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Pedagogy and Persuasion

Teaching gender with Jane Austen's *Persuasion* in the EFL classroom

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Title: Pedagogy and *Persuasion*: Teaching gender with Jane Austen's *Persuasion* in the EFL classroom

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Abstract: The aim of the essay is to argue why and how Jane Austen's novel *Persuasion* can be used in an English as a Foreign Language classroom when discussing gender issues in upper secondary school. By using literature in the language classroom a teacher can help foster personal involvement in the students. The classroom activities in this project will help the students develop their language skills in different ways: to watch and listen to a film adaption of the movie, to read the book, and to debate and discuss the themes of this essay. This essay uses gender theories for the literary analysis as well as the Education Act (2010:800) and the Swedish curriculum to discuss the pedagogical implications. By using *Persuasion* a teacher can illustrate and question stereotypes to promote equality between men and women as stipulated in the curriculum and help students achieve the goals set for English 6 in upper secondary school. The analysis shows that Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth both break the gender stereotypes of the time in which the book was written. Further, these results can be used to discuss gender performativity as well as the norms behind masculinity and femininity.

Keywords: Literature, Gender, Masculinity, Femininity, Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, Stereotypes, Pedagogy

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1. Introduction

The Swedish curriculum for the upper secondary school in accordance with the Education Act (2010:800) states that education in school should promote and establish respect for fundamental democratic values, not least that of the “[...] equality between women and men” (4). The curriculum also emphasises the goal that individuals should be taught to “empathise with and understand the situation of other people” (10). This has certain implications for the school, not only in terms of how to deal with problems of discrimination based on gender, class, and sexuality, but also what material and what method to use in the classrooms.

This essay has a more narrow focus: to examine how teachers can promote equality between women and men by using literature in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom and specifically with Jane Austen’s *Persuasion* (1818). I believe that an important part of promoting equality between women and men is to discuss the problem of gender stereotypes. This can be done in several different ways, but I will argue that using literature for this purpose can be a valuable teaching method.

My claim for this thesis is therefore that Jane Austen’s *Persuasion* is a book that is not only entertaining, but it can also be used to discuss gender stereotypes in the EFL classroom since the characters in the book are on the surface very stereotypical but that through a literary analysis one could argue the very opposite as well. This is a tool that can be used to encourage students to analyse gender roles and stereotypes that are the norm today and also do the same in relation to the time in which it was written. During this project the students will be able to discuss whether gender roles and stereotypes are something to strive for and from there discuss what impact they have on equality between the sexes today.

In this essay I will discuss the benefits of using literature for language acquisition and describe how *Persuasion* can be used for this purpose. I will discuss the book in relation to the goals set by Education Act (2010:800) as well as the Swedish curriculum and the syllabus for English in upper secondary school. I will show that working with *Persuasion* can help students achieve the goals set for English Level 6 as well as further students’ understanding of gender stereotypes and equality between men and women.

In the first chapter of this essay I will argue for the use of literature in the language classroom and introduce the book and discuss problems that might occur during the teaching of this particular text. After that I will discuss previous research in the field of gender theories and the concepts that will be used in this essay, namely gender, femininities and masculinities. Further I will discuss research on gender in women’s literature in general as well as introduce

two researchers' characteristics of women and men at the time the book was written and follow that up with previous research done on Jane Austen's *Persuasion* from a gender perspective. In the following part of the essay I will discuss the didactic and the literary analysis of *Persuasion* including ideas for classroom activities. This will be presented as a lesson plan consisting of six weeks and an analysis of Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth. The final chapter will contain concluding reflections and remarks on the project as well as ideas for further studies.

2. Teaching *Persuasion* in an English as a foreign language classroom

Reading is an important part of learning a language and that is reflected in all curriculums of the Swedish school, even as early as preschool level, and with reading comes the use of literature. This means that students in upper secondary school have gone through years of literature and similar studies. While some students find literature studies to be a rewarding experience, just as many students believe the opposite and may find the idea of reading a whole novel to be rather intimidating. In this chapter the didactic and theoretical aspects of teaching literature will be discussed. I will also examine and consider possible conflicts that may arise when using *Persuasion* as a tool for discussing gender stereotypes because of the historical gap between Austen's society and our own.

2.1 Why teach literature in the EFL classroom

Through literature, students learn to explore possibilities and consider options for themselves and humankind. They come to find themselves, imagine others, value difference, and search for justice. They gain connectedness and seek vision. They become the literate thinkers we need to shape the decisions of tomorrow. (Langer 1)

The use of literature in Swedish schools is a common practice today. The curriculums for both the compulsory school and upper secondary school mention the use of literature in all language classes (Skolverket 2011, 2013). The fact that teachers use literature is no longer in question, but why should we and for what aim should it be used?

With regard to English as a foreign language in upper secondary school, Skolverket specifies in its syllabus the use of "literature and other kinds of fiction" with the aspects "[c]ontent and form" for level 5 and "[c]ontemporary and older literature" with a focus on "[t]hemes, ideas, form and content" for level 6. English 7 requires even more, but as this is an elective course I will not focus on this level. However, it is clear that to fulfil the requirements the students in upper secondary school need a more analytical approach to literature than in the compulsory school. The analytical and interpretive side of literature studies are often very different from the way students read literature at home and therefore the gap between this and what is expected of them in class can be daunting.

Learning a language is often hard and it is safe to presume that not all the students enjoy the experience to the same degree. Nevertheless, there is a reason to why the syllabus dictates the use of literature in the English as a foreign language classroom. Collie and Slater state

four different reasons as to why literature should be used in the classroom: it gives students an opportunity to work with “valuable authentic material”, to achieve “cultural enrichment”, and “language enrichment” (3-5). All of these are important to the students of language but they say that “[a]bove all, literature can be helpful in the language learning process because of the personal involvement it fosters in readers” (5). This, they claim, helps students to avoid the superficial and mechanical process of learning a language and to find enjoyment in it (Collie and Slater 5-6).

In *Envisioning Literature: Literary Understanding and Literature Instruction*, Judith A. Langer argues a similar case. She believes that literature helps students to see different possibilities and different truths from several perspectives and that this promotes imagination (8). By doing this the readers, in our case the students, are allowed to “use various angles of vision to examine thoughts, beliefs, and actions” (5). This can be connected to what the Swedish curriculum for the upper secondary school says about what the school should aim for, namely to promote “the understanding of other people” and “the importance of forming personal views” (4).

With this I have hopefully shown that the use of literature is something positive and to be striven for. However, there still remains a discussion of whether we should use authentic literature or literature modified for the purpose of acquiring language. Authentic literature is literature that is not written for or rewritten with the purpose of using the text when teaching language (Collie and Slater 3). An authentic text therefore has the advantage of being a window into the thoughts and opinions of the author, but also the society in which the book was written. This will help the students gain an insight into the culture and language of the country it was written in. The syllabus for English as a foreign language stipulates that the education should include “[a]n international perspective” and “[a] historical perspective” (Skolverket 6). It is therefore more appropriate to use authentic texts as far as possible in the classroom so students have the possibility of reaching these goals.

2.2 Why teach *Persuasion* in the EFL classroom

Choosing a text

So far I have established why literature is such a valuable resource to use in the language classroom but the question still remains of how to choose a novel to make the most of the material. Most teachers I have met during my teacher training period have a fairly simple way

of choosing novels for their classes; they choose texts they have already worked with before. Other teachers choose novels or texts that they like the best, so as to keep their own motivation high. While these methods are rational they only cater to the teachers' needs and wishes instead of those of the students. Collie and Slater believe that the teacher has to choose novels with themes that the students can relate to and with a language difficulty that is not too much above the level of proficiency in the class (6).

Why Persuasion?

As I mentioned above, literature can help students to broaden their perspectives on various matters of life. There are of course any number of texts dealing with themes and topics that are relevant to the students' lives and also applicable to the goals of the syllabus. Yet there are other aspects of this that should be taken into account. The activities we want to do with the students are also significant to our choice of novel. I have decided to work with Jane Austen's *Persuasion* for this project because I believe it is a novel that has a lot to offer the students in terms of themes, ideas, and structure. *Persuasion* also fits the criteria listed for the English Level 6 class in upper secondary school.

Jane Austen's *Persuasion* is what most would consider a classic love story. The story can also be connected to most students' own conceptions of gender, femininity and masculinity. Nevertheless, there are ideas expressed in the book that will contradict what most students' would consider to be the beliefs of the era in which the novel was written. This is something I will use as a discussion point in my analysis later. The many characters and themes of the book make it a useful tool for teachers. I have chosen the themes of gender stereotypes and equality between the genders and will use the two main characters to address these themes in the book.

2.3 A discussion of potential problems

Persuasion is the love story of Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth set in the early 19th century. The book itself is rather innocuous, as there are no controversial themes to be found in the whole novel. This, in itself, might become a problem in the classroom. There is a risk that the book could alienate students because of the fact that it portrays a heterosexual couple trying to come to terms with their past and creating a future for themselves. The Curriculum for the upper secondary school clearly states that all who work in schools should "actively resist discrimination and degrading treatment of individuals or groups" (Skolverket 2013, 14). Nevertheless it is my belief that *Persuasion* contains a number of themes that students can

relate to even though the story is about a heterosexual couple. By discussing the theme of gender I believe the students will see that the benefits of the book are more than its demerits.

The second problem of the novel is that it is set almost two centuries before our own. Most of the students will feel disconnected to the setting and might get frustrated with the language of the novel. However, there is support in the syllabus of English which specifically mentions the use of “older literature” as a goal in Level 6 English. Further, the Curriculum for upper secondary school says that it is important to establish, amongst others, an historical perspective (Skolverket 2013, 11). In his book *In Defence of Reading: Teaching Literature in the Twenty-First Century* Daniel Schwarz explains that “we need to situate [the text] in the political and historical context; we need [to] situate [the] text within the author’s life and values and the time in which he wrote; and we need [to] explore first and foremost the values he enacts” (39). What he means is that a text is never created in a vacuum and therefore it is important to reflect and give students the opportunity to put the text into its context and from there begin to analyse the text. This will be addressed in my essay as well in the very first lesson of the project (see 4.1).

3. Theory

In this chapter the theories used for analysing *Persuasion* in the English as a second language classroom in relation to gender will be discussed. In 3.1 I will introduce gender theory as well as contemporary theories about masculinity and femininity and thereafter discuss why one should explore masculinity and femininity in upper secondary school. I will also discuss gender specifically in women's literature as well as masculinity and femininity in Austen's time and finally introduce previous research done on the book in relation to gender.

3.1 Gender theories

In the curriculum for the upper secondary school in Sweden, it says that “[t]he school should actively and consciously further equal rights and opportunities for women and men. Students should be encouraged to develop their interest without prejudice to gender differences” (Skolverket 5). Further, it specifies that teachers shall “ensure that teaching in terms of content and its organisation is typified by a gender perspective” (9). To be able to follow these instructions the teacher must be aware of what gender is and how it can affect both students' opinions and their own. I will use R.W. Connell as my source for the specification of gender in this essay along with some input from West and Zimmerman.

In this essay I make a difference between the notion of sex and the notion of gender. Sex is best described in terms of biological traits and characteristics which define women and men. Accordingly, the notion of sex is a global one where nationality and cultural background plays little or no role in the understanding of sex. Gender, on the other hand, is what society believes to be feminine and masculine, which might be certain types of behaviour, activities, and attributes but also roles. Consequently, the notion of gender differs depending on several factors, such as nationality, cultural background et cetera.

In the article “Doing Gender” Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman write that gender is not simply a matter of what a person is, but more importantly it is what that person does repeatedly in interaction with other people (140). This means that what we consider to be ‘innate’ in a specific sex is actually something we create in social activities. If gender is something we do, then the differences between masculine and feminine, between men and women are not natural or biological, but nevertheless they are essential to establish gender (137). This is displayed in our everyday choices, as for example when we choose either the toilet for men or for women.

R.W Connell says that “we need at least a three-fold model of the structure” to understand gender: power, production, and cathexis (defined as “emotional attachment”). The

power aspect is the subordination of women, i.e. patriarchy. The second aspect, production, is the gender division of labour. This affects the economic situation between the two sexes, as unequal wage for men and women or that typical female occupations pay less than male ones. The cathexis aspect entails the gendered character of sexual desire and Connell says that “[t]he practices that shape and realize desire are thus an aspect of the gender order”. The last aspect is often analysed in feminist works that connects heterosexuality with men’s social dominance (Connell 73-75).

3.1.1 Masculinities and Femininities

There is a lot of debate on whether Jane Austen created stories with characters that broke the gender rules of her time. To understand the arguments of this debate we need to define what we mean by femininities and masculinities. In this part I will discuss the stereotypes of men and women in modern times and how they influence our way of understanding sex and gender. I will also make use of the concepts discussed here in my project for the book (see 4).

In *Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide* Lois Tyson discusses sex and gender and presents traditional gender roles, such as women being emotional, weak, nurturing and submissive whereas men are described as rational, strong, protective and decisive. By promoting these gender roles men can justify inequality where the woman is seen as inferior to the man. The monopoly of the superior position that men have has been used throughout history as an excuse when denying women the right to education and other means of acquiring more power (83).

R.W Connell discusses hegemonic masculinity with a base in Antonio Gramsci’s analysis of class relations. According to Connell, hegemony is “the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life” (77). Further, she defines hegemonic masculinity as:

[T]he configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (77)

From this she draws the conclusion that the currently accepted strategy might be exchanged for another group of men who construct a new hegemony (77). Because of this structuring of social practice we must also consider the interaction between gender, race and class (Connell 75). The hierarchy of masculinities can be viewed as a triangle, hegemonic masculinity is on top, since it is considered to be the real masculinity, but very often it includes a minority of men. After this come other types of masculinities, for example at the very bottom of the

triangle we find homosexual masculinities. This is because it is often easily associated with femininity in the patriarchal ideology (Connell 78). However, this does not mean that men who do not meet the normative standard of hegemonic masculinity have nothing to gain from it. Connell says that “men in general gain from the overall subordination of women” (79).

Connell discusses the concept of a fixed, unchangeable true masculinity in her book *Masculinities*. She argues that it is a common belief that masculinity stems from having a male body and that this body either directs actions taken (men are more aggressive than women in nature) or limits them (it is not in the male nature to take care of infants) (45). By this she means that it is generally believed that the biological differences between women and men create different characteristics, i.e. femininities and masculinities.

With a masculine gender comes “certain muscular shapes and tensions” according to Connell (52). According to her sport has become the main definer of masculinity in popular culture where men can prove their superiority to women because of their physical performance. At the same time, if this performance cannot be achieved because of, for instance, physical disability, a man’s masculinity may become questioned and men dealing with this problem are often unable to ignore the hegemonic standards and therefore make an effort to reach it in other ways (54-55).

As stated above in 3.1 the school is required to actively discuss and problematize gender and to give a gender perspective on the content of the lessons. When discussing gender it is therefore necessary to also give students an opportunity to consider what influence gender stereotypes have. For this to be achieved, a teacher can use Connell as an instrument for students to use when analysing characters or other aspects of literature. In my essay this will be done in class by analysing characteristics of the two main characters of *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth (see 4.2).

3.1.2 Why discuss masculinity and femininity in upper secondary school?

In her book *Being Boys, Being Girls: Learning Masculinities and Femininities* Carrie Paechter argues that it is in secondary school where students form small groups of practice within which students construct identities in relation to not only the school but also to their imagined future lives (111). She writes that school puts a strong limit on the masculinities and femininities that are allowed to be constructed and performed, and that by doing so it prefers a particular form of masculinity and femininity (113), hegemonic masculinity and femininity in Connell’s words (see 3.1.1). This, she says, does not stop students to position themselves in communities of masculinity and femininity practice in compliant, oppositional and other

stances of this hegemonic view (116). Paechter argues that depending on school subjects, which can be divided into masculine and feminine, students assert or construct themselves “in alignment with or in opposition to dominant notions of masculinity and femininity” (118). Mathematics is characterised by rationality, which is then related to masculinity and therefore marked as a masculine subject. It can even be connected further with being an unemotional and abstract subject that is often characterised as masculine (Paechter 119) as it is not connected to women who are often considered to be emotional even in Austen’s time (see further in 3.2). Paechter suggests that this might even cause teachers to enforce gender stereotypes instead of challenging them with different strategies. As an example she mentions avoiding the romance genre when teaching all-boys classes, since the genre is connected to women just because of their emotional ‘trait’ (120).

It is reasonable to believe that what Paechter suggests is not unrealistic and that it is probably a frequent occurrence in upper secondary school even in Sweden today. But why should we then work with these questions in an EFL classroom? As I have mentioned before (see 3.1) the Curriculum for upper secondary school teaching should be adapted to the individual needs and circumstances of students and that the students should be encouraged to develop their interests “without prejudice to gender difference” (Skolverket 5). The syllabus for English states that “[s]tudents should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge of [...] social issues [...]” (1) and in English 6, which is the target level of this essay, it states that the content should deal with “[c]oncrete and abstract subject areas related to student’s [...] societal and working life” (7). Not only does this mean that teachers should adapt their own ways of teaching their subject and take care not to influence the students, it also means that students should become aware of these issues and be given the opportunity to address them in class. Paechter says that “[t]eachers should make themselves aware of when their assumptions of gender differences [...] construct masculinities and femininities” and that this could be addressed by form of discussions (130). It is my belief that this should not only be something for teachers to discuss but that the discussions should also take place in the classroom with the students. This idea will be the basis for my classwork activities in relation to the literary analysis done with the themes of masculinity and femininity.

3.2 Gender in Women’s Literature

Women’s fiction reflects an experience radically different from men’s because our drive towards growth as persons is thwarted by our society’s prescriptions concerning gender. Whether women authors are conscious of this feminism or force pro femina in their novels or not, [...] the tension

between [...] forces demanding our submissions and our rebellious assertions of personhood, characterize far too much of our fiction to be incidental. (Pratt 6)

In *Literature and Gender* Lizbeth Goodman writes that gender as an approach to literature is a way for readers to learn about society as well as about literature if they pay attention to their own assumptions and stereotypes while reading (viii). She continues by saying that by approaching literature like this it will enlarge “your scope of vision and intensif[y] and enrich[...] the experience of seeing or reading” (ix).

She argues that there is a difference between men’s writing and women’s writing because of gender. Goodman explains that as few women had a proper education before the twentieth century, writing was not something they could choose with ease (71). Not only did they not have education, they were also preoccupied with tasks set aside for women, namely domestic work. Further, as norms and gender influenced writing as a form of work, limitations were also set on what type of themes and genres women could write about. Because women in the middle- and upper-classes spent their time at home, they had a limited frame of reference which naturally led to most women writing about what they knew the domestic life (Goodman 72). What then are the archetypal patterns in women’s literature?

In *Archetypal Patterns in Women’s Fiction* Annis Pratt clarifies the term archetypal by saying that it “constitute images, symbols, and narrative patterns that differ from stereotypes in being complex variables, subject to variations in perception” (4). She introduces different categories of literature according to what “aspect of the human development they depict, initiation into adulthood [...], entry into marriage [...], the quest for sexuality [...], and personal transformation [...] in the novels of rebirth” which she argues are archetypal of women’s literature (Pratt 168). For this essay I will be using two of these categories, namely the first two since they correspond to Austen’s *Persuasion* the most. I will briefly summarize the characteristics of these two types of literature below.

The first category, the novel of development, features young women who try to adapt to the norm of womanhood. Pratt continues by saying that this theme was often used by women writers but more rebellious ones injected their own criticism of society’s concept of womanhood, usually through the use of wit. This, she says, allows authors to criticise marital norms and accommodate them at the same time (15). Pratt says that “the hero does not choose a life to one side of society after conscious deliberation [...] she is radically alienated by gender-role norms from the very outset” (36). This, she notes, is what makes the novel of

development “less a self-determined progression towards maturity than a regression from full participation in adult life” (36).

The second category, novels of marriage, depicts women where marriage becomes a turning point in life, with more or less protests from the heroines. However, Pratt mentions that although many literary texts in this category depict tragic fates, “a few suggest that men and women can transcend gender norms to create authenticity within marriage” (41). Often the theme is a struggle between love and marriage, where social norms and individual desires are mutually exclusive and hard to combine (Pratt 58).

So what were the characteristics of men and women at the time when Austen wrote her book? In *Subjects on Display: Psychoanalysis, Social Expectation, and Victorian Femininity* Beth Newman agrees with Nancy Armstrong’s belief that the desirable ideal for women at the time consisted of characteristics such as “moral uprightness, thrift, heightened sensibility, and emotional intensity” (7). In “‘Manners’ Make the Man: Politeness, Chivalry, and the Construction of Masculinity, 1750-1830” Michèle Cohen argues that the hegemonic masculinity of the time was represented in the “polite and refined gentleman” (312). Nevertheless, she says that politeness with its emphasis on pleasing others and self-effacement became characteristics of femininity in the early 1800s (Cohen 314). Consequently, she makes a distinction between this politeness, which could endanger a polite gentleman’s masculinity, and the chivalry one which “was unambiguously masculine” (320). Cohen argues that masculinity here was described in terms such as “bravery, loyalty, courtesy, truthfulness, purity, honor, and a strong sense of protection toward the weak and oppressed” (326). She also mentions the importance of a strong body and “vigour of mind” (324). This, she argues in relation to Lord Kames, made men superior to and the protector of women as men were physically and mentally strong whereas women were “delicate and timid” (329).

In my essay I will use these dichotomies and Pratt’s patterns to structure my own analysis of Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth and then move on to discuss how this might be useful in the classroom as well as suggesting classroom activities to go along with the literary analysis.

3.3 Gender in *Persuasion*

There is a lot written about Jane Austen and *Persuasion* in general, and also much is written particularly about gender and stereotypes. Most of these books and articles focus primarily on the female characters of the book and therefore primarily on femininity, but there are a few

exceptions which will be provided below. However, the authors use different characteristics, or dichotomies, in their analysis of the book when they discuss gender and femininity, e.g. gentleness, rationality, and persuadability. I will briefly summarize these views below and my own interpretation will be discussed in part 4.2 of the essay.

In *Jane Austen's Civilized Women: Morality, Gender and the Civilizing Process*, Steiner analyses *Persuasion* through a postmodern feminist position on moral development. Steiner states that Austen treats gentleness not as a feature of female nature but as a product of moral development (156). She argues that Anne's modesty and gentleness is a result of Austen's interest in the construction of femininity in which gentleness is a large part (158). She also points out Captain Wentworth's disdain of fortitude which he believes to be a defective character trait, as portrayed by his reaction to Louisa Musgrove's attempt to impress him (159). She also discusses Wentworth's understanding of women's otherness, where he fails to understand Anne's reasons for breaking the engagement and also his belief that justice is superior to the ethics of care (165-6). Steiner also argues that Anne's constancy is not an innate trait but a construction linked to women's social status, as the character herself expresses in the book (170).

In the sixth chapter of *In the Meantime: Character and Perception in Jane Austen's Fiction* Susan Morgan discusses the heroine, Anne Elliot and her rationality. She describes Anne as "neither conventional heroine nor delicate plant nor even young lady" but instead as a rational woman (167). She further argues that Anne's "emotional apprehension is the mode of an intelligent and thoughtful woman" (172). Although the gender stereotypes of the time would have said that intelligence in a woman was an unwanted trait, Anne also displays features of femininity such as fortitude and gentleness. The rationality and objectivity of male characters are also discussed in regard to Mr Elliot whose selfishness is disguised in the form of rationality (173). Captain Wentworth's rationality is also described as flawed because of the way he treats the broken engagement to Anne (179).

Another book about Austen and her heroines is *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood* where Alison G. Sulloway writes that readers of Austen can enjoy both the fact that the heroines successively accept feminine roles but that this is a process of them "judging their judges for themselves" which she means is a partial escape from the feminine role (59). Sulloway also states that "[a]s a Christian, Austen could not believe that the sexes were born to perpetual warfare, but she knew that they were trained to little else" (109). She also quotes from Leroy Smith's *Jane Austen and the Drama of Woman* where he says that Austen defines

a woman as “a creature who cannot “be free”” unless she is allowed the freedom to judge for herself and demands to be viewed for herself and not by stereotypes (Smith qtd. in Sulloway 120). Sulloway describes Anne as a highly intelligent woman that is “even more acute than her modesty will admit to herself” (137).

Arthur E. Walzer states in “Rhetoric and Gender in Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*” that Austen sanctions the female values over the masculine, that Anne’s persuadability is better than Wentworth’s firmness (689). He argues that Austen challenges the masculine firmness where yielding to persuasion would be seen as a weakness (695). He believes that Austen provides the reader with signs of that the masculine unpersuadability does not equal reasonable, manly integrity but rather reflects selfishness and pride (697). He also writes that “Anne is paradigmatic of female sensitivity and receptivity and Wentworth of male assertiveness and resolve”. He argues that while Anne might seem to be the weakest character in the book, she is actually the strongest and that her strength stems from stereotypical female traits (700).

To summarize, these four authors all share gender as an analytical tool to interpret *Persuasion*, but they differ in the way they view Anne Elliot and her femininity in particular. Sulloway and Morgan interpret her as breaking traditional gender stereotypes and Steiner argues that she is a construct of femininity but that she breaks some of the stereotypes anyway. On the other hand, Walzer interprets Anne as a stereotypical female character but that, instead of that being something to be frowned upon, it is Austen’s way of valuing female values as something that is not inferior to masculine ones but equal. In this way not breaking stereotypes becomes something positive instead of what might initially be considered a flaw of the book.

4. A lesson plan

In this chapter I will discuss how I intend to use *Persuasion* to help students develop the abilities listed in the syllabus while discussing gender stereotypes to promote equality between the sexes as the national curriculum obligates school to do. I will start by describing my lesson plan for the first four weeks of the project and then do an analysis of the two main characters based on the views of Cohen and Newman as well as input from Connell and West and Zimmerman in relation to gender to show my own interpretation of the book. To do this I have done a close reading of *Persuasion* to find quotes to back up my interpretation. After this I will describe my ideas for classroom activities for the last two weeks.

The syllabus for English in upper secondary school mentions five different goals that the school should help students attain during their education:

- 1) Understanding of spoken and written English, and also the ability to interpret content.
- 2) The ability to express oneself and communicate in English in speech and writing.
- 3) The ability to use different language strategies in different contexts.
- 4) The ability to adapt language to different purposes, recipients and situations.
- 5) The ability to discuss and reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used. (Skolverket 2)

While teachers should incorporate all five of these skills in their lesson plans for the whole course, in my essay I will focus on the first, second, and fifth to create my lesson plan.

Persuasion is not only a rather long book with approximately 250 pages depending on the version, it is also a text written almost two centuries ago. This could seem to be an overwhelming task to many students and therefore it is important to plan the project accordingly.

Depending on the available lesson hours per week I have come to the conclusion that this project would approximately take six weeks to complete, with two lessons every week. The lessons would take place in English 6 since the syllabus mentions the use of “older literature” as well as “themes, ideas, form and content in film and literature”, which the syllabus for English 5 does not (7). The book will be divided into five parts with each part containing a total page number of between 40 to 60 pages. By dividing the book like this the students will be finished with the book before the last week of the project. Most of the reading will be done by the students at home although some lesson time will also be assigned for the task during the weeks when and if time allows.

Collie and Slater suggest that warming-up activities are good to address students’ displeasure at the idea of reading a whole novel (16). Langer also describes, in her book, a

model with the idea of *easing access before reading* (101) which could be considered to be the same thing. Therefore the first and the second lessons will be dedicated to a pre-reading phase as suggested also by Tricia Hedge in *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*. My pre-reading activities will be the introduction of the themes that will later be discussed: gender, masculinity, femininity and gender stereotypes as well as an introduction to the author. Week 2 to 4 will be dedicated to themes that the novel addresses as the students read. Week 5 will focus on the bigger picture of the novel as the students complete reading the text and lastly, week 6 will focus on post-reading activities where students will reflect on what they have discussed and learnt. Introducing and working with the novel this way will hopefully help the students understand why the specific novel was chosen and encourage the students to continue reading the book as the parts they have read will be discussed in the order they appear in the book.

4.1 The first four weeks

Week 1

Week number one will consist of 2 lessons, where the first will focus on presenting the themes for the coming literary study on the novel. The lesson will begin with an presentation of the author, Jane Austen, with a special focus on her biography to introduce students to the society of the time. This will be continued with a discussion of the term gender in relation to masculinity, femininity and gender stereotypes. The discussion will take place in groups of four and five where they are allowed to freely talk about any associations or feelings regarding the terms written on the white-board. Hedge argues that free discussions provide opportunities for students to develop certain aspects of fluency (277). Further, Olga Dysthe writes that since students have different knowledge and experience it is beneficial to let students work in groups so they can share their individual thoughts with the group (44). The students will at the end of the lesson share their discussion points with the whole class with the teacher writing down keywords on the white-board to create a mind-map. According to Hedge this “generates ideas through individual reflection [which] are scribbled down and developed as the mind makes associations” (311). The teacher is supposed to take a very passive role to not influence the students’ opinions in the discussion more than necessary. They are however to provide structure to the discussion if it becomes obvious that the free discussion is not working in a group, in accordance with Hedge’s argument that a discussion often needs structure of some kind (277).

During the second lesson the class will watch the television film adaption of *Persuasion* directed by Adrian Shergold in 2007. Kathleen Brown discusses the advantages of using film adaptations of books when teaching literature in her book *Teaching Literary Theory Using Film Adaptions*. According to Brown the teachers should “meet students on familiar terrain and [...] use film and television adaptations of literary texts to help them [...] become more deeply engaged with the literature itself” (11). This, she claims, helps students to overcome their resistance to reading assignments and that the film adaption may help students gain confidence to tackle the novel after the “film has broken the ground that the written interpretation covers” (13). Another advantage of showing a film adaption is to encourage students that find reading difficult but like learning language through listening exercises. Collie and Slater argue that “[t]he experience of hearing the [dialogue] always brings some new detail to the fore” (66). While the students will not be able to see the whole television film adaption it will be a good introduction to get the students to start reading and make them eager to find out what happens after the section of the film they watched.

Week 2 - 4

This period is what Hedge calls the “while-reading phase” and it is to help students be active when they read. During these weeks the students will have to read the majority of the novel at home since the lessons will focus on the themes of literary analysis rather on the reading of it. The weeks will be divided into two parts; the first lesson where the students get to discuss what they have read and the second session for literary analysis of the themes chosen for this project. The literary analysis and its exercises will be discussed further in 4.2.

For the first lesson of every week the students will be asked to bring a quote they particularly like for some reason or another and a discussion question about the reading they have completed until the lesson. The lesson will begin by the students working in pairs summarizing the previous part and then they will form a larger group of six where they present their quote and discuss what they found interesting about it. When the group have all presented the quotes the discussion will move on to the questions the students brought. In the end of the lesson the groups will be asked to present the quote they all found to be the most interesting one as well as briefly describe the discussions they had as a group. This session will help the students to remember what they read so that the literary analysis session of the week will be fully dedicated to its purpose and not to remembering the plot outline. By repeating this process every week the students know what to expect and also know what they need to prepare and therefore it creates a secure environment to work in.

In the second lesson week 2 and week 3 the themes masculinity and femininity have been discussed separately. In the final session week 4 these themes will be addressed at the same time. This is to conclude the literary analysis part of the project as well as address questions that might have arisen during the project and needs sorting out or that would be good to discuss in relation to previous activities. The students are by this week supposed to have read almost the whole book, at least 200 pages at this point, and this will definitely change the way they might have viewed the characters earlier in the process.

The teacher will begin the lesson by re-telling the class what they thought in earlier lessons, writing down the winning arguments from weeks 2 and 3. After this the students will be divided into smaller groups of about four. This can either be done by the teacher if deemed to be necessary, but students could also be asked to do this by themselves so they hopefully are comfortable in the coming discussion, which can be rather sensitive to some students. After the groups are divided the students will be given time to discuss the following questions in the group.

- Since week 2, has your opinion about Captain Wentworth being (or not being) masculine changed? If so, why? Refer to the book for examples.
- Since week 3, has your opinion about Anne Elliot being (or not being) feminine changed? If so, why? Refer to the book for examples.
- Are men always masculine and are women always feminine? And if so, is it important that they are?
- Is there only one way to be masculine or feminine? Can you be both?
- How do gender stereotypes affect equality between the genders?

Here the teacher must be alert and try to lead the discussions back to the original questions if the students find it difficult to keep to the topics. When the discussions are over the teachers should wrap up the lesson by commenting on certain parts of the discussions that he or she picked up on that might serve some purpose if discussed or addressed in the whole class. If time allows, the teacher could also introduce the role-play that is the topic for the following week (see 4.3).

4.2 Themes for literary analysis and classroom activities

This part of the essay contains the literary analysis of the themes femininity, masculinity and gender stereotypes. These will be discussed in relation to my analysis of the two main characters based on the views of Cohen and Newman as well as input from Connell and West and Zimmerman. To do this I have done a close reading of *Persuasion* to find quotes to back

up my interpretation. After this I will introduce my ideas for classroom activities and discuss how this might be done in an EFL classroom in upper secondary school and why it should be in relation to the curriculum.

4.2.1 Masculinity and Captain Wentworth

Although rationality and unemotional responses to events are often connected to masculinity, Wentworth is often depicted as more emotional than the main character, Anne Elliot. This will be the base for the classwork for the week dealing with masculinity and Captain Wentworth. In this part I will first make a brief analysis based on Cohen's view of the hegemonic masculinity of the time and then continue with a description of the classwork.

Persuasion is set in England during a time where strict boundaries of masculinity and femininity were in place. Therefore it would not be a stretch to believe that the characters would behave appropriately in accordance with this, and to a certain extent that is true in the character of Captain Frederick Wentworth as well. If we apply the characteristics described by Cohen this becomes even more obvious; namely "bravery, loyalty, courtesy, truthfulness, purity, honour and a strong sense of protection toward the weak and oppressed" (see 3.2). Our first introduction to Wentworth displays him in a very favourable light; he is almost the perfect man having built up his fortune and the confidence to top it off.

All his sanguine expectations, all his confidence, had been justified. His genius and ardour had seemed to foresee and to command his prosperous path. [...] He had distinguished himself, and early gained the other step in rank, and must now, by successive captures, have made a handsome fortune. (Austen, 28)

It is not a great leap of faith to say that as the main love interest for Anne Elliot, Captain Wentworth is supposed to be the better alternative than, for instance, Mr. Elliot for her in marriage and therefore we can presume that most qualities he possesses are favourable. In line with what Cohen says about the hegemonic masculinity of the time, Wentworth believes it is his role to protect women because of their frailty. This is illustrated not only in the passage where Louisa jumps down a steep flight and Wentworth later reprimands himself for not protecting her when "he burst forth, as if wholly overcome: [...] 'Oh, God! That I had not given way to her at the fatal moment! Had I done as I ought'" (Austen 116). It is further illustrated in a dialogue with his sister, Mrs. Croft, where he argues that it "is from no want of gallantry towards [women]" (Austen 67) that he will not allow women on board, but because he believes that women are in need of protecting from the weather that they would be subjected to during a trip. His sister reprimands him and says that women are also "rational creatures" and that they are just as aware of what a boat trip would entail as a man. While

these quotes illustrate Wentworth's chivalry and protective side in accordance with the hegemonic masculinity, they also illustrate how he is less rational and more emotional than both Anne Elliot and in the latter case, Mrs. Croft. This emotional side of him is more characteristic of the hegemonic femininity, as discussed by Newman (see 3.2).

There are many ways to address masculinity and gender stereotypes in the classroom. For the practical classroom activity to be done in relation to the masculinity theme I chose to follow Paechter who argued that discussions would be a good way to address this kind of theme. It is my belief that this can be a sensitive topic for some students as it deals with questions of identity, which they are subject to every day and especially in school (Paechter 111). Therefore the teacher should begin with a short summary of the discussions held the first week (see 4.1 *Week 1*) with a focus on things said about masculinity in particular. After this the students should be allowed to add thoughts or comments that were not discussed at that time. All this should be written down on the whiteboard to get a better overview of what has been said and not and to help students in the coming discussion. After the students' discussion the teacher should present the ideas of the time by introducing the dichotomies of Cohen and Newman so students are presented with an historical perspective as well.

For the following lesson I was inspired by Collie and Slater's practical activity called "Debates" (74). They argue that the formal structure of a debate can help students to express themselves in a foreign language. The curriculum for the upper secondary school says that the teaching should "emphasise the importance of forming personal views and provide opportunities for doing this" (Skolverket, 4). In her article "Affective Learning and the Classroom Debate" Suzy Jagger writes that not only is debate a good learning tool for promoting interaction in the classroom it can also help students improve their critical thinking. Further, she argues that a debate encourages active learning and promotes greater interest in the subject of debate (39).

The class will first be divided into groups of six persons, out of which they will form two teams of three. One team will argue that Captain Wentworth performs gender in a masculine way and the other team will argue the opposite. They will have time to, in group, find related quotes in the book to back up their arguments. In the lesson before this the students will be asked to pay special attention to Wentworth and the descriptions of him to prepare for this session. Because of the limited time the teacher will give a strict time frame in which the students are allotted for this part, depending on how long the lesson is. This part of the lesson will give the students the opportunity to practice both finding information in texts in a timely way and forming arguments for their stance, which encourage students to think

critically on what they have read so far. It is also specified in the curriculum that students should learn to work together with others and develop their ability to take responsibility and initiatives for their own learning (Skolverket 6).

When the preparations have been done by the groups they will choose one student in each team to be in charge of keeping the time so that the time is divided equally between the groups. The starting team will begin with their arguments and will be given about three to five minutes to complete this. During this time the opposing team is allowed to write down notes on the arguments of the first team to be able to address them if necessary. When the time is up they change group and the opposing team will be given an equal amount of time to give their starting arguments. When the first round is up the students will be given one to two minutes to discuss the opponents' arguments and quickly form counter-arguments that will be given in the second round of arguments that will follow. When the second round is completed the group will vote on which side they personally felt made the better case and what argument they believe to have been the best. The argument they choose does not necessarily have to be from the "winning" side of the debate. If the group finishes before the rest of the class they are allowed to freely discuss related topics or questions that the teacher will have prepared in advance so that the other groups can finish in their time.

In the second part of the class all the groups will present their winning side and the winning argument. The teacher will write down the winning argument on the whiteboard, divided between the pro and con side of the debate. This is so that the other groups will be given a chance to learn from the other groups as well and consequently create a greater chance of learning potential (Dysthe 309). Dysthe argues that discussions of complex problems with no true answer create an opportunity for the students to develop their reflective ability (310). When this is completed the teacher will continue the discussion with questions about the difference between masculinity of the time Austen wrote her book and today to help students see the text in a historical perspective, which is mentioned in the syllabus for English as a foreign language (Skolverket 6).

Summarising this activity, the desired outcome would be that the students become aware that while Wentworth performs characteristics prescribed to masculinity he also performs traits thought to be feminine, especially at the time the book was written. This will become clear when they are forced to find arguments based on what is written in the book no matter what their personal opinion might be in the beginning. Further, if they become aware of this, they will hopefully notice that they themselves also fit into both 'categories' and that

this creates the possibility of there being more than one way, the hegemonic way, to be masculine.

This activity will demand that the students use all five goals described in English in upper secondary school (see 4). They will first have to read and understand the source material, *Persuasion*, and then in groups write down arguments to support their claim and finally speak both in the debate and in the free discussion in the whole class. The presentation will of course have to be adapted to the situation, the debate, and the students will also have to make sure that their classmates understand their arguments. Further, the theme will demand that they discuss and reflect on social issues, which is the fifth goal for English, and the goal that inspired this essay. This activity will cover all three of the English 6 requirements of “[c]ontent of communication”; ethical and existential issues, themes and ideas in literature, and values and traditions in the English speaking world (Skolverket 7).

4.2.2 Femininity and Anne Elliot

As argued by several other researches on the topic of gender and Anne Elliot (see 3.3) I believe that Anne is not constrained by the hegemonic femininity at the time of the book although she eventually adapts to society’s norm in the end (as described by Pratt, see 3.2), but through her own choice. I will discuss my interpretation of her in relation to Newman and Cohen’s dichotomies and then introduce the classroom activity for the theme of femininity.

The dichotomies that Newman introduced were “moral uprightness, thrift, heightened sensibility, [...] emotional intensity” and Cohen’s additions were politeness, timidity, being modest and delicacy. The younger Anne Elliot, as in eight year before the book take place, is in the beginning of the book described using similar words; “Anne [is] an extremely pretty girl with gentleness, modesty, taste, and feeling” (Austen 24). The older Anne’s “bloom [has] vanished early” but she still has “an elegance of mind and sweetness of character” (Austen 4). She is in a sense the very picture of the desirable woman that Newman mentions (see 3.2).

However, there are certain characteristics of Anne that are not typical for the time. She often acts more rationally than her male counterparts, especially in tense situations. An example would be in the passage where Louisa falls down some steps where Anne takes control of the situation “and everything was done that Anne had promoted, while Captain Wentworth, staggering against the wall for his support, exclaimed in the bitterest agony [...]” (Austen 110). Austen describes the following situation even further:

Anne, attending with all the strength, and zeal, and thought, which instinct supplied, to Henrietta, [...] to suggest comfort to the others, [...] to animate Charles, to assuage the feelings of Captain Wentworth. Both seemed to look to her for directions. (110)

Anne is also very aware of how being born as a woman in the era affects her ability to perform gender and to live her life. She can see the structures that men have put in place that creates an inequality for the sexes. She critiques society's expectation of the two sexes: women are to be in the domestic sphere whereas men are to be concerned with the public one, to pursue a profession or business. She says to Captain Harville:

We certainly do not forget you so soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. [...] We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion. You have a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions. (Austen 233-234)

In the same conversation she also mentions how a lack of education has created even further inequality in being able to tell their own stories, as men have always been given the opportunity of education whereas women have not. Captain Harville argues that since songs and proverbs all talk of women being fickle, they are so. Anne disagrees and says:

[I]f you please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything. (Austen 235)

In the end *Persuasion* is about Anne Elliot marrying Captain Wentworth after overcoming several obstacles stemming mostly from the latter not being able to understand Anne's reasoning and logic. Anne matches both of Pratt's patterns for the hero of the novel of development and novel of marriage and *Persuasion* fits Goodman's view of women's literature (see 3.2). Austen uses her wit to critique the marital norms that Anne has to adapt into, in accordance with Goodman's novel of development, but her marriage is also portrayed as a turning point in her life, as the novel of marriage is characterised. But Anne's marriage is something she does by her own choice and she finds happiness in that choice, as the marriage is something the main characters both wanted. Pratt writes that "Austen approaches marriage by balancing critique with acceptance, using wit, humor and satire [...] to proffer an affectionate *and* financially prudent model husband" (44, Emphasis by the author). And in the end they do marry happily ever after.

Who can be in doubt of what followed? When any two young people take it into their heads to marry, they are pretty sure by perseverance to carry their point, be they ever so poor, or ever so imprudent, or ever so little likely to be necessary to each other's ultimate comfort. This may be bad morality to conclude with, but I believe it to be truth; and if such parties succeed, how should

a Captain Wentworth and an Anne Elliot, with the advantage of maturity in mind, consciousness of right, and one independent fortune between them, fail of bearing down every opposition? (Austen 250)

The classroom activity for the femininity week will be the same as for the masculinity week, described above in 4.2.1. The debate will help students find both arguments in support of Anne performing gender in a feminine way and arguments to oppose the view. The following classroom discussion will once again both have a historical perspective and also question gender stereotypes that occur with the separation of masculine and feminine traits.

This week, groups that finish faster than their peers will discuss Arthur E. Walzer's analysis of Anne Elliot, who he claims is the strongest character in the book because of her stereotypical female traits (see 3.3). While my interpretation of Anne is different, I think Walzer's can be a valuable tool to discuss how female traits are often seen as inferior but that they can also be thought of as positive. The students will therefore be given a chance to discuss if and how the female traits Anne Elliot performs are superior to the masculine ones of Captain Wentworth by comparing how Austen writes the two characters.

4.3 The last two weeks

During the fifth week of the project I will make use of post-reading tasks to help the students remembering everything they have read and discussed so far. For this task I was inspired by Collie and Slater's exercise called "What if...?" (83). This exercise focuses on plot themes as alternative choices to certain events which the students then discuss. I will, however, ask students to discuss and prepare a short role-play from the perspective of someone other than Anne Elliot. Dent-Young discusses the value of role-play in the article "Role-play in Language Teaching". He says that it "stimulates conversation by providing it with a purpose" and that it is a challenging task but "[a]t the same time, [...] the individual is protected by the knowledge that every one around him is doing the same thing" (Dent-Young 64). Further, Dent-Young argues that "[r]ole-play often seems to generate excitement, and sometimes humour" (64). This role-play will then be presented in front of the whole class during session two. While doing this they will have to discuss the feelings and emotions of characters not presented clearly in the book and hopefully get to know the minor characters better. The teacher will have prepared a small selection of alternatives in case the group cannot decide on a specific part themselves since the time allotted to the task is limited. The presentation should not take more than 10 minutes so that the whole class can present their work during the second lesson.

The last week will be dedicated to activities for reflection of the work students have done so far and also to discuss the novel as a whole since the students should have read the entire novel by the first session of the week. The first session will therefore focus on reflections about the book as a whole through discussions in groups where students are supposed to answer the questions:

- In your opinion is *Persuasion* a book that breaks gender stereotypes or not? Back up your opinion with arguments from the book and the previous discussions we have done in class.
- What is the difference between the gender stereotypes of the *Persuasion* era and now?
- Are gender stereotypes hindering or enabling equality between men and women?
- Are we more equal now than in the 19th Century? Base your arguments on the book and any other knowledge you have of the period.
- When *Persuasion* was written homosexuality was considered a crime in England. Discuss how the book may have been different if the couple were two men or two women instead.

The second session would then focus on reflecting on the project as a whole. The students will be given time to discuss what they think they have learnt during the project as well as how well they think the structure of the project was. This will be done in the whole class so that everyone is given a chance to express their opinions.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this essay has been to show how and why a teacher can use Jane Austen's *Persuasion* in an English as a Foreign Language classroom to discuss gender issues in English 6. Paechter discusses how upper secondary school is a place where students form groups of practice where they perform gender in compliance or opposition to the hegemonic masculinity or femininity that the school unconsciously might promote. However, the curriculum for upper secondary school states that the school should "encourage all students to discover their own uniqueness as individuals" as well as promote "equality between women and men" (Skolverket 4). Further, it specifies that the school should encourage students "to develop their interests without prejudice to gender differences" (Skolverket 5). The project explained in this essay has also taken into consideration all of the five goals in the syllabus of English so the students will have an opportunity to practice their abilities to read, listen, speak and write while discussing these issues.

The claim of this essay is that *Persuasion* by Jane Austen is a valuable resource for teachers who want to discuss gender in their English 6 class. The two main characters in *Persuasion* are on the surface stereotypical and follow the characteristics listed by Cohen and Newman, as well as the book in itself follows the patterns of Goodman and Pratt. Nevertheless, through a more thorough analysis in class by means of discussions and debate students can find arguments supporting the opposite view as well. The initial views of the students are then followed up in a later session where they are able to discuss how their views have changed after they have read more of the book.

As previous research shows, gender is a frequent angle in which *Persuasion* has been discussed before. With this essay, however, I have shown how to use the book as a tool in the EFL classroom for teachers wanting to teach gender, and in particular femininity and masculinity. On the other hand, there are other angles that have not been discussed in this essay; social class, ethnicity and the heterosexual norm. All of these aspects are important to a fuller understanding which is something that needs to be addressed by the teacher. This could also be aspects that could be discussed in a later project.

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