

Men and Boys in *Man and Boy*

Gender Roles and the Relation Between Fathers and Sons
in a novel by Tony Parsons

Anna Nissen

Anna Nissen
C-Essay
Department of Languages and Literatures/English
University of Gothenburg
Spring 2012
Supervisor: Chloé Avril

Abstract

Extensive reading is beneficial in the language learning process. If students get the opportunity to read novels, they will not only increase their vocabulary and develop their language competence, but they will also learn about living conditions and social issues in the country in which the story is set. Since students learn much more from a book which they find interesting, it is essential to find a novel which most students in a class appreciate.

Man and Boy by the British author Tony Parsons can be a good option. It appeals to many students, and it deals with a number of interesting issues which can be discussed in class, for instance gender roles and family relations. The purpose of this essay is to show how Tony Parsons challenges traditional gender roles when he lets Harry Silver, the protagonist of the novel, reconsider his role as a man and a father. Harry's father has always served as a role model for his son, and just like so many other fathers he has influenced his son and made him the man he is today. This kind of relation between fathers and sons is universal, and it is another thing which is discussed in this essay.

When you get the opportunity to discuss what happens in a novel you will learn much more from it than if you just read it for your own amusement, and it is always useful to work with a novel in different ways. Therefore the last chapter of this essay presents a number of activities which can be good to use before, while and after a novel is read. This three-phase procedure can help readers get a more thorough understanding of *Man and Boy*, but naturally it can also be applied to other novels.

Keywords: Man and Boy, Tony Parsons, gender roles, fatherhood, masculinity, teaching

Innehåll

Abstract	1
Introduction	3
1: Issues to discuss when reading <i>Man and Boy</i>	7
1:1 Gender roles.....	7
1:2 Fathers and Sons.....	12
2 How to Work with <i>Man and Boy</i> in the Classroom	17
2:1 Pre-reading Activities	17
2:2 While-reading Activities	18
2:3 Post-reading Activities	20
Conclusion.....	23
List of references	24

Introduction

The syllabus for English at the upper secondary school stresses that students should meet written English of different kinds and relate the texts which they have read to their own experiences and knowledge.¹ Naturally, fiction is not the only genre which should be used, but reading novels is still an important part of the education. Although the textbooks which are used at school include authentic material, for instance extracts from novels, I have experienced that the texts which are presented there are too short to capture the reader's interest. When you read a whole novel, especially an exciting one, you really want to know the end of the story, and even those who find reading difficult will try to finish the book. Therefore I believe that it is vital to include reading of novels in the education of English as a foreign language.

Reading novels can serve many purposes. In *Literature in the Language Classroom* Collie and Slater discuss ways in which literature is helpful in the language learning process. They claim that personal involvement "enables learners to shift the focus of their attention beyond the more mechanical aspects of the foreign language system" (Collie and Slater 5). In other words, although the language in a novel might be quite difficult to understand, a reader can be able to come through it just because of an exciting plot. When they read novels students will improve their vocabulary, and Collie and Slater point out that "literature provides a rich context in which individual lexical or syntactic items are made more memorable" (Collie and Slater 5).

Tricia Hedge, the author of *Teaching and Learning in the Language classroom*, is another person who is in favour of extensive reading and who sees the benefits that students can gain from it. She explains that to become a successful reader you must learn how to conquer a text.

¹ I undervisningen ska eleverna få möta talad och skriven engelska av olika slag samt få sätta innehållet i relation till egna erfarenheter och kunskaper. (Läroplan för gymnasieskolan (SKOLFS 2011:144 n. pag.)

Among other things you must increase your awareness of how texts are organized, and you must find strategies which can help you to guess new and difficult words. Hedge means that “it is only through more extensive reading that learners can gain substantial practice in operating these strategies more independently on a range of material” (Hedge 202). She also points out that through extensive reading learners will not only improve their language competence and their reading ability, but they will also, among other things, become more independent in their studies and develop confidence and motivation to carry on learning (Hedge 204).

Collie and Slater suggest that when students find reading meaningful and enjoyable it is more likely to give them linguistic and cultural knowledge than if they do not enjoy their reading (Collie and Slater 6), and I agree with them. Therefore it is vital, but difficult, for teachers to select books which their students will find interesting. One way to solve this problem is to let the students choose their own books. It is, however, very useful and educative to let all the students in a class read the same novel. Then they will all share an experience, and it will be possible for the teacher to present the students with a number of tasks which will help them to understand the text better.

The novel which I will present and discuss in my essay is *Man and Boy* by the British author and journalist Tony Parsons. It was published in 1999 and won the British Book Awards’ *Book of the Year* in 2001. Since then it has been translated into many other languages. Tony Parsons has written other books, but *Man and Boy* is still his best-selling novel. When I first came across it I was a bit surprised that my 17- and 18-year-old students liked it so much. The plot is about a man, Harry Silver, who has a big crisis when he is reaching his 30th birthday. His wife leaves him when she finds out that he has been unfaithful to her, and the situation gets even worse when he loses his job. Suddenly he is left to take care of his 4-year-old son, Pat. Ever since Pat was born, Harry has been an absent father, whose greatest interest has

been his job as a TV-producer, and he faces numerous problems when he has to learn how to take care of a child and a home.

Exactly what makes a novel interesting is hard to say, but it is important that the book reflects human experience in one way or another. It is also vital that readers can identify themselves with the hero of the book, and that they find his quest exciting. These are things which are well met in *Man and Boy*. Even though the problems which Harry Silver tries to solve are quite prosaic they are still interesting to read about. His quest is to take care of his son (and eventually to let him go), and he has to solve his own problems while he learns to become a better person. I think that one of the reasons why the book appeals to students at the upper secondary school is the fact that even though Harry is so much older than they are, they can still recognize many of the situations which he finds himself in. For instance, many students know from their own experience what happens to a family when the parents go through a divorce. Also, although Harry is an immature and naïve person who messes up his life all the time, he is a very kind and loving man who does his very best to make his son (and his parents) happy. Therefore it is easy to feel sympathy for him. At the same time it is easy to laugh at him. All the mistakes that he makes are obvious, and the reader can clearly see what is going to happen to Harry long before he himself realizes it. I imagine that readers feel good when they find that they are cleverer than the hero of the book.

When you read *Man and Boy* it is easy to find interesting topics and questions to discuss, and this is another reason why the novel is a good alternative when you look for a book to read with your class. It is a form of Bildungsroman, and throughout the book Harry grows as a person. Towards the end of the book he is much more mature than he was when it started. The teacher can easily frame questions which can be discussed in class, for instance: “What kind of a person is Harry? What do you know about him and his background? In which ways

does he change?” It is also possible to reflect on a number of themes which can help readers understand the book more thoroughly.

In the first chapter of my essay I will concentrate on some of the issues which I believe are the most important ones in *Man and Boy*, i.e. gender roles and relations between fathers and sons. Tony Parsons describes an ordinary man and his life. Therefore the way in which he presents these issues is a bit ambiguous. My thesis is, nevertheless, that Tony Parsons challenges traditional gender roles when he puts Harry Silver in completely new situations where he has to question his role as a man and a father. Since his own father has always served as an important role model, their relation has influenced Harry in many ways. The fact that Harry's father loves his son and has confidence in him has made Harry strong, but since he has also transferred some of his own biases to him, Harry must now free himself from these in order to become a modern man.

Usually you can learn many things from a novel even if you just read it for your own amusement, but to get a more complete understanding of a book it is beneficial to work with it in different ways. Hedge (as well as Collin and Slater) suggests a three-phase procedure when the teacher helps students to develop their ability to understand the text by giving them different tasks before, while and after reading it (Hedge 209). In the second chapter I will therefore introduce a number of exercises which will help the reader of *Man and Boy* to see what the novel is really about, and when doing so I will take this three-phase procedure into consideration.

1: Issues to discuss when reading *Man and Boy*

1:1 Gender roles

The curriculum for the upper secondary school, as well as the one for the compulsory school, stresses how important it is to strive for equality between men and women. Therefore the subject cannot be ignored, and when reading books like *Man and Boy* it is easy to find topics connected to gender roles. Throughout the book Harry Silver is struggling with his gender identity. In some situations he conforms to gender expectations, but in others he challenges traditional gender roles, for instance when he has to take over Gina's role. This is why *Man and Boy* is well suited for discussions about equality. As I have mentioned before, Harry is very much an ordinary man, and in consequence he is not perfect. Naturally it is very difficult for him to see his own defects and prejudices, but they are apparent to the reader. This is why it is possible for us to learn things about ourselves and our biases when we read about Harry and discuss the things which happen to him.

Quite often we hear the expression "boys don't cry", and in *Masculinity in Crisis* Roger Horrocks argues that "men find emotions dangerous things". He also asserts that it is difficult for men to communicate their feelings (Horrocks 30). In *Man and Boy* we can see examples of this. Harry, who is the narrator of *Man and Boy*, exposes his flaws when he relates his story and jokes about his own mistakes. By doing so he hides how deep his feelings really are, and at the same time he shows that he has some distance to his own life and to the sad things which he experiences during a rather brief period of his life. Harry will eventually change many of his attitudes and habits, but his difficulties when it comes to expressing feelings will remain, and they will characterize him as an "ordinary man" throughout the book.

In the beginning of *Man and Boy* Harry's masculine identity is rather old fashioned, and he tries to copy the role which his own father had. One of the reasons why his life becomes so

complicated is the fact that he has to learn how to become a new kind of man who actively takes care of his son. Pat made Harry a father and a man, and therefore he has always meant very much to Harry. Still Harry has not been there for his son during the first four years of his life. It is only after the divorce that he learns how to take care of a child and a home. When Gina and Harry change roles the traditional gender roles are made visible, and the reader is made aware of his or her own prejudices.

For instance, the fact that Gina decides to leave her 4-year-old son to go to Tokyo to work there is quite shocking for most readers. As a rule single parent families are headed by females, and a woman very seldom chooses to abandon her child. It is much more common that men desert their families in order to give priority to their careers. On the other hand, even today it is easy to question a man's ability to take care of his child, and the fact that Harry is left to do so is something which makes the novel interesting. Actually, not even Gina trusts Harry enough to let him take care of Pat, but ironically she leaves him with her own father, who has let her down so many times.

But what is really the most shocking thing: the fact that a mother leaves a child with his father, or the fact that a father does not share the responsibility for raising the child? Tony Parsons implies that it is easy to glorify a man who does what so many single mothers do, and through Harry he lets the reader understand that what Harry does is not really that fantastic. For instance, when Harry and Cyd, the woman who will become his new girlfriend, first meet, Harry's thoughts show that he has achieved some distance to his own role and importance:

She saw a man alone with a child and she thought that somehow that must make me better than other men – more kind-hearted, more compassionate, less likely to let a woman down. The new, improved male of the species, biologically programmed for child-caring duties. As if I had planned for my life to work out this way. (Parson 87)

What we expect of men and women respectively changes over time, and in an essay about Great Britain published in *The Father's Roles* about ten years before *Man and Boy* came out, Sonia Jackson showed that there had been an increase in married women who worked outside their homes. However, after marriage, or at least after the birth of the first child, many of them decided to stay at home to take care of their children and their homes (Jackson 30). Of course the situation has changed since 1987, but still it is much more common for women than for men to take care of their children. In *Man Enough* Frank Pittman suggests that “When babies come, biology intervenes and temporarily threatens to screw up the equality of the marriage” (Pittman 253). However, I believe that many women have experienced that the reduced equality is there to stay, and once a woman has decided to take care of the home and the children it is difficult for her to reclaim her old life. In the long run she will probably feel dissatisfied, and this is exactly what has happens to Gina. Therefore it is important to focus attention to this problem.

Today many Swedish teenage girls are truly ambitious and most determined to be successful in their future careers. When they read about Gina's mistakes they might be able to see the obstacles which have prevented her from combining her two different goals: being a good mother as well as being gainfully employed, and hopefully they will learn something from it. Because of Swedish laws it will probably be easier for them to combine motherhood with work outside the home than it is for women in many other countries. In Sweden it is also becoming more and more common for men to use their paternity leave, and for those who are teenagers today it will probably be even more important to share the responsibility for their children than it is for those who become parents today.

However, when women realize that they want to stay gainfully employed all their lives there are many things which must be changed. Even today men and women accept roles which are rather old fashioned. In *Masculinity in Crisis* Roger Horrocks describes a common situation in

working-class and middle-class families. Normally the man is the one who earns the money and who has the economic power, whereas the woman usually runs the family practically as well as emotionally (Horrock 26). These are other things which are illustrated in *Man and boy* and appropriate to discuss. Before the divorce Harry devoted himself completely to his job as a TV-producer. It was important for him to support his family financially, but in addition to that he very typically identified himself with his job. In *Great Britain* Sonia Jackson claims that even fathers who are unemployed hold on to an identity defined by work (Jackson 42). Traditionally they have been the breadwinners, and like so many other fathers Harry has gladly accepted this role. However, by the end of the book he has changed many of his values, and by then his relation to Pat has become far more important than his job. This is how he expresses it:

I had changed over the last six months, my months of bringing up Pat alone. The show with Eamon was just a way to pay the mortgage, not the way to prove my worth to myself and everyone else. Work was no longer the centre of my universe. The centre of my universe was my boy. (Parson 324)

However, while Harry and the other grown up characters in *Man and Boy* seem to be questioning traditional gender roles, the children in the story tend to reinforce the idea of gender differences as natural. Most of the characters in *Man and Boy* are adults, but we also meet Harry's son Pat and Cyd's daughter Peggy. Although Harry describes Pat as a beautiful, gentle and loving little boy who is “too sweet for the rough and tumble of the playground” (Parsons 173) he and Peggy are, in a way, stereotypes of a boy and a girl. Just like many other boys Pat is obsessed with Star Wars. He is not more than four years old, but he still watches Star Wars films as often as he is allowed to, and when the television is turned off he plays with Star Wars figures. Peggy, who is one year older than Pat, is described as a strong,

confident girl. Her favourite toy is Disco Ken. Pat and Peggy are best friends who love playing together, but they play in very different ways. As Harry puts it:

Pat wasn't built for hunting and gathering, and Peggy wasn't made for making jam and jumpers. Yet give them a box of Star Wars toys and suddenly they were responding to their gender stereotypes. Peggy just wasn't interested in games of death and destruction. And that's all Pat was interested in. (Parson 173)

Harry (as well as the reader of the book) wonders why they act in this way, and he considers whether it is because of nature or nurture. Perhaps Tony Parsons wants to show how easy it is for parents and other adults to fortify traditional gender roles even though they think that they are broad-minded. Very often boys and girls are treated differently, and we expect different things from them. For instance, in the society of today many mothers want their daughters to become strong and independent, and just like Cyd in *Man and Boy*, they encourage them to defy the conventions of the society. On the contrary, it is more difficult for young boys to challenge masculinity and the things which are expected of them. According to Michael S. Kimmel, author of *Masculinity as Homophobia*, men need men's approval, and if they admit weakness they will not be seen as real men (Kimmel 275).

If we really want to change traditional gender roles we must question both how women and men act. Even today masculine characteristics, for instance strength and competitiveness, are considered to be more desirable than feminine characteristics, and consequently there are many women who strive for these qualities. There are also many women who compete with men in their professional lives. However, although it is becoming more and more common for men and women to share the responsibility for their children, it is nevertheless vital that feminine characteristics, for instance empathy and the ability to communicate feelings, gain the same value as the masculine ones. In *Man and Boy* the adults have begun to question

traditional gender roles, and they try to alter their own lives, but they still expect boys and girls to behave in different ways. When he depicts his characters in this way Tony Parsons shows that there are still many things which must be changed before we can achieve complete equality between men and women.

1:2 Fathers and Sons

Although *Man and Boy* is very much about how Harry fights the traditional gender roles when he and his wife Gina divorce and he becomes a single father it is also, among other things, about relations between fathers and sons. Just as the title of the novel indicates, this is one of the central themes of the book. For Harry his father has always been a hero, and this is something which he returns to many times in the book. Harry's father is his most important role model. He is described as a gentle man who always wants to protect his family, but one thing that has been very important for Harry is the fact that he fought in the Second World War and received a medal. In many ways Harry wants to be just like his father, and he realizes that he is becoming more and more like him. Still he is not quite as good as his father, at least not in his own eyes. What he lacks most of all are the traditional masculine attributes. When Harry grew up he played with toy guns and prepared himself to become the man his father and grandfather had been before him: “a fighting man, a man who kissed some tearful woman goodbye and put on a uniform and went to war” (Parsons 294). However, as his mother points out, the world has changed and he must become a different kind of fighter. Today we expect other things from a man, and therefore Harry has to be strong in a completely different way.

Harry looks up to his father, but he also knows that he himself is very important for his own son, Pat. He says that “Every father is a hero to his son. At least when they are too small to know any better” (Parsons 47). We all need heroes and boys need masculine role models. In his book *Man Enough* psychiatrist and family therapist Frank Pittman stresses how much the

father means to a boy who searches for his masculinity. Very early in his life a little boy knows that he is destined to grow up to be like his father, and if his father accepts him as he is that will prove that he is masculine enough “to join the company of men”(Pittman 106).

As I mentioned before, Harry’s father has always been important to Harry. He has also been very protective towards his family. In every situation he has taken the whole responsibility and tried to solve all the problems. Actually, to some extent he has shown that he does not trust his wife and son enough to let them see his weaknesses. It is hard for him to accept help from others, and he even tries to hide the fact that he has caught cancer. In *Masculinity as Homophobia* Michael S. Kimmel suggests that “masculine identity is born in the renunciation of the feminine, not in the direct affirmation of the masculine”. This means that men often deny their more feminine sides. Therefore they are sometimes insecure about their own identities, and it can be difficult for them to admit weakness and ask for help. If they do, they think that they are not “real men”. (Kimmel 274-275). I believe that, although they are reconsidering their own roles, this is also true with the men in *Man and Boy*. Sometimes it is difficult for Harry to live up to his father’s demands. He was, however, lucky enough to grow up with a caring father and the fact that Harry's father has served as a good role model makes it possible for Harry to develop his own masculinity in a positive way. He knows that he is not a practical man like his father, and he is not a hero who has fought in a war, but as he learns how to take care of his own son he also begins to appreciate his own abilities.

Frank Pittman claims that “Masculinity varies from time to time and place to place” (Pittman xiv), and he describes how the concept of fatherhood has changed radically over the past two hundred years. Before the Industrial Revolution both men and women worked at home, and fathers could take an active and natural part in the upbringing of their children, especially of their sons. However, in an industrial society someone must work outside the home in order to

earn money. Since men usually got this role, masculinity began to be defined in the terms of making money instead of domestic involvement (Pittman 122).

Gender roles and conditions are still changing, and one of the reasons why it is difficult for Harry to find his own role as a man and a father is the fact that the social conventions have changed over the years. He cannot be the same kind of father as his own father was. Harry's father knew exactly what was expected of him because "in his days a father's role was set in stone" (Parson 95). He could be a "brilliant father" without being there, and Tony Parsons shows how much everything has changed when he lets Harry think to himself:

Wait until your father gets home, she told me. And the mere mention of my father was enough to make everything in the universe fall into place.

You don't hear that threat so much today. How many women actually say, *Wait until your father gets home* now? Not many. Because these days some fathers never come home. And some fathers are home all the time. (Parsons 95)

In this case Harry's father acted "Father the *Disciplinarian*", which is one of the roles which Frank Pittman suggests that fathers found when they came home to their families after having worked somewhere else (Pittman 123). Like so many other women, Harry's mother was responsible for the home and the family, while Harry's father was a produce manager for a chain of supermarkets who travelled around and visited the supermarkets "to make sure the fruit and vegetables on sale were up to his demanding standards" (Parsons 113). However, Harry's father was not entirely an absent father. When Harry remembers his childhood he recalls the safety that he felt, for instance when his father carried him from the car when the family returned home late. Now Harry wants Pat to feel that kind of security, and even though their world has fallen apart he tries to protect Pat from troubles.

Although they are not as prominent as the relation between Harry and his father, there are actually a few more relationships between fathers and sons in *Man and Boy*. Since they are so different from the relation which Harry and his father have they serve as important contrasts. For instance, when the police come to pick up some burglars, Harry's father and an old policeman discuss the reason why the young boys ended up this way. They are rather prejudiced when they guess that "the mother's on benefit" and "the father probably buggered off years ago" (Parson 112), but still they say something which might be true. In *Man Enough* Frank Pittman writes that "Life for most boys and for many grown men is a frustrating search for the lost father who has not yet offered protection, provision, nurturing, modeling, or, especially, anointment" (Pittman 129). If their own fathers have been absent in one way or another, boys are likely to copy their mistakes, and many prejudices, for instance about gender roles, will be preserved. The boys will also have to find other role models to take after, and perhaps the two young burglars found improper ones.

In *Man Enough* Pittman also states that the failed father-son relationship is universal, and he points out that it has inspired a number of films, for instance the Star Wars trilogy, in which Luke Skywalker, who is mourning his lost father, has to prove that he is a real man (Pittman 136). Harry's son Pat really loves Star Wars, and Harry, as well as Frank Pittman, has understood what it is about. One day when Pat has watched *Empire Strikes Back*, Harry realizes how many father figures Luke has.

There's Yoda, the wrinkled elder who has good advice coming out of his pointy green ears. And then there's Obi-Wan Kenobi, who combines homespun homilies with some old-fashioned tough love.

And finally there's Darth Vader, the Dark Lord of the Sith, who is probably more in keeping with the spirit of our time – an absent father, a neglectful

dad, a selfish old man who puts his own wishes – in Mr Vader's case, a desire to conquer the universe – before any parental responsibility. (Parsons 117)

This proves that Harry has realized how important it is for him to be a good father, and it also shows how much he despises men who abandon their own children. At the same time it shows that there are always other men who can serve as role models, or heroes, for boys who miss their own fathers. In Harry's case his own father has been a very good model, but since the world which he used to live in is completely different from the one we live in today, Harry cannot only rely on things which he has learnt from his father. He must also question traditional gender roles and free himself from at least some of the prejudices which his father has transferred to him. Since he was quite young when Pat was born he does not know any other men who are in the same situation. Therefore he is, at least among his own acquaintances, some kind of pioneer. Instead of learning from other men, he must rely on women when he learns to become a single parent.

2 How to Work with *Man and Boy* in the Classroom

2:1 Pre-reading Activities

When *Man and Boy* is used in classes with more advanced students, the text itself will be quite easy for the students to understand. Still it can be a challenge for some students to read a whole novel in which the language is intended for native speakers. Therefore it can be a good idea to spend some time on warm-up sessions, and in *Literature in the Language Classroom* Collie and Slater point out that “The first imperative is usually to try and draw the learners quickly ‘into’ the text, so that they find it interesting and want to continue reading it on their own” (Collie and Slater 16). If the book is good enough readers will probably like it once they have come into the story, but for those who are unwilling to start reading it is good to give some kind of introduction to the book.

One way in which it is possible to make the students curious about the novel is to use the title and cover design, an exercise which is suggested in *Literature in the Language Classroom* (Collie and Slater 17). Normally the title and cover are things which reveal what the book is about. This is also the case with *Man and Boy*, and therefore it is useful to have a look at the cover of the book and to consider what it tells us about the novel. The edition which can be bought today (2012) just shows two pairs of shoes: one pair for the man and one for the boy. They are placed in the top left hand corner and the bottom right hand corner respectively, and indicate that the man and the boy are left on their own, but naturally the students should come up with their own interpretations. The background of the front page is white, but when you look at it more closely you realize that the whole of it is covered with extracts from a dictionary which explain what the words “man” and “boy” mean and how they can be used in different contexts. If the teacher lets the students look at the explanations of the words this can inspire to discussions about what is a “man” and what is a “boy”.

Another good idea is to concentrate on the first chapter(s) of the book. The students can listen to the text when it is read aloud, or they can read it on their own. Usually the author reveals a great deal of information about the main characters in the very beginning of the book, and if the reader examines the text carefully he or she will be able to figure out many important things. A question which could be asked is “What do you know about the characters after having read the first chapter of the book?” The students could also be asked to make three columns on a piece of paper. In the first column they should write down things which they know have happened to Harry and Gina in the past, and in the second column they should make notes about what kind of people they are today. In the last column they should predict what will happen to them in the future. When this is done the students should try to find evidence for what they say in the very first chapter of the book. Naturally it is possible to let them compare their ideas immediately, but in *Literature in the Language Classroom* it is suggested that the notes should be collected and put in a “time capsule” (Collie and Slater 31). When the book is finished the students will get their notes back and then they can compare their own ideas to the things which really happened in the book.

2:2 While-reading Activities

Once the students have started reading the book, the fact that they read and enjoy themselves is the most important concern. There are, however, a number of things which can be done in order to help them when they read. For instance, since they will probably have to finish the book in a certain amount of time, it is useful to make them a plan for their reading. This schedule will help slow readers to keep up with the others, and if quick readers are encouraged to follow it, it is more likely that they will remember what happened in the book when it is time to give an account of it. If the readers are given questions about what happens in the novel these will help them to understand it better. It is useful to discuss the questions in

class, especially in small groups where everyone will get the opportunity to express his or her opinions.

Even though I do not believe in presenting students with too many tasks and exercises connected to the book they read, I think it is important to use the book and the things which happen in it as an inspiration to find new themes to work with. When English as a foreign language is studied in Sweden, one of the goals is that students should learn about living conditions and social issues in English speaking countries. In *Literature in the Language Classroom* it is pointed out that literature can “incorporate a great deal of cultural information” (Collie and Slater 4). The authors mean that although the characters, and the context in which they appear, are made up, fiction can provide the reader with information about the country in which the story is set. Therefore it is possible to learn things about English society by reading a book like *Man and Boy*, and when working with it during English lessons it is useful to pay attention to differences between Sweden and England.

One thing which could be studied is parental leave in England and Sweden. In *The Changing Role of Swedish Fathers* Carl Philip Hwang reveals the fact that as early as 1968 Sweden aimed for “complete equality between men and women in the labour market, politics and the family” (Hwang 120), and today the father and the mother are supposed to share the parental leave. 60 days are dedicated to the father, and although there are still families where fathers do not choose to stay at home with their infants, more and more men are eager to do so. Even though the conditions for British parents who want to stay at home with their children are better than in many other countries, they are not as generous as the Swedish ones, and the things which happen in *Man and Boy* prove that the differences are important. Pat is about four years old when Harry takes over the responsibility for him. When he was born it was quite natural for Gina to give up her career so that she could take care of him. In England mothers are expected to leave their jobs in order to take care of their children, and the

possibilities for British fathers are much more limited than for Swedish fathers. On the Internet it is easy to find information about parental leave in these two countries, and for students it can be interesting to compare the terms, and to discuss how the different conditions influence parents and their behaviour.

It is also interesting to discuss differences when it comes to the school system, and this is another theme which *Man and Boy* could inspire. One very important disparity is the fact that British children start school much earlier than Swedish children. Pat is only five years old when he starts school, and then he has to wear a school uniform. Since Swedish children are completely unaccustomed to school uniforms, this is an interesting topic to talk about. In Britain the issue is debated. Actually, most British people of today are in favour of school uniforms, and they are used in most schools. In an article published by the Guardian on the 18th of January 2011 Stephanie Northen reveals that “More than 90% of all secondary schools in England are now thought to insist on uniform”. Pat wears a grey V-necked sweater, a white shirt and a yellow tie when he goes to school, and when Harry talks to Gina, he explains why Pat's school brought in a school uniform: “...some of the kids were turning up in Polo gear and all that designer stuff. They thought it was unhealthy. So he has to wear a shirt and tie” (Parsons 244). The things that are mentioned about school uniforms in *Man in Boy*, in addition to what can be read about them in newspaper articles and on the Internet, could inspire to a debate where the students could argue for or against school uniforms. Speaking is an important part of the English education. It is not always easy to find interesting and inspiring topics to discuss, but I believe that this topic ought to suit many students.

2:3 Post-reading Activities

When the whole novel is read the students should get the opportunity to process the things which they have experienced while reading the book, and naturally the teacher wants them to show that they have really read it. Role plays usually serve the first purpose well. Harry Silver

very often finds himself in complicated situations which he has set himself in, and therefore “forum theatre”, or rather “forum plays”, can be a good alternative.

Forum theatre is a very special form of theatre which was created by Augusto Boal, a Brazilian pedagogue and theatre man. The original idea is that actors should play a scene in which a character is oppressed. The spectators are asked for solutions which can help the character in his or her difficult situation, and when the actors follow their advice the play will have a different outcome. Sometimes it is possible for a spectator to come up on stage to play the part of the oppressed person.

When the idea of forum theatre is used at school it is possible to find inspiration in novels. Since Harry Silver so often makes the wrong decisions it is easy to find scenes in *Man and Boy* which are suitable for forum plays. When working with forum plays the class should be divided into groups of 3-5 people, and each group should choose a scene in which Harry (or someone else) acts in a way that makes his life even more complicated than before. The group should then try to illustrate what happens in the scene. They are supposed to make up a dialogue and practise their role play. When they are ready, it is time for them to act it out in front of their classmates. While the others watch they should try to come up with possible solutions which would improve the outcome of the scene. The spectator who comes up with a solution is asked to come up “on scene” to play a new version. The character who is oppressed (or just has serious problems) is to be exchanged, and the new actor will show how he or she thinks that this character ought to have acted in this situation. Normally it is good to try at least two different versions before it is time for the next group to take over.

There are many benefits which can be drawn from this way of working. Primarily students get the opportunity to work with the novel in a different way. Although each role play will just be about a very short part of the novel, the different scenes will nevertheless help the students to understand it better. Role plays also give students the opportunity to practise speaking. When

they prepare themselves they help each other to build up a dialogue. Since the structure of the role play will change when one of the characters is exchanged it is essential that they do not rely on lines which are made up beforehand, but they will have to improvise a great deal. In fruitful situations (and when it is used regularly) drama can build up the students' confidence. Karin Byréus, who has worked with forum plays for many years, claims that she has seen that when children and teenagers get the opportunity to take a part in a play and try to find new solutions they learn to believe in their own ability to change things for the better (Byréus 11). If the method is only used once or twice it is perhaps difficult to see any improvements, but I believe that a person who has managed to see and solve Harry's problem will be proud of the fact that he or she can see what Harry, a 30-year-old man, has not been able to see.

When students have finished reading a novel their teacher usually wants to check up if they have really read it, and he or she also wants to know if they have understood what they have read. Then it is time for some kind of assessment. It is quite common to let students write book reviews or to let them take part in book seminars, but naturally there are other options. A method which I have tried in connection to *Man and Boy* is to let the students answer questions about the book. These questions should be of a different kind than the ones which were given as a while-reading activity. The questions should not only be about the contents of the book, but they should also encourage to discussions about ways in which the things that happen in the book influence the characters and their lives. In all situations students should strive for fluent and idiomatic English, but in this case communication is more important. It is essential that they can express what they have noticed when they have read the novel. Some students might prefer to discuss this kind of questions with others, but I have experienced that when they get the time to reflect over things which happen in the book they can also express their own thoughts and feelings in written English.

Conclusion

My aim with this essay has been to show that it is beneficial and educative to use novels when teaching English as a foreign language. Naturally it is very important to find texts that the students appreciate and understand, since when the teacher manages to find something which suits most of the students in a class they will find reading meaningful as well as enjoyable. Then they will learn much more from their reading.

When we read novels it is possible for us to learn things about other cultures, and when we talk about what happens in a book this can open up our eyes to our own situation. Among other things *Man and Boy* deals with gender roles, and the author, Tony Parsons, challenges them. In a way, Harry and Gina change roles, and the fact that we find it interesting to read about this proves that we have our own prejudices and that it is important to discuss this kind of things.

When little boys grow up it is vital for them to find good masculine role models. Because of this, the relation between fathers and sons is another interesting issue. Harry's father has had an important impact on his son. He has always been Harry's hero, and he has transferred many of his own values to him. However, what is expected of men changes from time to time, and Harry must therefore learn new things in order to become a modern man who can take care of his son all on his own.

Man and Boy is a book which many students at the upper secondary school appreciate.

Naturally it is possible to read it "just for fun", but if you really want to learn something from it, it is essential to work with it in different ways, and to discuss it with others who have read the same novel. This is why I present a number of exercises which can be used in class in the very last part of my essay.

List of references

- BBC Home – Studentlife – Debate of the Week. “Should we have school uniforms?” Retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/studentlife/debate/2008/40_uniforms.shtml
- Byréus, Katrin. *Du har huvudrollen i ditt liv*. Stockholm: Liber AB, 1990. Print.
- Collie, Joanne and Stephen Slater. *Literature in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. Print.
- Forum theatre. (n.d.) Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forum_theatre 3 April 2012
- Hedge, Tricia. *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.
- Horrocks, Roger. *Masculinity in Crisis*. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1994. Print
- Hwang, Carl Philip. “The Changing Role of Swedish Fathers.” *The Father's Role, Cross-cultural Perspectives*, edited by Michael E. Lamb. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1987. Print
- Jackson, Sonia. “Great Britain.” *The Father's Role, Cross-cultural Perspectives*, edited by Michael E. Lamb. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1987. Print.
- Kimmel, Michael S. “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity.” *The Masculinities Reader*, edited by Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett. Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2001. Print
- Kursplan i Engelska (gymnasieskolan)*. Retrieved from <http://www.skolverket.se> 27 March 2012
- Läroplan för gymnasieskolan* (SKOLFS 2011:144). Retrieved from <http://www.skolverket.se>
- Northen, Stephanie. (11, 01, 18). School uniform does not improve results. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/jan/18/school-uniform-results>
- Parental leave. (n.d.) In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parental_leave . 13 March 2012
- Parsons, Tony. *Man and Boy*. London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999. Print
- Pittman, Frank. *Man Enough: Fathers, Sons, and the Search for Masculinity*. New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 1993. Print.
- Sundelin, Jenny. (08, 03, 11). Play: the Swedish way. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/mar/11/children_2/3-12
- Tony Parsons. (n.d) In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony_Parsons_%28British_journalist%29 6 Feb. 2012