Wor(l)d Citizenship: A Case for Cultivating Cultural Understanding through Postcolonial Literature in the EFL Classroom

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1990-02-10-0411
Degree Project Essay
Term 8
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Abstract

This essay argues for postcolonial literature as a content of Swedish EFL education, to benefit educational goals of intercultural understanding. The essay examines the Swedish curriculum and discusses how the educational goals of intercultural understanding outline an ideal citizen who with artistic creativity involves themselves in other people and cultures. This empathic imagination touches on the concept of world citizenship, of acknowledging the common humanity of all people regardless of culture. However, the Swedish curriculum establishes a national, Swedish identity as a starting point for intercultural understanding. The essay claims that studies of literature could benefit cultivation of involvement and empathy through the concept of narrative imagination. In particular, the essay argues that postcolonial or multicultural literature would be fitting for cultivating intercultural understanding, questioning hegemonic, dominant formations of cultures, and representing marginalised voices. As sample works of postcolonial literature, the essay introduces two works, one by Alice Walker and the other by Ntozake Shange, who both are African American female authors who challenge dominant, monocultural, White supremacist patriarchal structures, and raise voices oppressed by various social parameters. These works disrupt illusions of consensus within English culture, and may thus give students insight into historical as well as sociolinguistic aspects of English language and literature. The essay concludes with a discussion on the paradoxes that might occur when working with postcolonial literature and the issues such content may address, between affirming the cultures and voices of marginalised groups, yet constantly looking beyond cultural borders to acknowledge the common humanity of a world in which we all are citizens.

Key words: postcolonial literature; multicultural literature; multicultural education; intercultural understanding; EFL education; narrative imagination; world citizenship; black feminist writers; african-american literature
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1. Introduction

In the following degree project essay, I will make a case for postcolonial literature in the Swedish EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom. I claim that postcolonial literature studies would benefit the educational goals of the Swedish curriculum and English syllabus, because it would provide good opportunities to address matters of intercultural understanding, and furthermore visualise and problematise hegemonic, monocultural depictions of Anglophone as well as Swedish culture.

My rationale for selecting my essay topic is due to recent political movements, education attitudes, and my own literary interests. As I write this, there is a wave of right-wing, nationalist politics that works towards normalising racism, hetero-cis-sexism, and enforcing patriarchal structures in Sweden as well as in many other European countries, which has only grown stronger during the recent years. Due to this development, the importance of addressing value-systems, human rights, and social justice in the classroom cannot be emphasised enough. Furthermore, I have encountered, during my studies here in Sweden as well as during my studies abroad in the U.S., an attitude among teacher students that teachers should strive towards being neutral or objective, not taking any ideologic or political stand. I have often heard teacher students, and sometimes teachers, criticising affirmative action or quotas that support marginalised groups for being bias and unprofessional. However, I would argue that striving towards being neutral or objective is simply to succumb to the dominant discourses, thus supporting the existing structures of power. Moreover, the Swedish school system is anything but ideologically neutral, since there is a curricular value-system stating the values and norms that teachers should convey to their students. To raise marginalised voices and favour oppressed groups would not be bias, I argue, but instead supported by the democratic mission of the Swedish school. I wish to bring literary traditions of resistance - which I have encountered during studies in African-American and queer literature - into the Swedish EFL classroom, to educate students of literary struggles for social justice, to stimulate their thoughts about power and privilege in our society, and to cultivate their understanding of culture and literature.

First, in the Background section of this essay, I will look at the educational goals of the Swedish curriculum, both the general goals of the value-system, on intercultural understanding, and the specific goals of the English syllabus, on culture and literature. These goals will be related to
Martha C. Nussbaum’s concepts of *world citizenship* and *narrative imagination*, as well as Bo Lundahl’s reading and interpretations of the English subject as a cultural and literary subject.

Secondly, I will discuss and problematise key concepts of this topic such as *multiculturalism* and *nationalism*. Thirdly, in the *Discussion* section of the essay, I will propose two sample works of postcolonial literature that could be used as a content in the EFL classroom to address matters of intercultural understanding.

2. Background

2.1. Culture in the Curriculum

To define the educational goals relevant for the argument of this essay, this section will examine the Swedish curriculum, analysing what goals are stated concerning culture and students’ intercultural understanding. The initial part of the Swedish curriculum, *Lgy11* states the general values and tasks of the Swedish school system, and defines the democratic foundation of values it rests upon. Tongue in cheek, this part is sometimes called ”the poetry part,” because of the abstract concepts, sometimes claimed to be buzz words, of democracy, solidarity, and ethics. Already in the first paragraph, solidarity with fellow human beings is phrased as a central goal, as ”education shall convey and establish respect of human rights and the basic democratic values that the Swedish society rests upon (Skolverket, 5, my translation).” One could discuss the explicit connection between ”democratic values” and the Swedish nation, which I will return to below. Further on, education should not only convey, but *promote* respect for ”the sanctity of human life, individual freedom, the equal value of all man, equality between women and men as well as solidarity between human beings (5).” So far, the curriculum vouches for solidarity, and commitment to certain, ethical values, and the educational goals start to shape the ideal image of a certain kind of citizen that the Swedish school system should produce through education.

The goal of intercultural understanding is not stated explicitly, but could be inferred, beneath the headline ”Understanding and compassion”, where it is stated that schools should ”encourage understanding of other people and ability of involvement (5).” The discourse thus goes from solidarity and respect to understanding and involvement; the ideal citizen should not just pay respect to the integrity of others, but also make an effort to imagine what it would be like to walk in others’ shoes. This active engagement is not the only obligation that is put on the ideal citizen, s/he should also face xenophobia and intolerance with ”knowledge, open discussions and active efforts (5).” Furthermore, students should not only stand up against xenophobia and intolerance, but the
school system should also make sure that the students do not succumb to these destructive forces themselves, because "internationalisation of Swedish society" places "high demands on people’s ability to live with and realise the values that lies within diversity (5).” There is a contradiction within the discourse here, that I will return to, namely that although the assumption seems to be that diversity per se is valuable and desirable, one has to "realise” its values. Ergo, it is implied that there is some resistance to this diversity in Swedish society. Perhaps this resistance is reflected in the balance between nationalism and intercultural understanding in the curriculum.

To cultivate the confidence needed for intercultural understanding, the ideal Swedish citizen of the curriculum is rooted in a Swedish cultural identity. Intercultural understanding and nationalism do not appear to exclude one another: to strengthen the ability of empathic imagination, students benefit from "familiarity with Swedish culture and history” and "participation in the common cultural heritage (5).” This idea of "Swedish” as a starting point for cultural interaction is then further specified to be developed into "Northern”, "European”, and "global”, but with "Swedish” at its core (5). An identity that is first and foremost "Swedish” is implied as the natural identity of the ideal citizen. However, there is no further development of what is encapsulated within this idea of "Swedish identity.” Despite this silence, one should not jump to conclusions of hegemonic, monocultural monoliths too soon, because further on there is another emphasis on intercultural understanding, stating the importance of "students’ understanding of the cultural diversity within the nation (7).” There actually seems to be an ambition to question monocultural concepts of "Swedish” in this line, with what could perhaps be seen as intracultural understanding, rather than just intercultural. Under the headline of "General Goals and Guidelines", it is stated that after completing a national upper secondary program, students should have knowledge about the Swedish national minorities’ (Jews, Romani, Sápmi, Sweden Finns and Tornedalians) ”culture, language, religion and history (10).” One could wonder why this goal is stated after, and separated in the bullet list, from the goal about "knowledge about and insight into central parts of the Swedish, Northern and Western cultural heritage (10),” instead of being an integrated part of the "Swedish cultural heritage.” This distinction could be interpreted as a result of a discourse on "Swedish” as equal to "ethnic Swedish”, which I will return to when discussing nationalism in the curriculum. Finally, goals of intercultural understanding are stated under the headline "Norms and Values", where it is made clear that students should learn to "interact in encounters with other people out of respect for differences in living conditions, culture, language, religion and history (11).” This is achieved through empathic imagination, by being able to "imagine and understand..."
other people’s situation and develop a will to act also in their interest (11).” One could argue that the empathic imagination is here preferably developed into a sympathetic imagination. Knowledge about other cultures is not enough, because it seems as if the “will to act also in their interest” suggests that the ideal citizen is not only aware and educated about other cultures, but also involved with and feeling for them. Intercultural understanding seems to not only recognise cultural differences or “borders”, but also strive towards reaching beyond those differences, recognising a common humanity.

The ideal citizen of the Swedish curriculum recalls the figure of a creative artist (perhaps a poet, since it is called the ”poetry part”), who with sensitivity can imagine the lives lived by others (5, 11). This involvement in others seems to demand vivid imagination, and the sort of creativity mostly associated with arts. Therefore, one could already jump to the conclusion that a curriculum that desires this kind of solidary, empathic citizen, should have a focus on some kind of art studies, an area of study that cultivates these creative processes of imagination. In this very essay, I will propose a kind of art studies that will benefit this cultivation: the study of the narrative arts of literature.

2.2. The Democratic Swedish Student: a Nussbaumian World Citizen?

In this section, the ideal citizen outlined in the curriculum’s initial part will be compared to the concept of world citizenship, discussing similarities and differences of the two concepts in regards to intercultural understanding. The ideal citizen that the Swedish school system seems to intend shape, with a proficiency for solidarity, empathy, and understanding and appreciation of the diversity of ”non-Swedish” as well as ”Swedish” cultures, is reminiscent of to Martha C. Nussbaum’s concept of the world citizen. Much like the Swedish school ministry’s goals of empathy and involvement, Nussbaum claims in her book Cultivating Humanity that ”we must educate people who can operate as world citizens with sensitivity and understanding (Nussbaum, 52).” This concept is traced back by the author to the ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes, who she claims coined ”I am a citizen of the world”, framing his subjectivity through his universal humanity rather than other group belongings, and the idea was then developed by Diogenes’ followers The Stoics into ”kosmopolitēs” (52). Similarly, bell hooks argues in her book Teaching to Transgress that civil rights activist Dr. Martin Luther King argued for the development of a ”world perspective” with loyalties that ”transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation” long before multiculturalism became a ”fashionable” term (hooks, 28). And just like hooks, Nussbaum claims
that the ideas of world citizenship or cosmopolitanism are "an essential resource for democratic citizenship" and vouches for them to be "at the core of today’s higher education (Nussbaum, 53)."

Solidarity, empathy, and respect that transcend cultural borders is found in the Swedish curriculum, but the firm anchoring in a Swedish national identity questions if the ideal citizen of Swedish education is a Nussbaumian world citizen. As the concept of kosmopolitēs was further developed in ancient Greece, it was noticed that an effect of comparative culture studies could be "removing the false air of naturalness and inevitability that surrounds our practices (55)", thus denaturalising the normative conception of one’s own culture and conventions. The educational goals of students appreciating cultural diversity within Swedish culture, and learning about national minorities, could be interpreted as goals of intracultural understanding, diversifying monocultural concepts of Swedish culture. But still, "the Swedish" is the initial starting point of the student’s identity in the Swedish curriculum, although it is then intended to develop "beyond" that "border". However, the Greek Stoics did not propose any abolition of national borders, but they did claim that we should "give our first allegiance to no mere form of government, no temporal power, but to the moral community made up by the humanity of all human beings (59).” So for the Swedish curriculum to be considered cosmopolitan in the Stoic sense, perhaps the phrasing ought to be "Education should contribute to students’ development of an identity that does not only relates to the specific human, but also the Swedish, the Northern, the European and outermost the global (in the original text, Swedish is placed where I now placed human).”

On the other hand, Nussbaum does not neglect a national focus in the curriculum, either, since she considers it "proper for us to spend a disproportionate amount of time mastering our native language and its literature (62)” in education. But she does lift the importance of questioning monocultural concepts of what counts as native language and literature, stating that the ideal "multicultural education” should not just teach students about cultures beyond their own national borders, but also "ethnic and racial, social and sexual minorities within their own nation (68).” Where the Swedish curriculum merely enumerates the national Swedish minorities, probably because of the acknowledgment of the correlating minority languages, Nussbaum adds class, gender, and sexual preferences as parameters of marginalisation. This inclusion in education will take the form of some kind of student "exposure” to foreign and minority cultures, and I will return later in this essay to how that exposure may take the shape of literature studies (69).

Despite the good intentions of including cultural groups, the very terms we use to describe culture will also to an extent define culture, which make multicultural a desirable yet problematic term.
Although Nussbaum herself uses the term *multicultural* to describe her ideal education for world citizenship, she takes account of criticism against the terms *multicultural* and *diversity*, since they are associated with a moral relativist approach that uncritically celebrates all kinds of difference without considering the moral dimension of the cultural practices (82). The term *interculturalism* is instead associated with "the recognition of human needs across cultures and of dissonance and critical dialogue with cultures (82)."

To summarise, one could argue that both the Swedish curriculum and Nussbaum’s education philosophy share ambitions of shaping sensitive and altruistic citizens, that reach out to fellow human beings across cultural and national borders, although with different purposes. The Swedish curriculum, as a steering document for institutionalised education, implies that a requirement for developing this sympathetic citizenship is an identity firmly rooted in "Swedish culture." Although the curriculum, just like Nussbaum, aims at including marginalised groups such as national minorities in its education, it seems like an additive approach, simply adding "the Other" to what is an unquestioned, naturalised concept of a "Swedish core culture". This ambition to place the nation state rather than humanity as the starting point could be further discussed, which I will, when returning to the term *nationalism*. Now, I intend to look at the specific subject of English in the Swedish curriculum, examining what its syllabus says about intercultural understanding.

### 2.3. The English Syllabus: Naturally Global?

This section will analyse and discuss the English syllabus of the Swedish curriculum, looking at how culture and literature is coded in the steering document. The depiction of the English subject, as presented in the English syllabus of *Lgy11*, is English studies as the acquirement of a tool, perhaps a key, that gives access to a worldwide language community. However, how this community has gained its worldwide expansion, is not further developed; although we are told in the very first line that English "surrounds us in our daily life (Skolverket, 53),” there is nothing mentioned about processes of colonialism, imperialism, or globalisation. But, when Bo Lundahl presents his reading of the English syllabus in his book *Engelsk språkdidaktik* (*English Language Didactics*), he does interpret that “the expansion of English as a global contact language is a part of globalisation (Lundahl, 83, my translation).” Lundahl interprets globalisation, however, as a natural development of trading networks expanding across national borders, rather than as an asymmetric power relation that forces certain ways of life unto others. Although he acknowledges that the status of English has been "described in terms of linguistic imperialism (82)", he chooses to view its
success in relation to “the need to find a language that works as a lingua franca in a globalised world (82).” Lundahl’s perspective on English as the rational, natural choice of a global language, rather than a language that because of its colonial and imperial history has had the power to grow global, seems to fit the English we encounter in the subject syllabus. English is here presented as a skill to master, a tool to acquire, to be able to “participate in different social and cultural contexts, as well as in global studies and working life (Skolverket, 53).”

Despite the focus on competence and mastery of skills, the study of culture within English is mentioned in the syllabus, and literature is motivated as a content for such studies. When the central content of the subject is listed, it is stated that the content of communication should include "living conditions, attitudes, values and traditions as well as social, political and cultural conditions in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used (54).” The study of this content should then lead to students meeting the knowledge requirement of being able to "discuss in basic terms some features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used, and also make simple comparisons with their own experiences and knowledge (56).” Contrary to the Stoics of ancient Greece, comparative cultural studies is here a goal in its own right, not the means to denaturalise or question the norms of one’s own culture. In his reading of the syllabus, Lundahl does conclude that the English subject is heavily focused on facts and isolated cultural descriptions, presenting "culture as a product (Lundahl, 124).” But despite this he also describes English as a cultural and literary subject (122).

At an upper secondary school level, the English subject is particularly open for concepts of intercultural understanding and narrative imagination, when students work with more literature than in lower grades. The interpretation of English as a literary subject is fitting in the English courses of Swedish upper secondary school, according to Lundahl, and he also argues that narratives and fiction are vital for intercultural understanding (404). In the syllabus, however, the explicit mentioning of literature is far from as elaborated as the mentioning of other content, such as rhetorics and communicative strategies in writing and talking. It is stated, though, that students should work with "content and form in different kinds of fiction (Skolverket, 54),” as well as "themes, ideas, form and content in film and literature; authors and literary periods (60),” receive "literature and other fiction (55),” and "contemporary and older literature, poetry, drama and songs (60).” There are no guidelines or considerations stated here, concerning the process of literary selection. Teachers of English may feel free to pick any literary works they feel like, whether it is with a burning interest for social justice and representation of marginalised groups, or with a
passion for the "DWEM (Dead White European Males)" of the classic, Western canon. Although he has a positive, consensus view on the process of globalisation, Lundahl does claim that "the multicultural classroom gives reason to discuss language education’s traditional focus on Great Britain and USA, when it comes to the selection of texts and content (Lundahl, 90).” When discussing literary studies within English, Lundahl argues that "no texts are culturally neutral”, and refers to Claire Kramsch’s statement that "a target language country is not represented by one culture (422).” Although Lundahl does not problematise the naturalisation of globalisation in the syllabus, he does present literature as motivated content for intercultural understanding, and furthermore the importance of considering representation when selecting texts, to question traditional, monocultural concepts of anglophone culture. His theory of texts as "cultural meeting places where different characters’ experiences can be discussed and clashed against each other (404)", and thus optimal for working with intercultural understanding, is relatable to another concept by Martha C. Nussbaum: narrative imagination, which will be defined and discussed in the next section. And, the name perhaps being a dead give-away, it is connected to the emphatic imagination stated in the Swedish curriculum’s initial value-system, the ”poetry part.”

2.4. Narrative Imagination: Fiction to Cover the Distance

In this section, the concept of narrative imagination will be presented and related to intercultural understanding, world citizenship, and literature studies. Although the English syllabus does not state many explicit guidelines regarding literature and culture studies, there are arguments for placing literature studies at the very core of the subject. To study literature within the English subject does not just benefit student’s knowledge of Anglophone culture, and the knowledge requirement of discussing Anglophone contexts, but it benefits the very goal of the Swedish curriculum to produce emphatic citizens. To put it all in Nussbaumian terms: narrative imagination is a potential road to world citizenship. Nussbaum explicitly states that “in a curriculum for world citizenship, literature, with its ability to represent the specific circumstances and problems of people of many different sorts, makes an especially rich contribution (Nussbaum, 86).” The literary art of the novel, prose, and poetry is preferred for this goal, rather than other sorts of text, because “narrative art has the power to make us see the lives of the different with more than a casual tourist’s interest - with involvement and sympathetic understanding, with anger at our society’s refusal of visibility (88).” Nussbaum’s very word choices seems to have found their way to the Swedish curriculum; the argument here is that the desired educational goals of involvement and emphatic imagination can be
reached through the study of narrative art. The relation between a desired form of citizen, living in a desired form of community, and the study of literature, is made even clearer when Nussbaum states that: "narrative imagination is an essential preparation for moral interaction (90)." Close reading of a novel, and involvement with fictional characters, is described as a boot camp for cultivating those desired habits of listening, connecting, and understanding the Other (90). Although her phrasing is highly stylistic, and her voice is full of dramatic embellishment, Nussbaum does assure that literature will not change society in the blink of an eye; "nonetheless, the artistic form makes its spectator perceive, for a time, the invisible people of their world - at least a beginning of social justice (94)." Through narrative art, marginalised voices do not only make their voices heard, but rather than shouting from far in a non-fiction text, they get a chance to tell it directly to our faces.

Just as Lundahl claims the importance of considering representation of voices and authors in a multicultural classroom, Nussbaum concludes that "if literature is a representation of human possibilities, the works of literature we choose will inevitably respond to, and further develop, our sense of who we are and might be (106)." As I will return to, when discussing the term multicultural, the representation of authors in the classroom is not just a compensatory matter, of making up for Sweden’s and the Western world’s colonialism and racism - it is a matter of the possible and acknowledged ways of life that we present to our students.

In the Swedish EFL classroom of upper secondary school, literature studies could benefit students’ development of intercultural understanding, and postcolonial literature could be particularly fitting for discussing matters of culture. In the Swedish curriculum, there are educational goals of developing citizens capable of empathic imagination, who involves themselves in different people’s situations and cultures. In Nussbaum’s concept of world citizenship, there are similar ideals of intercultural understanding, and Nussbaum also presents literature studies as a way of cultivating such skills. In Lundahl’s reading of the English syllabus, there are arguments for considering Upper Secondary School English as a literary as well as cultural subject, and for questioning the traditional monocultural approach to English culture and literature. Therefore, a literary content that disrupts such monocultural concepts, such as postcolonial literature, would benefit the educational goals of intercultural understanding. Literature studies would cultivate skills of involvement and imagination, and postcolonial literature in particular would address matters of culture explicitly. However, there are some key terms encountered so far in this discussion that need to be further developed and discussed. The very term multicultural, used to describe literature and education as well as classrooms, needs to be examined. Furthermore, the phenomenon of nationalism seems to
both implicitly and explicitly coexist with its implied antonym *multiculturalism* in the curriculum, and there are critics arguing that they are not as distinct from one another as sometimes suggested.

### 2.5. Multiculturalism: Critical Questions or Casual Color?

In this section of my essay, I will discuss the term *multiculturalism*, and define how it relates to my topic of postcolonial literature in the Swedish EFL classroom. The term is often used to describe an approach towards culture studies and literature associated with postcolonial literature, and sometimes the two terms are used as synonyms. Also, it is a term that has been criticised for actually being counter productive and complicating rather than solving the issues it aims to solve.

First, I will try to define the term by looking at various attempts to describe its origin and usage. Secondly, I will look at how the term has been used to describe certain kinds of literature. Thirdly, I will give an insight into the criticism that has been aimed at the term and the ideas that it is said to encapsulate.

The ideas that multiculturalism encapsulate have been shifted and redefined since the concept was coined, but the main intention behind the term seems to often have been a will to include, to favour not just a single culture or concept of a culture, but to let in other groups. In the article "Multiculturalism, Literature, and Curriculum Issues," featured in the anthology *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts*, there is an attempt by Violet J. Harris and Arlette I. Willis to locate the foundations of multiculturalism, which they admit is "like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack (Harris & Willis, 825).” They trace its evocation back to 1941, where the term was understood in a *The New York Herald* review as vouching for a multicultural way of living, to "counter other ideologies such as imperialism and colonialism (825).” Not only does the term here resemble the ideas found in *postcolonialism*, but it sounds as if the two terms are used synonymously. One could almost see them as a negative or positive way of discussing the same concept; *postcolonialism* tells us what ought to be countered, *multiculturalism* tells us what ought to be favoured. While *postcolonialism* in its word structure inherits an ambition to strive against and beyond colonialist perspectives, *multiculturalism* in its word structure inherits an ambition to include a variety of cultures into a context. Other definitions that the authors summon to their text is multiculturalism as ”a philosophical position and movement that assumes that the gender, ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity of a pluralistic society should be reflected in all of the institutionalized structures of educational institutions, including the staff, the norms and values, the curriculum, and the student body (826).” Multiculturalism is lifted into the school system in this
definition, claiming that it is the duty of teachers and curriculum to acknowledge and represent the various social groups of a society.

In the context of the Swedish school system, the term *multicultural classroom* is often uttered. Lundahl claims that although multicultural includes various factors, it has come to be used in common discourse to refer to the fact that a lot of the students have foreign backgrounds, which would make the term "multiethnic classroom" perhaps more appropriate (Lundahl, 90). During the 1970’s, *multicultural education* became a popular concept, aiming to acknowledge the traditions of ethnic minorities and stimulate a public support for immigrant children’s integration. However, the concept was criticised for stereotypical representation, treating culture as a static product, and in Sweden it lead to a polarised categorisation of students into "Swedish” and "immigrants” (Lundahl, 97). The trend in Sweden has instead shifted to *intercultural pedagogy/intercultural teaching*, which aims at keeping questions about culture alive rather than static, and question majority- as well as minority cultures within society (97-8). Nonetheless, the term *multicultural education* is still used in most Anglophone countries (Lundahl, 98).

To follow the mission of multicultural education, to question and counter ethnocentric concepts of culture, *multicultural literature* is suggested as a content. This is the approach that I will use myself in this essay, and therefore I will specify the definition of postcolonial, or multicultural literature that I use to define my proposed literary content. Cai and Sims Bishop offers a definition of multicultural as either world literature, referring to all literature; cross-cultural literature, written about various groups, but not necessarily by group members; and parallel culture literature, written by group members (Harris & Willis, 827). In her article "Multicultural Literature and Young Adolescents: A Kaleidoscope of Opportunity”, Susan M. Landt provides a more simplistic definition of multicultural literature as literature that is written by or brings up the perspective of marginalised groups, marginalised due to any social parameter (Landt, 691). One could say that Landt sums up the cross-cultural as well as the parallel culture literature in one concept. To distinguish between multicultural and postcolonial literature, Behbood Mohammadzadeh writes in his article "Incorporating Multicultural Literature in English Language Teaching Curriculum” that multicultural literature is a broader, more inclusive term than postcolonial literature, the first encompassing literature written by all kinds of marginalised minorities, while the latter is defined as written by former colonised subjects, (specifically colonised by Britain) (Mohammadzadeh, 24). However, the author brings other definitions to the table, such as postcolonial literature as any literature somehow affected by colonialism throughout history, or writing that can be interpreted as
scrutinising and resisting colonialist perspectives (24). While the first definition very specifically labels literature as postcolonial due to author background, the latter definitions seems like they can be argued and discussed depending on the interpretation of the literary work itself. But, by using the latter definitions of postcolonial literature, the term seems to merge with multicultural literature; if multicultural literature is written by authors of, or brings up the perspectives of marginalised groups, and the very act of writing and publishing such a work may be interpreted as an act of resistance against colonial hegemonies - is multicultural literature per se postcolonial literature?

When discussing selected sample titles of postcolonial literature in this essay, I will use the definition that lies closer to multicultural, defining postcolonial literature as literature written by, and raising the voices of subjects affected by colonialism, and furthermore resisting colonialist perspectives.

Although there is a lot of praise, and arguments for multicultural education and within it the incorporation of multicultural literature, the key term multiculturalism has been thoroughly criticised. Some critics lay out the potential pitfalls and misconceptions of a term that they do believe is for the better good, others point out that the term itself is highly problematic and in fact may not counter the destructive social structures it aims to counter. Lundahl points at the importance of using multiculturalism in a broader sense, not just letting it in practice be used as only referring to ethnicity, but including parameters such as "gender, class, musical taste, interests, opinions and other group belongings (Lundahl, 95)." Using multiculturalism to define students as members of simply one group, as having a single identity, may lead to plural monoculturalism, treating these various cultures as "isolated islands that end up next to each other without interacting (95)." This perspective of plural monoculturalism is also brought up by Magnus Persson in his book *Varför läsa litteratur? (Why Read Literature?),* where he claims that "critics of identity politics have pointed out the danger of a strong emphasis on the characteristics and autonomy of the own group leading to a paradoxal form of pluralism with separatistic streaks (Persson, 32, my translation)."

Besides the educational goal of intercultural understanding, criticism has also been aimed at the implied educational goal of a Swedish cultural identity. Persson problematises the Swedish cultural identity desired in the Swedish curriculum, which is conveyed "in static terms and viewed as something obviously positive (41)." The presumption seems to be that "a stable cultural identity both is possible and necessary, and it is never considered that it could also work as constraining, oppressive and suffocating (41)." This hegemonic, unquestioned notion of a desired, national
identity will be further discussed when discussing the term nationalism. Persson further problematises the Swedish curriculum’s way of conveying the multicultural, bringing up the paradox that Sweden is said to be a multicultural society, yet there is a constant distinction between the Swedish, cultural heritage and the Others’ cultural heritage (43). The Others are implied as being members of immigrated, non-European cultures, which reduces the multicultural to a matter of simply ethnic diversity (43).

The implied resistance against diversity in the curriculum is problematic just because it needs to be inferred, instead of being explicitly stated in the steering document. Paradoxically, although cultural diversity is inherently valuable, there is a strong need to educate students and convince them about its positive aspects (44). Persson interprets this as the curriculum writing out a vision of a desired social and moral condition, but he claims that by ”consequently avoiding or neutralising conflicts there is a risk of legitimising the shape of things and give an impression that the all good society already is here (61).” Just like the English syllabus, when not speaking out about the complexity of globalisation and the status of English, the depiction of multiculturalism in the Swedish curriculum may convey an illusion of consensus by not addressing conflicts within society.

Another word that is coded as inherently good in the Swedish curriculum is diversity. In an article simply titled ”Diversity”, featured in Critical Terms for Literary Study, Louis Menand describes how diversity has within the multiculturalist movement been “taken to name a good in itself (Menand, 336).” He does states at the very start that diversity ”simply names a fact, which is that people who write works of literature are different from one another, and so are people who read works of literature (336).” However, he does claim that the problems of diversity that multiculturalism proposes to solve, by offering alternative formations besides the dominant formations of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and Eurocentrism, remain unsolved by the multiculturalist approach (346-7). Just like Lundahl points out the danger of multiculturalism becoming a plural monoculturalism of ”isolated islands”, Menand points out the danger of multiculturalism producing ”just a lot of little monolithic abstractions” when taking on the big monoliths of dominant formations (347). Kevin K. Kumashiro touches on this issue in the article ”Post Perspectives on Anti-Oppressive Education in Social Studies, English, Mathematics, and Science Classrooms”, when addressing the problem of adding diversity to a curriculum. He brings up as an example the problem of adding Black authors to a curriculum simply counting on their voices to bring up differences based on ethnicity, thus giving ”blackness, in other words, a normative (or steering) character in the inclusive curriculum (Kumashiro, 16).” Static, set
definitions like these, as sometimes used in identity politics, blurs out group members in the margin, and simply enforces closed, isolated concepts of culture, adding a normative difference (16).

The selection of marginalised literatures and authorships, runs the risk of enforcing cultural borders rather than transcending them. Adding difference to the curriculum can thus be done without jeopardising hegemonic structures, and the difference can actually be objectified and locked in an "ethnic canon (18)." Not only could such adding of difference be argued to be ineffective, but some would also claim that it is counter productive. In the article "Issues in Using Multicultural Literature in College ESL Writing Classes," Stephanie Vandrick writes that there are concerns among some educators that "labeling and categorising people (and their literatures) by race, gender, ethnic background, religion, sexual orientation, ability or disability, will lead to losing sight of our humanity, our connectedness to other human beings (Vandrick, 255)." Vandrick seems to claim that the struggle to diversify literature studies may actually jeopardise any vision of world citizenship, making us blind to the common humanity behind cultural categories. However, although Vandrick acknowledges this potential danger of identity politics, or identity literature, she still sees multiculturalism and the labeling of multicultural literature as a necessary evil. In an ideal world, she claims, we would not need such affirmative action as labelling, promoting, and incorporating multicultural literature into our education, but until we wake up in that Utopia, teachers need to do all they can to bring those marginalised groups and cultures into the classroom (267).

Trying to act "colour blind," or "objective," when selecting literature, will thus do nothing to counter hegemonic structures that effect literary selection. In her essay "Postmodern Blackness", featured in the anthology Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts, bell hooks criticises the postmodern critique of identity politics, arguing that it neglects the struggle of oppressed groups such as the African-American civil rights movements (hooks, 1309). Although hooks acknowledges the need to discuss and problematise identity politics, she refuses to deny the potential it has for "those who have suffered the crippling effects of colonisation and domination to gain or regain a hearing (1310).” Claiming that the critique often comes from a privileged white, male intelligentia, she says it never surprises her "when black folks respond to the critique of essentialism, especially when it denies the validity of identity politics by saying, ‘Yeah, it’s easy to give up identity, when you got one (1309).’” In another work, Teaching to Transgress, bell hooks claims that, for example, including a Black author like Toni Morrison without paying attention to ethnicity is to implicitly support classic canon biases, resulting in "another form of tokenism (hooks, 39).” Where Menand and Kumashiro sees it as constraining to focus on ethnicity and gender when working with for
example Black female authors, hooks claims that the lack of such a focus would result in symbolic inclusion, not taking account of the marginalised groups these authors represent.

Intercultural understanding must always include cultivation of intra-cultural understanding, analysing both majority and minority cultures within one’s own national culture. hooks sees a particular danger of tokenism in predominantly white classrooms, and therefore argues that "it is so crucial that 'whiteness’ be studied, understood, discussed - so that everyone learns that affirmation of multiculturalism, and an unbiased inclusive perspective, can and should be present whether or not people of color are present (43).” The "whiteness”, the majority culture, should be just as studied and scrutinised as the non-white, minority cultures in the classroom, to make sure that it does not remain an unquestioned, hegemonic monolith. hooks does not portray this as an idyllic, harmonic, process; on the contrary, it may generate conflict in the classroom.

Looking out over the class, across race, sexual preference, and ethnicity, I saw students nodding their heads. And I saw for the first time that there can be, and usually is, some degree of pain involved in giving up old ways of thinking and knowing and learning new approaches. I respect that pain. And I include recognition of it now when I teach, that is to say, I teach about shifting paradigms and talk about the discomfort it can cause. White students learning to think more critically about questions of race and racism may go home for the holidays and suddenly see their parents in a different light (hooks, 42-43).

Just as important as addressing the "blackness” and "femaleness” of Black, female authors, hooks vouches for the importance of addressing the "whiteness” of a dominant, white majority culture. Such discussions are part of denaturalising the concept of the national culture, such as the "Swedish culture” or "Swedish identity” desired in the Swedish curriculum. The Nussbaumian world citizen, as opposed to the ideal Swedish citizen, questions hers/his cultural identity as defined by nationality, and strives to transcend that border. But although the fearless confrontation of issues such as white supremacy and racist social structures is admirable, it is, as hooks makes clear, not without risk. To address such matters could surely stir conflict within the classroom, and especially make members of privileged groups feel attacked; to bring up, for example, criticism of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy from a Black feminist may shake the equilibrium of some white boys in the class. Moreover, it may actually shake the equilibrium of nationalist streaks within the Swedish curriculum, as well as implied monocultural conceptions of "Swedishness”. I will now look at these issues, discussing the term nationalism in relation to Swedish education.
2.6. Nationalism: A Ghost Colonial

This section returns to the Swedish curriculum, discussing how the concept of nationalism may be related to the curriculum’s guidelines concerning culture and intercultural understanding. The Swedish curriculum and Nussbaum both convey similar ideals of empathy and solidarity, but where Nussbaum’s idea of world citizenship seems to almost blur national borders, the Swedish curriculum has a firm belief in a national, Swedish identity as a starting point for any road to any cultivation of democratic values. The curriculum conveys to the reader a nation to be proud of, founded on democratic values. There is an implication that the demands put on students, such as learning to appreciate the values within diversity, may be reached through the shaping of a Swedish identity, and knowledge about the Swedish, cultural heritage. But it is not specified what lies at the core of this Swedish heritage, this identity, this culture. However, it seems to be something separated from that cultural diversity, just like it is separated from its national minorities. A definite answer is not given, but many times the concept of Swedish is implied as a matter of ethnicity. Although the curriculum states that Sweden is internationalised, ”multiculturalised,” there is a monocultural concept of ”Swedishness” that seems bound to the nation state.

There is a streak of national essence in the curriculum that may be difficult to avoid in the construction of steering documents for a national, institutionalised education. However, these nationalist tendencies are expressed in matters of supporting economic growth, rather than worshipping any monarchy, as was the case with the curriculum of the Swedish folk school at the beginning of the 20th century. Ninni Wahlström writes in her book *Läroplansteori och didaktik (Curriculum Theory and Didactics)* how this curriculum code was ”organised around a worship of religion and motherland”, a patriarchal raising of citizens, or rather workers, to serve the nation state (Wahlström, 26, 28, my translation). Discussions about education policies today speak about the idea of a global citizenship, perhaps similar to the Nussbaumian world citizen, claiming that the nation ”no longer defines a definite border for identity and notion of citizenship (157).” Nonetheless, one could still argue that the patriarchal production of workers still lingers in the systematic curriculum perspective of standards based curriculums such as *Lgy11*, which ”main purpose is to prepare students to be able to assert themselves as individuals, and the country as a nation, in a constantly increasing global economic competition (127).” When the globalised market could be argued to transcend and even blur national borders, the curriculum’s goal of a firm Swedish identity could be a way to make sure that a Swedish student will work for the good of the Swedish nation as she/he transcends these borders. Even though the old, nationalist folk school
code of swearing allegiance to a national monarch has been removed from the curriculum, the will to prepare students to assert the country as an economic force seems like a nationalistic streak. I will now discuss how streaks of nationalism in Swedish education affect the goals of intercultural understanding.

Culture as a concept has been interpreted and used in many ways since it was developed in the end of the 17th century, and often it has been associated with sociopolitical power. In her book *Om språkundervisning i mellanrummet (On Language Education in the Third Space)*, Ulrika Tornberg gives an historical overview of the term culture, how it went from an elitist enlightenment ideal to a nationalist desire of drawing borders and "through education, control, and even violence integrate a large variation of local cultures and identities to a coherent, common, national identity (Tornberg, 59, my translation)." Through this process, culture started to be conceived as an object, a fixed product, such as Lundahl claims is the view in the subject of English still today.

Tornberg goes on to criticise the educational goal of intercultural understanding, which she claims, much like the criticism against multiculturalism, enforces the notion of cultures as set, fixed objects that can be studied and compared as isolated phenomenons (62). She points out a paradoxal co-existence in the Swedish curriculum, where the idea of uniform, national cultures are supposed to be studied, but the discourse on "diversity and internationalisation seems to contradict the discourse on 'culture' as a uniform, national phenomenon (64)." This desire to convey a stabile, monocultural nation state has its origins in "national elites’ attempt to construct national identities to adapt the masses to the growing industrial society (69).” This shaping of nation states and Europe as a whole has "instead of giving people safety, contributed to arms race, pollution, ethnic conflicts, and a growing unemployment in the former industrial countries (68).” Bringing up these arguments for the failure of the nation state, Tornberg seems to side with an alternative such as the Nussbaumian world citizen, when she claims that "language pedagogy perhaps should abandon the term 'culture' as in 'culture' bound to nationality (270).” In a polyphonic creation of meaning, culture could instead be constructed in the meeting between all the different individuals that reside within the classroom (271). From Tornberg’s perspective, "Swedishness” would then not be something unquestioned, but instead an open question to be discussed, alongside "Englishness”, in the EFL classroom.

In the the Swedish EFL classroom, notions of uniform, national identities may be found not only in the curriculum, but in teachers’ approaches to their students. Tornberg brings up the multicultural classroom of Sweden today, arguing that teachers cannot "have a uniform, Swedish, national culture
as a starting point for comparison with the target language country (67).” Potential pitfalls of enforcing monocultural concepts of culture on either side of comparative culture studies, thus there is the risk of not only neglecting marginalised groups of English culture, but also marginalised groups of Swedish culture - the very students in the EFL classroom. Jörgen Tholin has examined the ethnical bias of Swedish steering documents for EFL education, in his article ”"Swedishness' as a Norm for Learners of English in Swedish Schools: A Study of National and Local Objectives and Criteria in Compulsory Schools”, and found that ”curricula and syllabi often have a traditional monocultural reference point (Tholin, 254).” This monocultural perspective is similar to the one Tornberg points out in the study of foreign languages, but Tholin elaborates how these streaks of monoculturalism can also be found within the very educational practices. To counter these remains of a highly Western, Eurocentric education, Tholin sides with Tesfahuney’s claim that ”a truly multicultural education should strive to be non-elitist in that it aims to base education, ideas, and priorities on the needs of all people (254).”

Once again, the calls for the acknowledgement of common human needs beyond national and cultural borders echoes with the concept of world citizenship, and for an ”exorcism” of these ghosts of a colonial past that linger in the Swedish school system. However, these monocultural perspectives survive not just because of ignorance, but because they benefit students who meet the normative standards, who have backgrounds that are the right kind of ”Swedish” and thus give them a better chance to receive better grades in English (265). Although English is stated in the syllabus to be a global contact language, the mastery of English still is based in practice, according to Tholin, on the mastery of Swedish, and the varied linguistic and cultural preconditions of students are not regarded, although ”Swedish culture is not one-dimensional (261).” It should be noted, though, that neither Tornberg nor Tholin have studied the most recent curriculum used today, Lgy11, but according to Lundahl, culture is still studied as a static object in the educational practices of today. The national, Swedish identity of the curriculum’s value-system is not only a precondition for the goals of intercultural understanding, but it also seems to be required of students to master subjects such as English. It seems like we in Sweden do not study English as a Foreign Language, but instead have our very own ”English as a Foreign Language for Speakers of Proper Swedish”.

In public and social discourses, the concept of Swedishness is often highly related to, or even made equal, to whiteness, and therefore there is something problematic in the voucher for a Swedish identity, when it can be viewed as a somehow ethnically White identity. This issue is discussed in an anthology published by the Multicultural Centre in Botkyrka, Sweden, titled Om ras
och vitet i det samtida Sverige (On Race and Whiteness in Contemporary Sweden), where the editors present the difficulty of discussing these matters in a nation that on an institutional level ignores white privilege and the discrimination of non-white Swedes (Hübinette, Hörnfeldt, Farahani & Rosales, 12). According to the authors, in dominant discourses the term *ethnic Swede* is equal to *white Swede*, while *immigrant* has come to encapsulate all *non-white Swedes* (29). I would interpret these curriculum goals of a strong, Swedish identity as an institutional desire for non-white Swedes to form a more white identity. The voucher for a Swedish identity could then be seen as an argument for non-white Swedes to assimilate the values and identities of the white majority culture.

Furthermore, the authors claim that a so called ”mix” or hyphen-identity, such as *African-American*, is less accepted in the dominant social discourses of Sweden; when identities such as *Afro-Swedish* is constantly questioned, the discourse of *Swedish* as synonymous to *white* is further enforced (29). Rather than incorporating various Swedish identities, there is somewhat of a safeguarding of the term ”Swedish.” Instead of adding prefixes, both the curriculum and the dominant discourses of Swedish society seems to voucher for appreciation of other, as in non-white, cultures - but resists letting them define their identities as varieties of ”Swedish.” This resistance seems like an obstacle towards the ideal of world citizenship, an anachronistic safeguarding of the idea of the nation, the national identity. When placing this focus on a Swedish identity that we find in the curriculum, combined with the discourse on Swedish as equal to white, in an historical continuum of Sweden as head of the league in development of racial biological theory, as inventors of racial category systems and skull measuring indexes, and founders of the world’s first racial biological institution - one cannot simply neglect the problematic aspect of the curriculum’s focus on Swedishness. The authors claims that the old, racist, white supremacist ideas of the Northern people as a superior race resonates within the proclamation of being the opposite; Sweden’s portrayal of itself as a role model nation of solidarity and democracy, outside of colonial and postcolonial tensions, is a new way of defining a people as superior (67). This Northern exceptionalism is implied in the curriculum, in a discourse of the Swedish nation and school system as naturally founded on democratic values.

Just like culture is not a static, fixed object (although it is studied as such in the English subject today, according to Lundahl), a curriculum is not a uniform document without inner conflicts. Therefore, it is not strange to find both the desires for multiculturalism and diversity, and the nationalist desires for a uniform, Swedish identity and nation within the Swedish curriculum, as
such a document is an ongoing negotiation between different political parties representing different ideologies.

Considering the destructive aspects of nationalist, monocultural desires, such as xenophobia, structural racism, and economic as well as militaristic arms races - I would voucher for the abandonment of safeguarding national boarders and monocultural ideas of a uniform, national culture. I make the case for a world citizenship that transcends national borders, acknowledges the diversity within and between cultures, and swears its allegiance to the moral community of humanity. Believing that the road to such empathy and understanding lies within narrative imagination, I argue that the study of literature would hone such values. And the literary content should also question hegemonic traditions of culture as well as literature; raise the voice of marginalised groups; affirm the various backgrounds of all students; and challenge students’ own conceptions of culture, nations, and identity. Therefore, I will now make the case for the study of postcolonial literature in the Swedish EFL classroom, because I believe that it will benefit the educational goals of the Swedish curriculum - and beyond that, perhaps lay the foundation for a greater and more desirable world citizenship.

3. Discussion

3.1. Postcolonial Literature in the Swedish EFL Classroom

In the following part of my essay, I will first discuss generally why I believe postcolonial literature would be beneficial to the EFL classroom. Then, I will introduce two sample works that could be used as literary content in Swedish EFL education: Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* and Ntozake Shange’s *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*. My definition of *postcolonial literature* is the one used in a broader sense, which is literature that is written by, or brings up the perspectives of groups that have been affected and marginalised by the effects of colonisation, and in their literary work address and resist colonialist perspectives. However, as this broader definition is sometimes used synonymously with *multicultural literature*, I will take account of such usages in my discussion.

Postcolonial literature sheds light on social structures of power, historically and contemporary, provokes thought among all students, no matter their intersectional position of various privileges and oppressions. I made an example earlier in this essay about White boys in the class who might for the first time develop an awareness of racism, but literature written by non-dominant groups is not just important "for Whites who need to be decentered in the curriculum and to learn about
others but also for students of color who need to be added to the curriculum and have their cultures affirmed (Harris & Willis, 829).” As Wisam Kh. Abdul-Jabbar puts it in his article “The Rise of the Unsaid: Spaces in Teaching Postcolonial Literature,” postcolonial literature could be argued to be a fairer depiction of a reality defined by dominant groups, an “invitation to understand the world as we know it now; a world that is fragmented, multicultural and highly politicised (Abdul-Jabbar, 224).” A vital educational value of postcolonial literature lies in “postcolonial literature as minority literature”, in its “representative minority experience and formulations of strategies of resistance (224).” Rather than just informing about minorities, postcolonial literatures may actually empower minority members within the very classroom, by disrupting a normative space and a normative concept of literature and culture. Furthermore, when these differences that disrupt are compared with what is familiar, or as the English syllabus phrases, different cultures are compared with the student’s own experience - students begin to “look beyond the differences and take a step toward appreciating the cultural connectedness of all humanity (692).” Once again, the narrative imagination that makes us involved in literary works of various cultures may serve as a bridge to world citizenship.

In English, as well as in other literary subjects and the teaching of former colonialist languages (such as Swedish), the selection of authors and voices that are allowed entry into the classroom shapes not only students’ perception of English culture, but in particular what counts as literature. Constraining, destructive social norms of class, gender, and ethnicity are enforced through educational practice when both authors and fictional characters “mainly consists of rich, white and heterosexual middle class men (Kumashiro, 15).” The questions that arise are which stories that enforce this status quo, and which stories that question these ongoing devaluations of social groups and identities (19)? To consider these questions in literary selection processes, and strive towards diversity and equality, is not only motivated by the curriculum’s value-system, but also benefits the educational goals of shaping solitary citizens. In his article “Mo’ Better Canons: What’s Wrong and What’s Right about Mandatory Diversity,” Patrick Colm Hogan brings up various criticisms of incorporating mandatory diversity into literary selection in education, but still concludes that

the most valuable aspect of an inter-cultural and gender-egalitarian canon is the opportunities it allows for freeing oneself from narcissistic constraints and experiencing what one is not - but still on the basis of what one is, in a similarity that can no longer be called ‘narcissistic’, because it is simply human, because it excludes no one (189-90).
To decenter the dominant voices of literature, and thus decentering dominant cultures, will make some students feel decentered, because “literary identification is founded upon narcissism (189).” Nonetheless, this decentering is desirable, as a part of the cultivation and raising of the adolescents in the classroom, from egocentric (and perhaps Eurocentric) to other-centric.

Introducing postcolonial literature studies into the classroom to work towards an ideal world citizenship is not a quick fix; there is not a pipeline from postcolonial literature through narrative imagination to intercultural understanding. There is a risk that readings of literature that portray living conditions in cultures that students have prejudices about will end up enforcing those prejudices instead of challenging them (Lundahl, 424). For example, when my selected sample authors portray Black female protagonists that challenge sexist, patriarchal structures within their closest family relations, students may enforce the racist stereotype of Black men as essentially violent, instead of questioning how patriarchal structures are found in various cultures and communities. Similar to the criticism against multiculturalism and identity politics, that cultures become isolated islands, Tornberg points out the pitfalls of orientalist exotification in culture studies, when

the discourse on ’culture’ as a consummated fact has a strong simplification and objectification aspect, wherein the distinction between ’us’ and ’them’, between ’inside’ and ’outside’ can be maintained and the unpredictable and ambitious in the constantly ongoing culture creating process of both ’us’ and ’them’ is left unregarded (Tornberg, 71).

Teachers’ ambition to introduce voices of a marginalised group and thus through narrative imagination and empathic involvement break through prejudice and stereotypes might actually just enforce such prejudice and stereotypes if the focus is solely on differences between cultures. Instead of preaching that ”they are this way” and ”you are that way”, but ”that is totally okay”, there must rather be a dialogue and discussion based on the questions ”are you sure that you know who they are?” and ”are you sure that you know who you are?”

Paradoxically, the vouching for literature studies to cultivate world citizenship and tear down the monoliths of the classical White Western canon, actually risks enforcing the idea of literate people as equal to good people, and especially the Western literary definitions of genres and forms, as inherently good. Nussbaum’s idealisation of literature studies is ”occasionally dangerously close to the myth of good literature - that you obviously become a good person by reading literature (Persson, 258, my translation).” There is no correlation between literary input and moral output, no
"easy way to equal the empathy that, hopefully, is used during reading and the empathy that the reader applies in the life outside of the book covers (259).” Moreover, this belief in the power of literature is said to be found in both multiculturalist perspectives, and universalist perspectives: the idea that texts can (re)form people as effectively as medical prescriptions can cure diseases (Menand, 349). However, even critics of Nussbaum bring up the fact that she emphasises critical readings of literature, to follow up the initial, naive encounter with a text with critical discussions about the text and the experience of reading (261). So, if Nussbaum gives a strong answer to the didactic question WHY literature should be studied, and I aim at answering the question WHAT literature should be studied, some critics of Nussbaum see the risk of not as thoroughly answering the question HOW literature should be studied.

The accusations of idealisation of literature, and multicultural literature in particular, also involves an accusation of non-scientific methods, and tokenism. Just like supporters of cultural diversity in English literature studies call out the risk of symbolic inclusion, critics of mandatory diversity claim that “to require the study of non-Western literatures in order to compensate for racist oppression and imperialism is to debase the university intellectually and to treat the suffering of oppressed peoples in a cavalier and opportunistic manner (Hogan, 182).” Both critics and supporters may ask for the consideration if the study of minority literatures have a documented effect on reader attitudes, because “if reading this literature makes no pragmatic difference, it it does not affect the real world, then we can have no ethical reason to want this (187).” Thus, there is a desire for empirical data that somehow proves the effect of certain literature, if postcolonial literature studies effect readers’ solidarity and empathy. There is little research to be found on this matter, and thus there should of course be a continued demand for more research, but until then, considering “the urgency of the problems of racism, sexism, and ethnocentrism, the possibility of doing good gives moral import to mandatory diversity (188).”

3.2. Womanist Writers for World Citizenship: Two Sample Works

In the following part of my essay, I will introduce two example works of postcolonial literature that could be used as a content in Swedish EFL education to work with educational goals of intercultural understanding. The two works that I have selected are Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* and Ntozake Shange’s *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Endef*.

First, I will briefly discuss central terms and concepts related to my selected works, such as Black women’s writing, Black feminism, and womanism, and how they are relevant for educational goals
of the Swedish curriculum. Afterwards, I will first introduce Walker’s work, and then proceed to Shange’s, concluding with a summary of my intended didactic design and rationale.

Walker and Shange, my two sample authors, portray the particularly precarious positions of Black female writings and experiences, at the intersection of social parameters such as ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, and religion. There is reason to stress positions, writings, and experiences in plural - because one of the pitfalls of making a literary selection with an intention of multicultural inclusion, is essentialism: to look for the single Black female position, writing, or experience. As Lundahl has claimed, multicultural, when used to describe the classroom of Sweden today, often ends up referring to a variety of ethnicity, instead of other social and cultural parameters such as those I have mentioned. Likewise, Kumashiro problematises the addition of normative differences, such as adding a “normative Blackness” to a curriculum. Thus, I have selected authors that raise voices oppressed due to various parameters other than ethnicity, exploring the complexity of racist, sexist, capitalist patriarchy, shaping alternatives that affirm other ways of living.

Black female writing is a literary tradition of political protest literature. In the historical overview and political manifest *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins writes that the history of Black women’s writing is a history of resistance and struggle for self-definition, and how ”portraying the range of ways that African-American women experience internalized oppression has been a prominent theme in Black women's writing (Collins, 93).” One way of resisting patriarchal discourses has been to produce woman-oriented literature, writing by Black women, about Black women in relationships with other Black women (104). However, Black female writers with a feminist ambition may use the term *womanist* rather than *feminist*, which Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi discusses in her article ”Womanist: The Dynamics of the Black Female Contemporary Novel in English” (Ogunyemi, 64). The author contrasts this term against conventional feminism, claiming that womanism takes account of the particular experience of Black women, of being subjugated by colonial, Western culture. In an attempt to pinpoint the intersectional position of Black female experience, Ogunyemi argues that Black women ”with their men, are victims of a white patriarchal culture; as women they are victimised by black men; and as black women they are also victimised on racial, sexual, and class grounds by white men (67).”

Although womanism may be perceived as a form of identity politics, its goals are universal. Both Alice Walker, one of my sample authors, as well as lawyer Pauli Murray emphasise that a womanist is foremost a universal humanist, advocating solidarity for all humanity (Collins, 42). The womanist perspective may thus be related to Nussbaumian world citizenship, although like feminism it has its
starting point in naming the group most lifted as effected by male patriarchy (both terms are originally based on a gender binary, though, blurring out other non-male gender identities).

However, if my intention is to select works that capture the particular experience of Black women, there is an overarching paradox of the ambition for postcolonial, multicultural perspectives, and the potential essentialism in selecting authors that I find representable for these particular positions, experiences, and voices. This issue is brought up by Diana Adesola Mafe in her review "Black Women on Broadway: The Duality of Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* and Ntozake Shange’s *For Colored Girls,*” when she claims that the danger of reading works and writings by Black female authors as "exclusively black lies in the notion of an ‘authentic’ blackness, an essentialist approach that threatens to reduce blackness to a simplistic, homogenous concept (Mafe, 34).” Once again, there is a risk of creating isolated islands of cultures, closed and fixed objects that risks enforcement of prejudice and stereotypes.

While the political, social, and historical experience of a certain group must be taken account of, and not be neglected due to some idea of being ”colour blind”, the Nussbaumian world citizen strives towards recognising the common humanity shared by all despite cultural parameters. However, the Swedish curriculum’s guidelines for a Swedish identity as a basis for sympathising with other, ”non-Swedish” cultures, runs a risk of creating the isolated islands just mentioned; my proposal to study these African American authors in the Swedish EFL classroom runs the risk of enforcing an idea of Swedish culture looking at non-Swedish culture, rather than human culture looking at human culture. How can we talk about differences that should not matter, in a way that acknowledges that these differences have played a role in the oppression of groups, but at the same time work towards a social future where they do not matter? The balance between on the one hand affirming marginalised cultures, and raising voices historically silenced, and on the other hand avoiding the pitfalls of essentialism - is one of the challenges of teaching these samples of postcolonial literature.

3.3. Writing a Voice Within Womanhood in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*

What God do for me? I ast.

She say, Celie! Like she shock. He gave you life, good health, and a good woman that love you to death.

Yeah, I say, and he give me a lynched daddy, a crazy mama, a lowdown dog of a step pa and a sister I probably won’t ever see again. Anyhow, I say, the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown.

She say, Miss Celie, You better hush. God might hear you.
Let ’im hear me, I say. If he ever listened to poor colored women the world would be a different place, I can tell you (Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*, 192).

In the following part of my essay, I intend to explain why I find Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* relevant as a literary content in the EFL classroom, but also take account of criticism that problematises aspects of the work. Foremost, I find the work interesting because of its literary form, its questioning and queering of patriarchal family structures, and its parallels to the colonial past of slavery.

The literary form of Walker’s work would be an interesting aspect to address in the classroom, due to the author’s use of the epistolary form. In her review ”Alice Walker’s The Color Purple: Emergent Woman, Emergent Text,” Lindsey Tucker argues that Walker’s choice of writing an epistolary novel was a conscious decision in several ways, since it makes parallels to various traditions. For example, the epistolary form has traditionally been a form used by women, since women were excluded from formal education and thus the more classic styles of writing (Tucker, 82). Secondly, the form and discourse of Walker’s writing draws on the tradition of African American slave narratives, such as Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, which, just like the epistolary form, draws on the sentimental tradition of writing (82-3). Moreover, the epistolary form may bring the author and the reader into a more intimate relationship, stimulating involvement with characters, because the informal discourse, closer to oral storytelling, gives a more sincere impression (Ogunyemi, 77). The choice of the epistolary form could thus enhance preconditions for narrative imagination.

Also, an act of resistance could be interpreted into Walker’s form, as Valerie Babb argues in her review ”*The Color Purple: Writing to Undo what Writing has Done,*” since the setting of the novel is a society where Blacks are subjugated to Whites, women are subjugated to men, and oral expression is subjugated to literacy (Babb, 107). Since the epistolary form is closer to informal, spoken language, the form calls attention to the historical fact that during American slavery ”it was a crime to teach a slave to read or write, and literacy was used to perpetuate a strict racial and subsequently sexual hierarchy (108).” Even when literacy was extended through access to education for African Americans, it was in the hands of Black men to give Black women access to literacy (108). Considering this historical background, the literacy development of the two main characters, sisters Celie and Nettie, who cultivate their writing and speaking to record their own oral history and individual voice, becomes an allegory for the historical continuum of Black female writing.
To make these parallels to slavery and literary traditions in the classroom though, students would have to be exposed to relevant history of American slavery, slave narratives, and Black females’ access to literacy and education. An historical contextualisation of the novel would benefit the discussion of Walker’s intentions with the epistolary form. However, in her review "Writing a Rationale for a Controversial Common Reading Book: Alice Walker’s the Color Purple" Pepper Worthington makes the point that the epistolary form actually could generate scepticism among readers, because it seems anachronistic (Worthington, 52). Flipping through the book, noticing and then discussing the construction of the narrative into letters, may be the very first thing students should do in their initial encounter with the book. An understanding of the author’s choice of form may reduce student resistance to a form that seems old-fashioned, and thus make way for a closer narrative imagination.

Another significant aspect of Walker’s literary form is her use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), which could be presented to familiarise students with, and discuss their attitude towards varieties of English. As mentioned, when discussing the English syllabi, target languages should not just be represented by a single, dominant culture, and thus neither in a single, standard form. With unconventional spelling, syntax, and grammatical structures, the main character Celie merges two forms of language, spoken and written, when although she writes down her experiences, ”she renders it in an oral manner (Babb, 110).”

Upon releasing her novel, Walker received a lot of praise for her usage of AAVE, which Christopher S. Lewis writes about in his review ”Cultivating Black Lesbian Shamelessness: Alice Walker’s ‘The Color Purple’” (Lewis, 165-6). Nonetheless, AAVE may be another cause of scepticism amongst readers who are used to conventional, literary privileged Englishes, although Tucker hopes that ”the near-illiteracy of the narrator enhances the magnitude of the same woman’s victory (Tucker, 50-1).” This empathy, going beyond both cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic (educational) borders, is not something to take for granted, and thus there need to be guided discussions of the sociolinguistic aspects of English in the classroom. Due to social and educational norms, students may find deviations from standard English disturbing, uncomfortable, or humorous (Vandrick, 264). However, through contextualisation and awareness of colonisation, students may ”see the political and social inequity of considering some varieties of English superior and others inferior (265).” The novel’s representation of AAVE is one of its aspects that questions monocultural conceptions of English culture, literature, and language, and therefore could be addressed to cultivate student awareness of different Englishes.
The Color Purple both questions and queers traditional, patriarchal structures, and shapes alternative ways of womanhood and family. Candice Marie Jenkins focuses on this aspect of Walker’s work in “Queering Black Patriarchy: The Salvific Wish and Masculine Possibility in Alice Walker’s The Color Purple”, claiming that Walker not only deconstructs romanticised ideas of Black nuclear family, but also queers Black family, ”reshaping it in unconventional ways that divest its black male members of a good deal of power, thereby reconfiguring the very meaning of kinship for black sons, brothers, and especially fathers (Jenkins, 970).” Jenkins argues that the decentralisation of men, along with portraying conventionally violent, masculine men in a negative light, is part of why Walker received accusations of ”bashing Black men” upon releasing The Color Purple (971-2). Nonetheless, the disruption of the traditional family, with a male, conventionally masculine man at its centre, ”is a family in which masculinity itself is called into question (971).” The paradox is that in constructing a woman-centered novel, where men mostly are depicted as nameless, violent monsters, Walker questions and queers heteropatriarchal masculinity. Towards the end of the novel, it is the feminisation, or queering of the male character Mr____ that shapes his relationship with the women of his family more egalitarian rather than hierarchical (985). The family construction that emerges at the end comes to include more members than traditionally, not necessarily bound by biological or juridical bonds, which ”decentralises the patriarch and calls for a more democratic distribution of kinship ties (986).” Walker’s work could be seen as envisioning a possible social future with ”men who are men in spite of patriarchal power, not because of it (994).” Or as Lewis puts it, ”the failed patriarch becomes the symbol of successful, feminist heterosexual masculinity (Lewis, 167).”

Walker’s queering of Black family relationships not only reimagines conventional masculinity, but also cultivates what Lewis calls Black lesbian shamelessness. Lewis bases Black lesbian shamelessness in the ”calls for black pride that circulated in the Black Power and Black Arts movement (159),” affirming and celebrating ways of living oppressed by heterosexism within the anti-racist movements. The romantic relationship between the characters Celie and Shug is presented by Walker as ”an alternative to being subjected to masculinist and dominative ideas of sex (162).” The traditional, heterosexist, hierarchical concept of a romantic relationship is presented an alternative that cultivates the protagonist’s subjectivity and right to her own sexuality. This nurturing relationship is contrasted against the many other abusive, heteropatriarchal relations that the protagonist is caught within, and eventually gives her the strength to resist her violators.
Vicky Greenbaum emphasises the importance of introducing *The Color Purple* as a lesbian novel, among other aspects, in her review "Literature out of the Closet: Bringing Gay and Lesbian Texts and Subtexts out in High School English" (Greenbaum, 73). Similar to my discussion about how multicultural authors benefit students of marginalised as well as privileged groups, Greenbaum claims that "gay and lesbian students need to know that voices like theirs are active, and straight-identified students need to see that there are many ways to be sexual in the world (Greenbaum, 71)." Greenbaum goes on to question our very concept of "marginalised" groups, implying that privileged groups would form some kind of original "centre," and that teachers should "know that the fear of displacement comes from the fallacy of one centre, instead, why not view life as a palette, or spectrum, or options (72)?" However desirable, an approach like this risks going moral relativist, ignoring that social groups are given or denied privilege due to social parameters. Similar to the previous discussion on identity politics, social hierarchies need to be considered, in order to be teared down and replaced by palettes or spectrums.

When introducing *The Color Purple* as a lesbian novel, resisting heteropatriarchal perspectives, there is also an opportunity to discuss how it resists traditional, patriarchal, monotheistic ideas of spirituality. Stacy Lynn Hankinson argues, in her review "From Monotheism to Pantheism: Liberation from Patriarchy in Alice Walker’s The Color Purple," that it is just because of her "spiritual reorientation” that the main character Celie engages in a lesbian relationship (Hankinson, 326).” Her lover Shug introduces her to an alternative to the traditional Christian idea of a White bearded man, and instead Celie embraces a pantheistic, traditionally female-oriented spirituality (324). This new, spiritual communion also draws on the African American diaspora, when Celie resists her abusive husband by cursing him, "citing and inhabiting a history of African diasporic religious practice (Lewis, 164).” By cultivating both her literacy as well as her sexuality and spirituality through the support of fellow women, "Celie finds her own voice, and her voice enables her to transcend the fear and silence of her childhood (Collins, 123).”

As the novel concludes, Celie does not just address God or her sister, but God, nature, and all people, acknowledging them all as holy, embracing a common value of humanity not far from Nussbaumian world citizenship (Hankinson, 327). For students, this aspect of the novel could be a basis for thinking about safe spaces, of how separatist groups can nurture and strengthen their members. At the same time, safe spaces could be argued to make intercultural understanding difficult, if certain groups are excluded to protect others.
Besides the traditional notions of family, sexuality, and spirituality that are questioned in *The Color Purple*, the novel also relates to the history of colonialism and American slavery. When distinguishing womanism from feminism, Ogunyemi makes the point that womanism, besides sexism, recognises "the impact of racism, neocolonialism, nationalism, economic instability, and psychological disorientation on black lives (Ogunyemi, 71)." She also specifically relates womanism to Walker’s work:

Black sexism is a microcosmic replication of Euro-American racism, a concept Alice Walker recognises. In *The Color Purple*, Nettie writes that the Olinka in not educating girls are "like white people at home who don’t want colored people to learn.” It follows that for the black woman, racism and sexism must be eradicated together (70).

The protagonist’s sister Nettie, who travels to Africa to do missionary work, learns about the effects caused by colonialism on the Olinka people, but at the same time she cannot shake off the Euro-American perspective of values that constitute her perspective (Babb, 115). For example, she still perceives beauty in European beauty standards, and neglects the Olinka’s religion as occult devil worship (Walker, 139). In the very form that Nettie’s letters are conveyed, with correct spelling and conventional grammar, we can see how she has dressed herself in "’white’ missionary language (Tucker, 92).” Nettie’s missionary friend, Samuel, also fails to see the Western standpoint from which he tries to impose normative social relations on the Olinka, although he starts identifying with them through the notion of a Pan-African communion (Berlant, 847). This Pan-African community is encountered by Nettie in America as well, when she finds an African American church in Harlem that “worship Africa, not America (847).” These aspects of diaspora that are found in Walker’s novel not only represent the effects of colonialism and slavery, but also questions monocultural concepts of culture. Lauren Berlin argues, in "Race, Gender, and Nation in 'The Color Purple’”, that Walker’s novel ”problematises tradition-bound origin myths” and instead shapes a ”postpatriarchal Afro-American national consciousness (833).” The dominant, monocultural concept of American culture is portrayed in the novel through the irrelevance of Christofer Columbus and the National Independence Day for Celie and her family, which for them is simply relevant for school studies or for getting a day of from work. These particular aspects could be easily translated into Swedish context: for which groups within Swedish culture are our national holidays relevant?
Walker’s work has been criticised for enforcing stereotypes, and for encouraging embracing, rather than resisting, the values of White supremacist capitalist society. In the review "On The Color Purple, Stereotypes, and Silence", Trudier Harries claims that the novel’s popularity "has created a cadre of spectator readers", whom she means "do not identify with the characters and do not feel the intensity of their pain, stand back and view the events of the novel as a circus of black human interactions (Harries, 155)." Harries thus claims that - despite what has been said about the power of the epistolary novel - Walker’s novel does not invite solely narrative imagination. Instead, these spectator readers would not emphasise with the characters, reaching beyond cultural borders, but instead have their stereotypes reinforced. Moreover, Harries claims that the protagonist Celie’s experiences of incestual rape and abusive relationships "is not only morally repulsive, but it invites spectator readers to generalise about black people the same way that has gone on for centuries (156).” Instead of valuing the way in which Celie comes to resist patriarchal traditions of living, and shape alternatives, Harries points out a risk that "the novel gives validity to all the white racist’s notions of pathology in black communities (157)." Cynthia Hamilton, in her review "Alice Walker’s Politics or the Politics of the Color Purple", is also concerned about the novel feeding into the racist, sexist stereotype of Black men as essentially latent rapists, claiming that Walker does not oppose this stereotype enough (Hamilton, 383).

Furthermore, Hamilton sees a failure in resisting colonialist perspectives, when the community formed at the end of the novel could be seen as "petty bourgeois nationals”, who have simply adopted the same values as the dominant colonisers (382). Owning her own housing, and starting her own business, Celie’s independence seems to fit into the ”American Dream”, so Hamilton argues that rather than shaping an alternative way of living, Celie has simply prevailed through the embracement of middle-class values (380).

Critical perspectives are highly beneficial for keeping students on their toes, making sure that their literary work is not constrained by a single, praising perspective. When working with postcolonial texts in the classroom, Robert Scholes suggests a deconstructive reading strategy where students read a text and produce text within, upon and against text (Mohammadzadeh, 25). Text within text is meant to support reading and understanding of the narrative, text upon text as interpretation of it, and text against text as criticism. Just like the interpretation of historical and social references demands contextualisation to be experienced by students, an awareness of critical perspectives is the foundation for students’ formation of their own critical readings. Therefore, it is vital to not only introduce (con)text that ”praise” the novel, but to balance this with voices that
problematise it. However, the balance of this needs to be emphasised; if there is an historical continuum of devaluation of certain literary work, as is the case with Black female writers, teachers need to consider what criticism is brought into the classroom, thinking how this particular, critical review fits into the continued devaluation of Black female authorship.

When working with *The Color Purple* as a literary content in the EFL classroom, teachers may shift the spotlight on various aspects of the book such as form, language, and social conflicts. In the very first pages of the book, all of these aspects ”attack” the reader at once; the epistolary form, the AAVE, and incestual rape in a destructive family relationship. Although I have suggested that teachers first start by looking at the epistolary form, how the novel is constructed of letters, before moving on to discuss linguistic conventions, histories of oppression, and social structures of power - students will face all of these matters when opening the book. Considering my own first encounter with the novel, on a course called *Unruly Voices of African American Women in Literature*, at Arizona State University, the experience can be quite overwhelming: I remember looking at my copy, with covers in innocent white decorated with pleasant, purple flowers, and then reading Celie’s first letter.

An approach that could be helpful to students first encounter with the novel is to contextualise the novel and provide background knowledge prior to reading. It could be argued that ”trigger warnings” and ”spoilers” takes away the excitement of naive reading, but I would claim that although that could be the case in pleasure reading outside of school, there is a call for preparing, and perhaps protecting students in literary studies inside the classroom. Sensitive topics should not be avoided, but they do need scaffolding, guiding, and preparation. During the process of reading the book, students could continuously ventilate their reading through reading journals, discussions, summaries, and comparing parts of the novel with scenes from the movie adaptation by Steven Spielberg. Reimagining scenes in the novel by rewriting in conventional prose with conventional grammar could also be a way for students to process the narrative and focus on the grammatical aspect of the work.

Moving from form to content, from Walker’s work as a constructed work of fiction, to an ambition of realism that refers to social issues outside the diegesis, students practice literary analysis as well as narrative imagination. The setting of *The Color Purple* may be distant to students in matter of time, place, and various cultural parameters, yet they are brought into a close relationship with its characters during reading. Through guidance from teachers and peers, and by processing the narrative as well as the issues it touches upon, they may come to the Aristotelian
concept of fiction as not real, yet possible. Celie is not real, but patriarchy, racism, and sexism are. These abstract, ”grand” words are hard for adolescents to concretise and contextualise, and therefore a narrative about the possible experiences of a possible 14-year old girl may be the entry students need to start grasping these matters, and how they matter for themselves as well as for all the strangers out there, fellow world citizens yet to be met.

3.4. Bringing Your Own Stuff in Ntozake Shange’s For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf

In this section of my essay, I intend to explain why I find Ntozake Shange’s For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf (which I will from now on refer to as For Colored Girls) relevant as a literary content in the EFL classroom. I will compare it to my recently discussed sample work, The Color Purple, look at the parts of the work that have been considered controversial and thus may be problematic to address in the classroom, and take account of criticism and limitations of the work. Shange calls her work a choreopoem, and the work consists of a collection of poems, reminiscent of spoken word group poems with multiple voices, or sometimes a manuscript for a stage play.

Like Walker, Shange illustrates the struggle of Black women fighting for self-definition, and how they eventually find a voice within sisterhood. As Shange puts it herself, her main reason for writing is because ”when I die, I will not be guilty of having left a generation of girls behind thinking that anyone can tend to their emotional health other than themselves (Collins, 105).” In her review ”Colored Girls: Textbook for the Eighties”, Sandra Hollin Flowers claims that For Colored Girls
may be viewed as a Black feminist work due to the perspectives and issues it brings up, which relates to the Black feminist movement (51). However, Flowers views Shange’s choreopoem as multifaceted, presenting how it also can be viewed as a ”literary coming-of-age of black womanhood”, or an ”initiation piece”, ”black art”, or ”Third World art (51).” Like The Color Purple, For Colored Girls is situated both in the U.S. and through diasporic links in Africa, and the colonies of West India (52). In the poem ”A Nite with Beau Willie Brown”, the very names of the children in the poem, Naomi Kenya and Kwame Beau Willie, ”are important, for both contain elements of the African and the Western, the miscegenation which resulted in the Afro-American (53).”

The poems that make up Shange’s choreopoem are ideal for close readings, having students think about author intentions regarding the very choice of words and names for characters. In the very title, Shange uses the term ”colored”, which conventionally is seen as derogative and out-of-date, but she resignifies it with positive values of self-definition and resilience. Diana Martha Louis, in her review ”Bitch You Must Be Crazy: Representations of Mental Illness in Ntozake Shange’s For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enuf”, argues that in poems like ”Sorry”, Shange reclaims and revalues ideas of being ”womanish (Louis, 204).” By rejecting destructive relationships, and advocating self-indulgence, the author depicts the idea of being ”unruly” or ”womanish” as something positive and nurturing. Relating this to the political perspective of womanism, ”African womanism in this sense is beyond an ideal; it is life-affirming, literally (204).” Such a topic may provoke student thoughts about the different preconditions for different social groups; what may be viewed as ”selfish” or ”aggressive” may actually be viewed as a political act of resistance, when an oppressed group claims its right to self-care and voice, refusing self-sacrifice and silence. In the poem ”Somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff”, Shange uses ”stuff” as a metaphor for the self-definition, spirituality, and sexuality that the poem’s voice claims her right to (Mafe, 42). In the name Shange has taken for herself (born Paulette L.Williams), Ntozake means ”she who has her own things” in Xhosa, a Bantu language, which would make this particular poem interesting to study from a biographical perspective.

To support students reading from a biographical perspective, the author’s own ambition and interpretations could be brought into the classroom. In an interview with Neal A. Lester, ”At the Heart of Shange’s Feminism: An Interview”, the author herself states that ”I know that my writing is feminist”, and ”everything I write and have written come from being a woman-centered person (Lester, 726).” Such statements from authors could be introduced into the classroom to stimulate the
reading and interpretation of literary content. Are student interpretations and perspectives limited if such a statement is introduced before reading? Or would they stimulate student motivation, to explore the work from a political, ideological perspective? Nonetheless, bringing the author’s own opinions and intentions into the classroom reminds students about the agents behind the text, disrupting the decontextualised idea of the text as an entity of its own.

Focusing on the literary form, Shange’s work could stimulate reflections on language conventions and sociolinguistics. In Lester’s interview, Shange shares her thoughts on language conventions, how she sure encourages “murdering the King’s english”, as in deriving from standard English, but she believes that to do so one must first master standard English, to know what one derives from (727). Similar to the AAVE in *The Color Purple*, Shange uses unconventional spelling and grammar, writing in dialect, and thus brings attention to different representations of the English language.

Moreover, literary representation of marginalised groups is another ambition behind Shange’s authorship, which she advocates at the end of the interview:

> I really believe that there’s no mistaking that we’re human. However, our humanity has been so little explored and so little made available to us through art that sometimes we doubt it ourselves and live one-dimensional lives because that’s all we imagine can be possible. Literature, if it does nothing else, should stimulate one’s imagination to know that there’s more - maybe not more ”out there”, but more inside of us that we can use for our own survival (729).

Shange’s words resemble Nussbaum’s ideas of literature as presentations of possibilities for readers, and how marginalised groups may revalue their culture and find means of resistance within literature. However empowering postcolonial literature may be, teachers may ask themselves how such literature will be received by privileged groups, or any students who feel that they do not find anything in Shange’s work that they can “use for their own survival.” If the goal truly is an ideal of world citizenship, the universal aspect of this choreopoem need to be emphasised, or else there is a risk of misconception, that this book is only ”for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf” in the EFL classroom.

Similar to the public reaction on *The Color Purple*, Shange was accused of attacking Black men upon releasing *For Colored Girls*. In the poem ”A Nite with Beau Willie Brown”, Shange depicts an abusive, violent husband, who ends up killing his own children, and weaves in the sociopolitical structures that render this character feeling so desperate, helpless, and angry (Collins, 158). But when the author has been questioned why she wrote that poem, why she choose to depict, what
some critics argue, a stereotypically violent Black man, Shange responded that she intended to shed light on dysfunctional family patterns that too often are kept secret (158). Another poem that has been criticised for “airing the community’s dirty laundry and demonizing Black men” is “Latent Rapists”, which by pointing out the risk of sexual violence also within Black communities, has been accused of shattering the idea of a united Black civil rights movement (Louis, 200). This criticism towards Shange could benefit classroom discussions about identity literature, how marginalised groups may unite under a certain social parameter, such as ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, but what may appear as a uniform movement at first will always reveal inner tensions and conflict, because an identity is never based on a single social parameter. Both Shange and Walker were criticised for speaking from a standpoint of not only being Black, but being Black women, being oppressed by sexism as well as racism.

Although Shange sheds light on the precarious situations of Black women, her work has its limitations, and is not to be perceived as written from some ultimate point of oppression. For Colored Girls could first of all be considered heteronormative, not taking account of various sexual preferences or gender identities, and furthermore there is a limited perspective of various socioeconomic preconditions in the stories of Shange’s colored girls (Louis, 209).

Since Shange’s work consists of poetry, meant to be read aloud, and has been put up as a play on Broadway, there are plenty of opportunities to work with performative processing of her text in the classroom. Richard Beach, Deborah Appleton, Susan Hynds, and Jeffrey Wilhelm argue, in the book Teaching Literature to Adolescents, that drama exercises in literature benefits involvement in narratives, transporting students to a different cultural setting (Beach; Appleton; Hynds & Wilhelm, 172-3). The short, closed stories within Shange’s poems could be performed as spoken word, reenacted as dramatic scenes, or read out loud with students taking turns, to make students experience word choice, rhythm and phrasing through the physical act of speech. Since the poetic form could be more unfamiliar to students than prose, and perhaps they are not as used to reading stanzas, teachers could show them scenes from the Broadway performance of the work, or from Tyler Perry’s movie adaption. Where Walker’s work could be processed through writing, Shange’s work could be processed through enactment and performing, to make students aware of the author’s intention with the poetic composition.
4. Conclusion

4.1. Postcolonial Paradoxes: Wishing this Essay did not Need to be Written

There are several paradoxes in working with postcolonial literature in the EFL classroom, multiple perspectives that sometimes appear to contradict one another. When analysing the Swedish curriculum, and comparing it to Nussbaum’s idea of world citizenship, I have encountered some paradoxes. The ideal of world citizenship acknowledges that we are first and foremost human, all belonging to the community of human beings, yet there is also an ideal constituted by national steering documents such as the Swedish curriculum that we all form an identity based on our belonging to the nation state. Part of being an ideal Swedish citizen is to appreciate the values of cultural diversity, yet this is something that needs to be realised through guidance, as if these values are assumed as incomprehensible, or met with resistance. Sweden is an internationalised, multicultural society, yet there is a uniform, Swedish culture and identity that students should embrace to reach ideal citizenship - or so the curriculum seems to imply.

In my rationale for postcolonial literature in the EFL classroom, I acknowledge some more paradoxes, such as when teachers can be obliged to both affirm cultures as well as dissolve cultural borders. From the perspective of Nussbaum, we are all world citizens of the human community, yet there is a need to acknowledge that people are oppressed and dehumanised due to social parameters. These social parameters of ethnicity, gender, religion, class, and sexual preferences should not matter, yet they need to be acknowledged as the cause of oppression and dehumanisation of people. When considering how we all are positioned at the intersections of these various parameters, we could all be considered multicultural, yet some positions that are perceived as normative give such social privilege that there is no need for acknowledgement or affirmative action. When studying culture in EFL literary studies, cultural differences need to be taken account of to understand how different groups have been given different amounts of access to social power - yet there needs to be an overarching goal, a vision of dissolving these cultural borders, acknowledging that we are all fellow world citizens.

Culture needs to remain an open question, or an ongoing conflict, because giving a final answer to what defines a culture, or establishing an illusion of consensus, will raise another monocultural monolith. The paradoxes need to remain; these sometimes opposing perspectives need to keep co-existing. To overcome monocultural and nationalist borders, we need to strive towards an ideal of world citizenship, yet understand that it is and ideal, not a reality. All voices deserve to be heard, yet asymmetric relations of power calls for the raising of marginalised voices, which will be at the cost
of silencing dominant ones. This affirmative action of identity politics or infusing a "minority quota" may be considered a "necessary evil" in a world that is "unnecessary evil". World citizenship is a vision, in a world that is vicious.

The very term intercultural understanding should perhaps be reimagined as intercultural listening, to further emphasise the ongoing process of empathetic induction in encounters with others. To keep culture an open question, rather than a fixed product, one needs to resist the urge to consider questions as finally answered, and instead continuously listen, question, and wonder. However, this intercultural listening also needs to go intra-cultural, being just as sensitive to cultures that one considers as belonging to oneself, or one’s nation, to avoid positioning all that is strange and different in cultures considered as Other.

The sample works that I have selected raise silenced voices, resist oppressive perspectives, and brings attention to the many faces of English language and culture. Working with *The Color Purple* and *For Colored Girls*, students will get the opportunity to involve themselves in characters who struggle for their right to define themselves, in the margins formed at the ends of various norms. Students will also experience alternative ways of "doing English", when encountering unconventional, creative, and unruly writing. Rather than asking themselves "why are these authors doing English wrong?", students may start to consider "why would the English I know be considered done right?".

In the same world that does not need identity politics, or identity literature, or affirmative actions of incorporating multicultural literature into language education, I would not need to write this essay. If the values of cultural diversity really were that natural and obvious, there would be no need to convince teachers and students that they need to realise its values. But since there are nationalist streaks in the curriculum discourse of identity, and since English culture is studied as a fixed object with focus on consensus rather than conflict, and since educational practises need to affirm the marginalised cultures both within literature as well as in the very classroom - the case for postcolonial literature within the EFL classroom needs to be made. Swedish EFL teachers should favour the postcolonial to get past the colonial past that still lingers in our literature, language, and ways of living our life.

**Works cited**


