stories for this reason, as they convey a sense of everyday life in Britain and the United States. Further, he argued that they open up possibilities of practicing language proficiency, vocabulary in particular. These two factors were equally important benefits from reading literature. As for literary value and quality, he was confident that literature has an aesthetic quality to it, defining it in terms of stylistics such as alliteration and rhythm. Poetry, in particular, was a common way for him to convey these aesthetic qualities to his students. He made sure to point out, however, that he values the contexts surrounding literary works just as important when teaching them as their aesthetic qualities. As for any underlying “meaning” in literature, he expressed his belief that while the reader’s interpretation of a work is important, it is often equally important, especially with regard to canonical literature, to highlight the author’s intent and why it has been so thoroughly studied. This, he argued, opens up many possibilities for teaching history and analysing social contexts in tandem.

Teacher B described literature as a window to a more expansive world view, greater vocabulary and better expressive skills. She placed great importance on its fostering role, arguing that the act of reading not only helps students screen themselves off from modern society and its abundance of external stimuli, but also completes them as human beings. By partaking of and understanding other peoples’ accounts of their various experiences, they would gain a deeper insight of their own lives. To this end, she named pleasure and enjoyment as the most important aspects of reading literature. While she acknowledged that literature contains an aesthetic value, in the form of expressiveness and style, she argued that this value was as important as her students’ interpretation and reaction to the work. However, her students’ analyses had to be made within reasonable limits, with them backing up their interpretation through arguments and evidence in the text. As for the historical and societal contexts surrounding literary works, she dismissed their importance for appreciating literature; while she does include it in her teaching, it is paramount that the work can “stand on its own”. Finally, she expressed doubt concerning the definition of the term “literature”; while she would like to consider other media to be literature (e.g. films, audio books) she still only felt comfortable treating novels and poetry as such in the classroom.

Teacher C started off by giving a narrow definition of literature, as he only considered it to be composed of prose, not poetry. With regard to benefits of reading, he strongly disavowed any notion of students at upper secondary school gaining any deepened perspective on historical and social progression and change. Rather, he mentioned two beneficial aspects as paramount: firstly, an understanding of new perspectives in relation to

one's own experiences, such as coming-out stories, leading to deeper insight and self-fulfilment. Secondly, one may gain the ability to understand and familiarize oneself with difficult literature, through means of an expanded vocabulary, understanding of stylistic aspects in a text as well as strategies for reading. This was followed up by a description of aesthetic quality as the only item of value in canonical literature, and contexts surrounding literary works as unimportant. The language and style used was repeatedly mentioned as a defining feature of a work's aesthetic quality. As for the underlying meaning in literary works, he expressed an aversion to the idea that every opinion of a work is valid; rather, he believes that there is one intended meaning of a work as designed by its author, describing it as piecing together a literary work with intent and adding that authors can fail to convey what they set out to do.

Teacher D began by giving a broad definition of literature, arguing that not only reading novels but also listening to audio books, watching movies and other activities counts as partaking of literature. As for benefits of literature, she mentioned two major aspects; chief among these were knowledge of history, culture and social phenomena, followed by language proficiency such as vocabulary and idioms. While she did concede that literature have varying aesthetic value, she downplayed its importance; to her, literature is primarily entertainment rather than art. She further argued that studying and understanding the contexts surrounding a literary work are more important and rewarding than any aesthetic elements or underlying message within the work, referring to the steering documents and their directive to view course content through historical, social and in particular critical perspectives. Instead of trying to uncover the author's intent with a work, she focuses on her students' personal interpretations, and tells them that there are no rights or wrongs in the world of literature. In relation to this, she stressed that it is paramount that her students engage themselves with reading and find it interesting, as they are often inexperienced readers and are vocal in their preference for other media.

Teacher E primarily described literature, exclusively in the form of novels and short stories, as a way to partake of second-hand experiences and new perspectives that may not be possible to experience first-hand. By reading literature, one can grow as a person and develop a catalogue of general knowledge. He also stressed the development of vocabulary as an important aspect, arguing that words represent worlds and subsequently a deeper understanding of previously mentioned experiences. As for literary value, he considers literature to be an art form and subsequently containing an inherent aesthetic value, describing

it as literary craftsmanship. This aesthetic value is timeless and can be appreciated regardless of historical contexts and who actually wrote the work. To illustrate this, Teacher E compared literature to a meal; while you can dress up the table at which you eat with a tablecloth, candles and silverware, it is still the actual food itself that matters in the end.

4.2 Definition of Literary Canons

With regard to literary canons and their definition, Teacher A argued that literary canons serve a valuable purpose by compiling and conveying high literary values of an aesthetic nature, and that these canons are formed through tradition and either conscious or subconscious choices by him, his school or other actors in society. He repeatedly argued for their importance as a source of “allmänbildning” (General Knowledge), which he aimed to instil in his students. His current school defines canonical literature as works older than 50 years, the rationale being that it must be considered a classic if it is readily available to students after such a long time. Teacher A disagrees with this definition, describing his ideal English literary canon as comprised of more modern literature from the 20th century in tandem with older literature such as Shakespeare. These modern novels would have to include works which students could analyse by reading between the lines and uncover hidden themes within the story and expressions. Lately, however, he has begun including excerpts and short stories rather than full works, motivated by time constraints.

When asked about her views on literary canons, Teacher B defined it as collections of both old and modern “classics”, all of which are literary works of high aesthetic value. These works are timeless; they convey and reflect aspects of the human condition, rendering them relevant and important for all generations of all ages. As such, she expressed her belief that canons are inherently closed phenomena formed through the popularity of the included literary works and the interest for them among readers. That said, she also came across as torn regarding whether this was desirable or not; she questioned if this process is impartial or not, and whether canons should be consciously opened up and altered in some regard. Further, she argued that canons also serve as a form of cultural reservoirs, from which students can familiarize themselves with their own or, in the case of foreign language learning, a foreign culture. When choosing what canonical literature to teach, she attempts to pick literature that both appeal to her students and are relatable, works that convey a cultural heritage and provides new perspectives on the human condition. This partly means that the literature chosen depends on the class in which it is to be taught.

Concerning literary canons, Teacher C stated his belief that there is one established English literary canon formed primarily through academic tradition and secondarily through commercial success and visibility. The works contained therein were described as products of their contemporary and current academic and literary sphere. He expressed discontent at the euro-centric nature and lack of postcolonial and feminist works in the established canon, arguing that they simply had not been allowed to rise to prominence and that they should be included if their literary craftsmanship is deemed sufficient. While the canon in use at his school concerned primarily works from the 15th century and onwards with little focus on modern literature, Teacher C wished to teach his own personal canon consisting primarily of authors from the Romantic period and modern science-fiction, arguing that the latter were more often referenced today than more traditionally canonical works are. His reasoning behind teaching canonical literature very much mirrored his views on literature as a whole, albeit with a greater focus on the quality of writing deemed inherent in such literature.

Teacher D expressed her belief that a single, established English literary canon exists, composed of literary works deemed well-written by the academic community and sphere of literary critics. She did, however, argue that this canon is too difficult, uninteresting and not very relatable for her students, preferring to have her students pick novels of their own choosing. This culminated in a critique of the existence of literary canons and what she perceived as their lack of purpose and utility. In order to meet the demands of the steering documents regarding classic literature, she usually gives her students excerpts of canonical novels or short stories to read and analyse. Moreover, she pondered the need for a literary canon specifically aimed at upper secondary students, bypassing the boredom and inaccessibility usually associated with that type of literature and including more relatable content. With this in mind, she added that literary canons, both the general, established one as well as those specifically tailored for students, should be opened up for more diverse authors. Examples given were authors of other genres, e.g. science-fiction, and more female writers.

Teacher E defined literary canons as collections of “meaningful literature”, the contents of which have been agreed upon collectively by society at large. Each canonical literary work conveys certain cultural values and thus ties a community or society together, providing stability. Furthermore, he argued that a single established English literary canon does not exist; as literary canons are so closely related to cultural reproduction, each English-speaking culture has their own. Although he conceded that a “standard” literary canon once existed and that he was taught it himself during his studies, he believes it to be out-dated and

practically abandoned. According to him, each canon is formed through consensus within a society's academic and educational sphere. He also added that this poses a dilemma for him as an English teacher in Sweden, since there are so many literary canons to pick from; time constraints require him to only choose a limited sample. Another aspect of this dilemma is the issue of difficulty, as they want to challenge their students with literature they are likely not to read on their own, but that it is more practical to be lenient and let them choose literature themselves. As for himself, he prefers to give his students short stories, as they sufficiently fulfil the purpose of cultural and literary study while also being more approachable and accepted by the students.

4.3 Classroom Application

As for the practical implementation of literature teaching in the classroom, Teacher A has his students read two novels; one modern and one "classic" as defined above. He starts off each teaching segment by introducing the authors by means of PowerPoint-presentations, covering their background, historical context and characteristics of their work; the students are not expected to carry out this research themselves. They later return to these aspects in various ways. Once the students have read the modern novel, they are then given the task of writing a book report according to a certain pattern. He specified that the "who" in the story, the characters and their motivations, are more important for the students to cover than the "what", the plot of the novel. Further, they are to both include what they believe to be the meaning of the novel as intended by the author, as well as their own views and interpretations. In relation to this, he added that many of the interpretations and analyses were not very good, due to them often being based solely on subjective feelings and not on any evidence present in the text. With regard to the classic novel, students prepare an oral presentation to carry out in front of the class, mirroring the pattern in the book report. This was motivated by a need to include more oral exercises. As for the goal of these teaching segments, Teacher A argued that vocabulary teaching in tandem with analysis of the authors and their intent is the main purpose. Finally, he described a motivated, driven student body, whose views on literature, a suitable literary canon and benefits of reading such mostly aligned well with his own.

Every time a new literary work is introduced to her students to be read concurrently, which mostly occurs with canonical literature in her case, Teacher B attempts to thwart any presumptions of boredom by first presenting the work, author or setting through other means. In the example given, she had her students watch a fictional movie concerning Shakespeare

before reading any of his writing, so that they could relate to the content and contextualize it, as well as hopefully gain some measure of interest. She follows up by presenting facts about the author and time period, connecting these to the movie. After her students have read a work, they are given questions concerning the work and tasked with recording themselves in pairs as they discuss them; the majority of these questions concern the themes of the work. By recording themselves, they are given opportunities to critique their own or each other's language. She also made clear that the purpose of this method is its flexibility; it allows students to practice their language production, to self-evaluate and to show ability for literary analysis. In terms of her role in the classroom, she described it as her primary task to get her students to read at all, as they are rarely motivated and would rather partake of the story through other media. She gave the arrival of the digital age as a reason, and argued that her students preferred easy, quick answers to complex phenomena rather than patient and through analysis (e.g. reading a novel in its entirety rather than simply reading a summary of its contents and intended message). Whether their views on literary canons aligned with her own, she could not ascertain.

Teacher C implements literature teaching in way of close readings and comprehension questions on a canonical novel read by all students. They are then asked to analyse certain passages, themes, symbolism and style; by doing so, he hopes that they can learn how to read and understand difficult texts. He does not introduce the author, novel or time period in any way, citing time restraints as the reason. Rather, his role is to inform students of terminology related to literary analysis. Students are tasked with producing podcasts in pairs discussing the novel on the basis of previously mentioned topics. They sometimes write essays on topics similar to the novel they have read, e.g. identity if the novel is a coming-out type of story, but book reviews are rarely utilized. He furthermore described a student body that mostly shares his view of literature and the established literary canon, although conflict would sometimes arise regarding their interpretation of a work; while many students argue that their subjective interpretation is as valid as any objective meaning inherent to the work, Teacher C disagrees. In particular, he was of the opinion that these subjective interpretations are often unreasonable in nature and based on doubtful evidence.

When asked about the actual implementation of literature teaching in the classroom, Teacher D described a focus on teaching the contexts surrounding literary works; in particular with regard to canonical literature, with which she teaches facts about the author, time period, comparisons to contemporary society and the overall importance of the work. In addition to

this, she considers literature in general as a tool for teaching all four of the linguistic skills: speaking, reading, listening and writing proficiency. Once the students have autonomously gathered information and orientated themselves with regard to the author and time period, they are tasked with holding a presentation of this knowledge for the rest of the class. Teacher D also mentioned employing movies and other media to teach the same topic in tandem, followed by discussions in class and smaller groups. As for her students' attitudes regarding literature, she described them as very unmotivated; they would often question the value of reading proficiency overall, and would rather partake of the story and content through film or lectures. She also gave the prominence of technology as a reason, saying that her students had a different mentality when she first started teaching.

When Teacher E gave an account of literature teaching in his classroom, he described a focus on analysing theme and message in the written works; the goal is partly to convey cultural values and partly to develop the students' understanding of literary craftsmanship. This is done by first introducing the work through other means if possible, e.g. watching a movie based on the novel or short story. Once they have concurrently read a literary work, they are to discuss the content (aforementioned theme and message in particular) both in groups and in class, followed by a written analysis. He described his own role in this process as a corrector, leading his students along the right path of interpretation. In relation to this, he also mentioned that his students often tried to justify subjective interpretations based on doubtful evidence; while interesting, they were nonetheless deemed irrelevant to the analysis itself. When asked about the student body and their views on literature, he portrayed them as greatly differing from the teachers'; according to him, they can rarely see the literary value inherent in certain works, and fail to understand the importance of reading canonical literature. Instead, they would be content with only having watched the movie adaption rather than reading the actual work it was based on.

5 Discussion

5.1 Analysis of Results

While the sample is too limited to make any reliable generalizations regarding the population at large, a few observations can still be made. First off, one can notice a distinct tendency towards the aesthetic literary tradition; all respondents acknowledged the existence of aesthetic literary value in some way, with four of them believing it to be important to their

teaching. On all four of these accounts, this aesthetic value was described as literary excellence in terms of stylistics, expressiveness of language, idiomatic depth and well-presented themes. However, it can be argued that this definition of aesthetic attributes in literature is more tangible and concrete in nature than that of e.g. Bloom (1994), who rather sees it as a more abstract, almost transcendent concept. Instead, it appears to align more with New Criticism, with its focus on identifying and analysing literary devices; an interesting happenstance, as Van (2009) argues that this approach holds doubtful value for communicative EFL-classrooms on basis of their often archaic, difficult or inaccessible language and vocabulary. Despite this, every respondent emphasized an increased vocabulary as one of the primary benefits of reading.

Another observation regarding the benefits of reading was its function as a tool for self-fulfilment; four respondents stated that literature is valuable as a conveyor of second-hand experiences and perspectives. While the details of their given definitions varied slightly, they generally agreed that these experiences not only provide their students with general knowledge of the world, but also help them grow as people and gain insight into their own lives. In addition, teachers A, B and E also brought up acquiring general knowledge as a beneficial effect. These four accounts given seem to indicate a view of literature as a tool for fostering students and instilling self-awareness. In contrast, Teacher D is an outlier in this regard; while she agrees on the importance of student self-awareness and fostering, her account of these phenomena more reflects the concept of critical awareness (Wallace, 1992). As previously mentioned in the review of topical literature, these views are to some extent reflected in both the aesthetic tradition and Critical Theory; although Bloom (1994) argues that literature (and the literary canon in particular) augments readers' sense of self through their experience and appreciation of art rather than merely partaking of other people's perspectives, proponents of Critical Theory largely echo Teacher D's sentiment of contextual understanding. By studying literature in such a way, they argue that a critical perspective can be instilled in the readers.

One can also observe a pattern in the respondents' answers with regard to the role of the teacher in the classroom in relation to the students; three of the respondents (Teachers A, B, and E) described an assertive role in the classroom, with them not only conveying contextual information and terminology, but also acting as guides for their students and correcting their analyses if they were to stray too far from the actual meaning of the work. Thus, they act as extensions of the author's perceived intent. In addition, Teachers A, C and E

expressed their own dejection at the abundance of purely subjective and unsupported interpretations. In terms of their own role in the classroom and students autonomy, most respondents (with the notable exception of Teacher D) seemed to lean towards New Criticism wherein teachers take an assertive, active role in explaining literary terminology and providing crucial information (Van, 2009). Teachers A and B, however, also emphasized the role of the reader and their personal reaction, more indicative of Reader-Response theory (Spurlin, 1995b). Thus, the findings of this study somewhat resembles that of Bloemert, Jansen & van de Grift (2016) as detailed in section 2.3.

In contrast to their views on literature, the respondents' accounts of literary canons differ greatly from each other. On one hand, there is the idea of literary canons as collections of cultural knowledge and values to be conveyed (as defined by Teachers B and E); on the other hand, some see them as compilations of aesthetic and literary excellence (Teachers A and B). There was also an idea of literary canons as products of subjective and perhaps arbitrary selection by academics and literary critics, as described by Teachers A, C and D. As for the actual works considered canonical, either in the way of what was perceived as an established English literary canon or a list of works prescribed by the school, several teachers expressed discontent; some of them imagined an ideal canon for upper secondary school as being more open, diverse and less euro-centric, echoing the arguments of Critical Theory (Kolbas, 2001). The diverse range of definitions, perceived purposes of and issues with literary canons among the interviewed teachers could indicate a problem for schools attempting to define what constitutes a "classic" literary work, e.g. as described by Teacher A.

Discrepancies between the respondents' and their students' views on literature was also a common feature among four of the five interviews. In particular, students were described as questioning not only the chosen novels and their contents, but the very act of reading itself. While the issue of student-teacher discrepancy regarding literature was previously brought up by Akyel & Yalçin (1990), their results showed students' questioning the goal of literature teaching in EFL, not the very concept. Several respondents also cited this discrepancy as a reason for them to introduce literature through alternative means, so as to better appeal to their students. Canonical literature, due to its perceived inaccessibility, was particularly treated in this manner, with Teachers B and D describing it as a regular occurrence in their classroom. Notably, three of the respondents also argued that this was not an issue when they first started teaching, which might indicate that this is a relatively new phenomenon. All in all, the respondents' accounts indicate that students to some extent

disagree with the steering documents for upper secondary school with regard to reading proficiency; teachers and schools may thus need to address students' concerns and make a case not only for the chosen literature (if a common literary canon is adopted or established) but also for the curriculum in general.

Finally, some respondents seem to fulfil the demands in the curriculum to teach older literature (Skolverket, 2011, p.60) through excerpts and short stories, rather than longer and coherent literary works. Teachers A, D and E gave two reasons for this, namely a) time constraints and b) that it is more motivating and less daunting for their students. This poses an interesting question: does reading these shorter works adequately help students as intended by the curriculum, or is this method inferior to teaching more complete literary works? This question is beyond the scope of this study, but may nonetheless prove interesting for teachers to ponder.

5.2 Limitations of Study and Future Research

Firstly, the study identified several underlying ideas about literature and literary canons among the teachers. In particular, every respondent acknowledged the existence of aesthetic literary value, and the majority of them defined it in a similar way. There were, however, several differing views on the formation and nature of literary canons. Thus, the first research question was deemed sufficiently answered. Similarly, respondents were in agreement as to the benefits of reading literature, particularly in the sense that it conveys human experiences and general knowledge. Despite this, there were major differences between respondents regarding the use of literary canons in EFL-teaching, and a crucial discrepancy between teachers' and students' motivation for reading was identified. With these factors being accounted for, the second research question was successfully answered. As for the third research question, the collected data was not deemed to sufficiently detail teachers' motivation behind chosen methods. While some interesting aspects of classroom application could be identified, such as perceived teacher- and student-roles when teaching literature, a revision of the interview guide could perhaps have yielded more insight. This area in particular could perhaps also have benefited from other, complementary research methods such as classroom observation.

As for future research, additional studies examining methods for teaching literature in EFL seems necessary, due to the insufficient data yielded by this study. In particular, motivation and priorities held by teachers when applying said methods should be in focus.

Additionally, the disparity between students' and teachers' views of literature and reading that this paper has detailed seems to warrant further study; as these accounts have been made purely from the perspectives of teachers, students should be surveyed through both qualitative and quantitative methods on a larger scale concurrently with their teachers, so as to not only gain a two-sided coverage of the issue but also enable more reliable and generalized conclusions. A randomized, more extensive and geographically less restricted sample would be ideal.

6 Pedagogical Implications

The study uncovered a few implications for EFL-teachers with regard to including literature in their teaching. Firstly, the diverse range of different attitudes and motivations accounted for by the study imply a need for teachers to critically examine their own views on literature, whether they are conscious or subconscious. What are one's own definitions of literature and literary canons, and what is the focus when teaching them? What qualities are deemed important? This study, and in particular the literature review, can hopefully provide some guidance for teachers in that regard, and inform further study. Secondly, the discrepancy of perspectives and priorities between teachers, students and schools could also prove a challenge for literature teaching. In light of students' questioning of reading proficiency in general, schools and teachers need to address underlying concerns with regard to their inclusion of literature. It also seems necessary to e.g. point out the beneficial effects of reading, the use of reading proficiency in modern society and the rationale behind the curricular goals, as well as the difference between mere reading and literary analysis.

7 Conclusion

From the study, one can conclude that Swedish EFL-teachers seem to perceive literature as containing an inherent aesthetic value. This value was primarily defined through aspects such as idiomatic depth, expressiveness of language and stylistics. Views on literary canons were more diverse; while some respondents argued for their role as compilations of above mentioned aesthetic values, some focused on their role in cultural reproduction. As for how they motivate the inclusion of reading literature in EFL, they all agreed that literature conveys invaluable knowledge in the form of second-hand experiences and provides an opportunity to partake of other perspectives. This was particularly true of canonical literature, which they

also argued provide opportunity for analysis of aesthetic value and cultural norms. Notably, the respondents reported a crucial incongruity between their own and their students' views on the benefits of reading proficiency; this incongruity was noticeably different from previously documented cases, as it questioned the act of reading itself. Finally, two perspectives on the role of teachers and students when teaching literature was accounted for by the respondents; one where the teacher takes an assertive and authoritative role in students' analyses, and one where the students' subjective interpretations are given more legitimacy.

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Appendix A

Personal

- What is your age?
- What is your educational background? What have you studied?
- How long is your teaching experience?
- Where have you studied? Sweden and/or abroad?
- Where have you worked as a teacher? Sweden and/or abroad?
- With regard to English, do you work with or are you in any way responsible for any of the school's programmes in particular?

Literature

- What does literature mean to you?
- What can be gained from reading literature?
 - Which of those benefits is the most important to you?
- Do you think literature has an aesthetic value?
 - Is it important?
- Is the context surrounding the literary work important to appreciate and/or understanding it?
- What is most important when reading literature, the author's intended message or the reader's own interpretation and personal reaction?
- Should literature play a bigger role in upper secondary school?

Canon

- What does the term "Literary canon" mean to you?
- How does a literary work qualify for entering a canon, in your opinion?
 - What constitutes a "classic"?
- What do you think is the purpose of literary canons?
 - What should it be?
- Is there an English literary canon?
- Is the English literary canon, in its current state, a good thing?
 - How would your ideal canon look like? What authors should be included?
 - Should a canon exist at all?

Classroom Application

- Is it important to teach the English literary canon in the EFL classroom? Why/why not?
 - If no, would you replace it with something?
 - If yes, how do you choose particular works from the canon?
 - In either case, what do you want your students to learn/gain from it?
- How do you approach literature in the classroom, generally speaking?
 - Do you approach all literature, canonical and otherwise, the same way?
 - How do you introduce literature to the students, if at all?
- How do you make your students work with literature?
 - Why do you think this is an effective way of teaching literature?
 - Do they work with all literature, canonical and otherwise, the same way?
 - What is your role in this process?
- What do you focus on when teaching literature? Language, style, content etc.
 - Language, content, style, facts about the author?
 - Do you do the same with all literature?
- How do you motivate your students to read?
- Do your students generally share your views of literature and its value?
 - How about with regard to the English literary canon?

Appendix B

Samtyckesblankett för examensarbete

Denna intervjuundersökning utförs som en del av ett examensarbete på Ämneslärarprogrammet vid Göteborgs Universitet. Studiens syfte är att ta reda på hur engelskalärare på gymnasiet tänker kring litteratur och den engelska litterära kanon i allmänhet och i sin egen undervisning. Förhoppningen är att denna studie skall ge utökad perspektiv på litteraturens roll i undervisningen av engelska, och ligga till grund för framtida forskning.

Undersökningen består av intervjuer, vilka kommer att spelas in, transkriberas och sedan analyseras. Respondentens namn, skolans namn och ort är konfidentiell information som endast är tillgänglig för forskaren. Respondentens ålder, genomförda universitetsstudier och verksamma år som lärare kommer dock att återges i samband med intervjusvaren. Jag förbehåller mig rätten att inkludera intervjusvaren i forskningsrapporten både i deras helhet och i enstaka stycken. Efter avslutat examensarbete kommer inspelningarna och respondenternas personliga information att förstöras.

Detta arbete sker under min handledare Fredrik Olsson vid Göteborgs Universitet, Göteborg, Institutionen för språk och litteraturer. Han kan nås på fredrik.olsson@sprak.gu.se

Tack på förhand,

Ludwig Hjort

Telefon: 0707404240

Email: gushjolu@student.gu.se

Jag samtycker till att delta i denna undersökning enligt ovan

JA [] NEJ []

Respondentens underskrift: _____

Forskarens underskrift: _____