

# A Postcolonial Reading of John Marsden's *Tomorrow, When the War Began*

– *An Interdisciplinary Study of Teaching Social Justice Through a Young Adult Novel in the Swedish Upper Secondary EFL Classroom*



Author: Johanna Wahldén

Supervisor: Dr. Lena Ahlin

Term: Spring 2016

Course: ÄENC51 English IV

Individual Research Project (15 hp)

English Teacher Education

Campus Helsingborg

## **Abstract**

The aim of this interdisciplinary study is to examine if John Marsden's young adult novel, *Tomorrow, when the war began* (1993), can be used in the Swedish Upper Secondary EFL classroom, when teaching social justice. In order to fully examine the aim, a postcolonial reading of the novel has been made. The novel has been analyzed in accordance with postcolonial literary theory and then contrasted with the idea of teaching social justice within the Swedish Upper Secondary EFL classroom. The literary analysis concerns a rhetorical flip which Marsden includes in his novel, and how he has managed to comment on the historic events in Australia, concerning the settlement of Englishmen and the dominance of the indigenous Australians. Furthermore, the analysis examines if it is possible to teach social justice through the novel, and if the novel is in fact, appropriate as an EFL classroom material. The analysis is concluded by advice for educators when teaching social justice through Marsden's novel.

The results showed that Marsden's novel is an appropriate means of teaching social justice in the Swedish Upper Secondary EFL classroom, as it allows the students to evolve a sense of empathy and an awareness of others. By applying a critical theory on a novel, and then bringing it into the classroom, the teacher manages to cover several of the aims expressed in both the Swedish Curriculum and the Swedish syllabus for the English teaching subject.

**Keywords:** teaching, social justice, Marsden, *Tomorrow, when the war began*, postcolonial criticism.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Young Adult Literature and Teaching Social Justice.....	2
Theoretical Background.....	4
Critical Literacy.....	4
Postcolonial Literary Theory.....	6
Selection of Material.....	8
Methods of Analysis.....	11
Criteria for Selecting YAL.....	11
Postcolonial Criticism.....	12
Social Justice Made Visible.....	13
Coding Method.....	13
Analysis.....	14
The Novel as Classroom Material.....	14
Marsden’s Postcolonial Flip.....	17
The indigenous Australians.....	18
Penetrating the heart of darkness.....	18
The others.....	19
Is it Possible to Teach Social Justice Through the Novel?.....	21
Advice for Educators.....	24
Conclusion.....	26
List of Reference.....	28

## Introduction

During the autumn of 2015, the Swedish people met headlines about a global refugee crisis. Soon enough, these refugees came to Sweden, and on a daily basis, newly arrived refugees were spotted at central stations all over the country. Lonely teenage boys without proper clothing and women in long dresses walking along a country side road became an everyday sight. At the same time, the papers depicted a Europe with rightwing political parties getting a stronger hold of parliaments. In Sweden, such a party became a part of Parliament in 2012. Clearly, there is reason to talk about democracy and tolerance in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in Sweden.

In the *Curriculum for the Upper Secondary School*, issued by the Swedish National Agency of Education (2011<sub>a</sub>), it is stated that one of the Upper Secondary school's fundamental aims, is to teach democratic values to students.

The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity between people are the values that education should represent and impart. [...], this is to be achieved by nurturing in the individual a sense of justice, generosity, tolerance and responsibility. (Skolverket, 2011<sub>a</sub>, p. 4).

There are many ways of implementing such a fundamental value in teaching. As a student teacher of EFL, I see a great deal of potential in literature as a means of discussing social justice. The aim of this essay is to explore if John Marsden's young adult novel *Tomorrow, when the war began* (1993) can be such a means. By applying critical theory on a literary work, connections can be found where we might not expect to find any (McLeod, 2010, p. 3; Tyson, 2006, p. 417). Within the field of postcolonial criticism issues such as solidarity and equality amongst all people, can be explored. By doing a postcolonial reading of Marsden's novel, focusing on postcolonial issues in order to prove that Marsden is doing a postcolonial comment with his novel, I hope to inspire others to use both young adult literature (YAL) and postcolonial analytical tools in their teaching at an Upper Secondary level.

In the aims of the subject syllabus it is stated that students should be given the opportunity to develop “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, 2011<sub>b</sub>, p. 2). Furthermore, “[...] students should meet written and spoken English of different kinds, and relate the content to their own experience and knowledge” (Skolverket, 2011<sub>b</sub>, p. 1). YAL is a great opportunity for young adult learners to relate to written English.

Moreover, throughout all of the courses of English it is stated that the core content of the courses is to teach about living conditions; values; attitudes; traditions; social issues; cultural, historical, political and social conditions; and also about ethical and existential issues in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used (Skolverket, 2011<sub>b</sub>, p. 3; p. 7; p. 11). In the first course of English, teaching should also be about “the spread of English and its position in the world” (Skolverket, 2011<sub>b</sub>, p. 3). English has gained its position in the world through imperialism and colonialism. Therefore it is highly relevant to bring postcolonial discourse into the classroom.

### **Young Adult Literature and Teaching Social Justice**

The benefits of working with literature in the EFL classroom are well established. The syllabus states that students should work with “literature and other fiction, both contemporary and older” (Skolverket, 2011<sub>b</sub>, p. 3; p. 7; p. 11). It is also stated that students should be aware of “living conditions, attitudes, values and traditions, as well as social, political and cultural conditions in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used.” (Skolverket 2011<sub>b</sub>, p. 3). Glasgow (2001, p. 54) proclaims that a good novel allows the reader to imagine the world of others and at the same time questioning one’s own world.

According to Beach et al (2011, p. 78), the field of YAL has gone through a shift in both quantity and quality during the last decade. In the U.S. there has been a 25 % increase in the

publication of YAL, and a 23 % rise in sales of YAL-books from 1995 to 2005. Books such as Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight*-series and/or J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* have provided young readers with a chance to encounter new worlds, allowing them to escape their own mundane reality. Beach et al (2011) describe a new literary canon, created by the teens themselves, based on popular culture with issues relevant for their everyday life. YAL includes a multitude of genres; fiction, nonfiction, short stories, and poems – which are all written for, and about, adolescents. YAL is rich and complex with an authentic language, thus providing teachers with a material with appropriate form and content. Furthermore, YAL builds students' literary skills and at the same time addresses standards and values. YAL deals with issues relevant for adolescence, such as racism, teen pregnancy, drugs, family matters, political injustice etc. YAL is an opportunity to work with full-length, high-quality literary texts in the classroom (Bull, 2011, p. 223; Bean & Moni, 2003, p. 638; Stallworth, 2006).

YAL is available in a multitude of topics, formats and genres, which is highly appropriate when talking about social justice in the EFL-classroom. Beach et al (2011, p. 86) discuss the reader as a transformative agent, which is a socio-political view necessary in today's global settings. They conclude that it is not enough to just include multicultural literature or simply promote tolerance. The teacher should include issues such as class, gender, race and injustices explicitly when teaching literature. By engaging in, and exploring different texts, the students are able to move beyond the classroom and create a meaning by using the word in the world. The students should be provided with a safe space for discussion, in order to reach true and meaningful dialogue which is the key to true education and transformative learning. Within YAL, adolescents have the space to explore the realities of their own world. With the help of the teacher and access to appropriate questions, the students have the opportunity to question the power structure operating in society (Beach et al, 2011, p. 87; Glasgow, 2001; Freire, 1993; Janks, 2013; Stallworth, 2006, p. 59).

## **Theoretical Background**

The theoretical background will provide the foundation on which the analysis will rest. The theoretical background includes an explanation of concepts such as critical literacy; postcolonial criticism; young adult literature; and teaching social justice. The concepts are highly relevant for the purpose of teaching social justice, by the means of a young adult novel. Through critical literacy, students are able to understand the world in which they live in, and can start to transform into agents of change, in order to create a more just society.

### **Critical Literacy**

One of the aims of the Swedish National Syllabus for the subject of English is for students to obtain the ability of a critical understanding of all types of texts (Skolverket, 2011b, p. 3). Tyson (2006, p. 6) defines being critical as to be able to examine a text. When the students evolve in their roles as readers, they develop the necessary skills to think critically and should evolve as empathetic beings with knowledge of social justice and democratic values. Teaching critical literacy is about how to problematize culture and knowledge in texts and making it available for classroom discussions (Bean & Moni, 2003, p. 638). According to Abednia & Izadnia (2013) the purpose of critical literacy is to create social justice. Through student dialogue critical thinking can emerge and lead to greater communication skills, which will give the students a critical understanding of the world. By evolving a critical understanding, the students can eventually start to change the world they live in (Freire, 1993, p. 73f). Borsheim-Black et al (2014, p. 123) states that critical literacy aims to illuminate implicit ideologies of texts by examining issues such as power, normativity, and representation, but also for providing opportunity to become agents of change.

The subject syllabus for English 5 states that “content and form in different kinds of fiction” (p. 3) should be dealt with in the classroom. Traditionally, when working with literature in the EFL-classroom, students read *with* the texts, meaning that they examine storylines; analyzing literary aspects; making personal connections; understanding historical contexts; and, doing thematic interpretations. Borsheim-Black et al (2014, p. 124f) contrast by suggesting to let the students read *against* the text, meaning that teachers should let students examine how the text is affected by power structures. By allowing students to read between the lines of a text, they are given the tools to examine their own ideas, values, and system of belief. Freire (1993, p. 69) claims that it is human nature to want to name the world, i.e. discuss and talk about that which exists around us. When reading *against* a text, i.e. reading it critically and then discussing with peers, students name their world. It is first then they can start to change it. The truest form of education, according to Freire (1993, p. 73) is to have a true dialogue. A true dialogue is sprung from critical thinking and dialogue, and formed within communications amongst those who want to transform the world.

In addition, Hilary Janks’ (2013) article *Critical literacy in teaching and research* deals with teaching students to become agents of change. Janks (2013) claims that critical literacy is about how to read both the word, and the world, “in relation to power, identity, differences and access to knowledge, skills, tools, and resources” (p. 227). Whilst working with critical literacy the aim of producing “strategies for contributing to and actively participating in argumentation, debates and discussions related to societal [...] life.” (Skolverket, 2011<sub>b</sub>, p. 8) is dealt with in a natural way. The main point of Janks’ (2013) study is to provide a framework for critical literacy education. According to the subject syllabus for English 6 it should be visible “[H]ow structure and context are built up and how attitudes, perspectives and style are expressed in spoken and written language in various genres.” (Skolverket, 2011<sub>b</sub>, p. 7). By making the interdependence of power, diversity, access and design/redesign visible,

a remake of Paulo Freire's model, Janks (2013) shows how education can contribute to a world in which students become agents of change and how teachers can produce students who are contributing in the world.

### **Postcolonial Literary Theory**

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British Empire had colonized several parts of the world, such as Canada; Australia; India; parts of Africa; the Caribbean; etc. The purpose of imperialism was an economic one, through the exploration of the subordinate countries – the Western<sup>1</sup> world could dress itself in luxury. McLeod (2010) explains colonialism as something that “concerns the settlement of people in a new location” (p. 9), and is a consequence of imperialism. Postcolonial criticism however, explores cultural aspects and the dynamic of the relationship between the new settlers and the indigenous people.

By applying critical lenses on a novel, the reader will find new scopes of cultural and institutional power, hierarchy and control (Beach et al, 2011, p. 15). A postcolonial lens allows the reader to see issues such as economics, politics, religion, and culture, and how these issues function within the structures of power (Brizee et al, 2015).

Postcolonialism as a literary theory became popular in the 1980's after Edward Said published *Orientalism* (1978). Although McLeod (2010, p. 47) states that Said's concept of orientalism is not interchangeable with postcolonialism, it is still a viable theory of how postcolonial criticism operate. The Orient has become important for the Westerners as it is adjacent to Europe, and the greatest, richest and oldest colonies to the Western civilisation. The Orient was the original source of civilisation and language, and functions as a cultural contestant to the West (Said, 1978, p. 1). The concept of orientalism is built on the premise

---

<sup>1</sup> When referring to the Western civilisation, it is Said's (1978) definition of Westerners as European Westerners – specifically the French and British civilisations.

that there are two opposite items, the West – also known as the Occident – and the Orient. Orientalism is a fabricated idea of what the Orient is. The Western people prescribe exotic attributes of the people in the Orient, making them the “others”, apart from people of the West.

The relationship between the West and the “others” is not an equal one. “It is important to grasp quickly that orientalism in part provides the West with means of fashioning an image of itself, by setting up a supposedly degenerate and brutish part of the world against which it can be beneficially compared.” (McLeod, 2010, p. 49). The West constitutes its own self-image by proclaiming what it is not, by prescribing the Orient with opposing attributes. Europe is defined as a contrast image, idea, personality and/or experience of the Orient (Said, 1978, p. 2). The European culture is seen as superior to the non-European people and cultures. Said (1978, p. 7) goes as far as naming European as “us” and non-European as “those”. By saying “those”, and not “them” he gives a hint of the existing view of non-European not being human. Freire (1993, p. 39) explains that a dominant population sees only themselves as human beings, and the oppressed are merely ‘things’. Oppression is an issue which prevents people from being fully human. Said (1993, p. 26) expresses the matter as independence being something purely for whites and Europeans. Other people, seen as lesser and subjects, were to be ruled, and to learn science and culture from the West in order to become cultivated beings.

One of the attributes proclaimed is that the Orient is feminine. By the logic of the West being opposite the Orient, the West is then masculine. Said describes the situation as the West actually penetrating the Orient, as the oriental integrity is being raped by Western civilisation (McLeod, 2010, p. 54). Said (1978) states that “the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination [and] a varying degree of hegemony [...]” (p. 5). Said is not alone in his assumption, in the novella *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad, 1999), it reads “We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness.” (p. 63). McLeod (2010, p. 54)

finds it worth noticing, the sexual attributes prescribed to the Orient. It reveals a perverse fantasy, shared by many male colonizers. It can be seen in the work of artists, who are “[...] depicting themselves, putting on the page or in their pictures their own desires, fantasies and fears.” (p. 55). They show off their own constructed images of what the Orient is, and not the true reality of it. Said (1993, p. 24) mentions Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* as a novella that captures imperial attitude. Conrad is worth mentioning when having a postcolonial discourse as he sums up two main ideas of imperialism in his novella. The first one is based on the power to take over territory, executed with force. The second idea is to disguise a take-over, by developing a justificatory regime of self-appointed authority (Said, 1993, p. 82). Conrad’s text at the time was a satiric critique against the imperial powers active in the Congo. However, it was later concluded that Conrad was not any better than the ones he critiqued. Conrad is describing the indigenous inhabitants as “savages” and “specimen”, which implies that the indigenous people are not humans. In many cases, the indigenous people are depicted by the oppressors as violent, barbaric, wicked, and ferocious (Freire, 1993, p. 38; Said, 1993, p. 200; Tyson, 2006, p. 419). The outdated depiction of indigenous inhabitants is a hot topic in Sweden, but could in fact be a learning opportunity if teachers included the topic in their teaching of social justice.

### **Selection of Material**

In order to bring postcolonial discourse into the classroom, the teacher should search for material from formerly colonized countries. One of those countries is Australia and *Tomorrow, when the war began* is a popular Australian YAL-novel. The novel is a part of the school canon in Australia (Board of Studies NSW, 2003). The reason for choosing it for this essay has to do with the double perspective Marsden so cleverly include in the novel. Also, the reason for choosing a YAL-novel to begin with, is because when allowed to critically

discuss teen issues, young adult learners can get a better understanding of how they are being constructed as adolescents in texts, and how that reflects the image of themselves and their own identity (Bean & Moni, 2003, p. 639). In order to keep up with teen-reading, Beach et al (2011, p. 90) suggest that teachers talk to teenagers about their reading habits, but also keeping themselves updated on popular culture by visiting commercial websites or following award winners. John Marsden has been nominated for the ALMA-award several times, which reveals his popularity in Sweden as well as the rest of the world<sup>2</sup>.

The novel *Tomorrow, when the war began* (1993) is the first one in a series of seven. They are followed up by three more, called *The Ellie Chronicles* (Schekels, 2014, p. 437). In this essay, the copy of *Tomorrow, when the war began* used, was printed 2011.

Schekels (2014) offers a thrilling perspective on John Marsden's novels. Schekels's (ibid) article starts with a quote from the second novel in the series, where Ellie, the protagonist, describes the classic Escher sketch, i.e. when a picture appears to display one image, but when you change the perspective you see something else. Schekels (ibid) uses the quote to form the hypothesis that the *Tomorrow*-series has Escher-like qualities. By applying different perspectives on the novels, Schekels (ibid) finds a rhetorical flip in Marsden's text. Just like an Escher sketch there are two views on display in Marsden's text. The story of *Tomorrow, when the war began* is about a group of Australian teenagers going on a camping trip into the Australian bush. Upon their return, they find their houses deserted, their pets dead and their parents gone. They soon discover that Australia has been invaded by an unknown force.

When the first novel was written, the discourse regarding the "Asian threat" was highly relevant in Australia. The Australian Prime Minister at the time was openly discussing a possible attack from Asia. The novel might be influenced by the "Asian threat" discourse, and

---

<sup>2</sup> ALMA is the largest international award for children books and young adult novels. It is a Swedish award, based on the memory of Astrid Lindgren (ALMA, 2016).

at a first glance, it might seem that Marsden follows the Prime Minister's line, but then Schekel (2014, p. 439) reminds the reader of the Escher sketch again. Things are not as they seem, and what can be mistaken for xenophobia is actually a comment on the Westerners colonisation of Australia. By illuminating the reader of the conditions that follow a colonisation, Marsden manages to comment on a controversial issue. It is like Marsden would like to tell the reader something about the Australian past as well as the contemporary time. McLeod (2010, p. 4) stresses the importance of including both the author and the contemporary time, when doing a postcolonial analysis, in order to fully understand the dichotomies and the undertones of the novel.

Traditionally, a postcolonial novel is set in an imperial setting, where the colonized identity struggle is depicted. If Marsden's novel would have been a postcolonial one, it might have to deal with the indigenous Australians and their relationship with the colonisers. However this is not the case. Marsden's story is set in a modern time, probably during the 1990's, in the Australian outback. The main characters are a mixed group of Australian teenagers, most of them white, although there is some diversity, as two of the boys are immigrants. But, as Schekels (2014) points out, there are two sides to the story, and within the analysis of this essay I will argue that Marsden is trying to make a postcolonial comment with his novel, consequently including him in the postcolonial discourse. Following is a description of the method of analysis.

## **Methods of Analysis**

In the analysis, three issues will be analysed; the novel as a high quality YAL-novel; postcolonial tendencies in the novel; and critical literacy and working with the novel as a means of teaching social justice. In this section, the method of analysis will be presented.

### **Criteria for Selecting YAL**

Beach et al (2011, p. 92), have developed a criteria to examine if a YAL-novel has high quality. The purpose of using the criteria, as an analytical tool in this essay, was to establish if Marsden's novel is in fact a high quality YAL-novel. The criteria have been modified in order to fit the purpose of this essay.

- The novel should have appeal and involvement, meaning that there should be a lasting and universal appeal to the novel, such as an attractive cover, and a high degree of personal, and emotional involvement.
- The novel should have literary quality, that is, there should be substance, and not be “fluffy”. Unique perspectives and ways of thinking should be offered.
- The characters, which should be old enough to understand the problems of a teenager, should be realistic, compelling and distinctive.
- The content and style should be relevant to teenagers. Descriptions should be good, images vivid, and have an appropriate tone, which should not speak down to teenagers.
- The plot should include a varied mix of action and have a satisfying ending.

Granted, the criteria might be seen as subjective, and built on the premise that most people have the same taste and get the same associations of an image/text. But, as the criteria are developed by six pilot groups of teens, the subjective nature of the criteria could be due to

the pilot groups' language use and limited knowledge of literary studies. Still, it is a useful tool for teachers in order to select YAL.

### **Postcolonial Criticism**

The second method used in the analysis is postcolonial criticism. There are two ways of working with postcolonial literary theory; both as a subject, and as a framework. In this essay, postcolonial criticism as a framework was used as an analytical tool. Tyson (2006, p. 417) explains postcolonial theory as a framework, as an opportunity to examine similarities of all critical theories that deal with oppression. When using postcolonial criticism as a framework, one seeks to understand the political, social, cultural and psychological aspects of colonialist and anti-colonialist ideologies. Colonialist and anti-colonialist ideologies can be present in any literary text, i.e. the text does not have to be postcolonial per se. A postcolonial analysis can still be made. Tyson (2006) explains that “postcolonial criticism defines formerly colonized peoples as any population that has been subjected to the political domination of another population” (p. 417). There are many aspects that allow for examination within postcolonial theory, e.g. psychological, ideological, political, intellectual and aesthetic ones. In this essay, one of Tyson's (2006, p. 431) questions to ask when doing a postcolonial analysis, has been used. It has been altered in order to fit the purpose of this essay.

- How does the text, explicitly or allegorically, represent various aspects of colonial oppression?

The aspects of colonial oppression that has been examined in this essay deals with the indigenous Australians; the canonical novella *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad, 1899); and the “others” – a term from Said's (1978) concept of orientalism. Also, there can be questions worth asking which are not, a part of Tyson's (ibid) list. The goal, Tyson (ibid, p. 432) states is to use the approach in order to see some important aspects of literature that might go unseen

otherwise. Tyson (ibid, p. 431) also suggests to investigate if the text is colonialist, anticolonialist, or in fact both.

### **Social Justice Made Visible**

The third method of analysis deals with the issue of teaching social justice in the Swedish EFL-classroom. The method is based upon the questions set by Glasgow (2001, p. 57). Glasgow (ibid) poses questions on the visibility of social justice in literary texts. Following are the questions proposed by Glasgow (2001, p. 57) in an adapted form, suited for this essay and its purpose.

- What is the oppression?
- What is the naïve stage?
- Is there evidence of acceptance of the dominant values?

Glasgow's (ibid) questions were a part of a project concluded with senior students at high school and junior college students, but they are nevertheless practical in the postcolonial analysis of Marsden's novel as well and are therefore included in the analysis section of this essay.

### **Coding Method**

In order to get a systematic analytic tool, a coding method was used. During the first reading, a colour coding was carried out. Each theme got its separate colour. The themes were young adult literature; postcolonialism; and social justice. When there was a tendency in accordance with a theme in the novel, that section was highlighted by appropriate colour. Quotes that seemed extra important were put into a table in order to properly organize the themes. The table with quotes and the colourful sections in the novel facilitated the analytical process, and resulted in several subsections which will be presented in the following passage.

## Analysis

In the following section, an analysis of Marsden's YAL-novel *Tomorrow, when the war began* will be provided. The analysis will be divided into three parts; dealing with the novel as a classroom material; Marsden's postcolonial flip in the novel; and teaching social justice through the novel. The analysis will be concluded with advice for educators.

### The Novel as Classroom Material

In order to find out if the novel has a high quality, the criteria set up by Beach et al (2011, p. 92) has been examined. The first question regards the universal appeal, and it can be concluded that the novel has a lasting and universal appeal. The cover is attractive, and tells of a thrilling story to come. It is steel grey and depicts a red road sign, featuring the title and the author's name. In the middle of the road sign, there is a white dove, flying in front of barb wire. Traditionally, a white dove symbolizes peace, whilst the barb wire signals oppression and war. The red road sign is ominous and reveals something hellishly evil. At the bottom of the cover page is a headline, which tells of the millions of readers worldwide who are already captivated by the story.

Quickly into the story, the reader becomes involved both personally and emotionally. The story begins with a teenage voice, which communicates that something terrible has happened. The narrator tells of how she and her friends got into their situation.

The protagonist of the novel *Tomorrow, when the war began* is Ellie Linton. The entire novel is focalised through Ellie's perspective, and written as a first person narration. Ellie is an intradiegetic narrator, i.e. she is a character, who exists within the story. She is a sixteen year old girl from the outskirts of the fictional small town Wirrawee, probably located in Victoria or New South Wales, Australia. The novel starts with a frame story told by Ellie. She prompts the importance of documenting the events they have lived through, as they are afraid

of no one ever knowing the risks they have taken (p. 2)<sup>3</sup>. Ellie is a strong female character, and ends up leading the group of friends. In the beginning she leads the group as it was her idea to go camping, and because she chose the location. After the group realizes that their country has been invaded, Ellie is the one who finds herself in a position of leading the group. As she is the one who is forced to kill the invaders chasing her (p. 90), everyone looks at her as someone who takes charge (p. 125). It is not difficult for the reader to feel compassion for Ellie. She is to the point, keeping everything real, and does not exaggerate anything in order to spice up the story telling. Neither is anything sugar coded. In the first chapter, she promises to be honest, and she sticks to it, even when the events are brutal.

Ellie's honesty leads to a high literary quality throughout the novel. Some of the critics of Marsden claim that this is not the case, but they fail to see the whole picture (Schenkel, 2014, p. 437). As it is a first-person narration, narrated by a teenager, the language and the thoughts is authentic to that of a teenager. Ellie is at times struggling to find the right words and thoughts, turning her ideas upside-down in order to examine how she feels. For instance, a big part of the novel revolves around her romantic feelings towards both Homer and Lee. She has several conversations with Lee that come out wrong, due to her irresolute thoughts (e.g. p. 202).

Ellie struggles with her ideas, and her evolving of herself, when changing her mind, offers a unique way of thinking. It shows that it is acceptable to think in one way, re-evaluate oneself, and then change your mind. Being a teenager can be confusing, and for an adolescent there might be some comfort in Ellie's indecisiveness. This is also true for the rest of the characters. They are teenagers as well, and they can relate to the same troubles as Ellie is experiencing. When the group is discussing if to take action, to start working as a guerilla

---

<sup>3</sup> In the analysis, when referencing to the novel *Tomorrow, when the war began* (Marsden, 2011), page numbers will stand by themselves.

group, Fi gives her thoughts on the matter; she tells the group of her fears of packing up under pressure (p. 240). Homer, one of the strongest characters responds sarcastically of how she is the only one feeling like that. He then goes on telling her that everyone has the same kind of thoughts, and how that is normal. The episode shows the universal process of thought, as well as kinsmanship amongst friends.

What is more, the novel deals with themes relevant for teenagers. There is a lot of focus on love and sex. Some of the members of the group become romantically involved, and there are both love stories and domestic triangles. Even in the midst of danger, Ellie finds herself thinking about boys and love (p. 124). There are also themes such as parental issues; life prospects and wonders of the future; and drug and alcohol issues. The subject matter is relevant and the narrating has an appropriate tone, which does not speak down to the reader. The narrator speaks to the reader almost like a peer, using the second person singular pronoun, “you” when directly speaking to the reader (p. 3). At the same time, the narrator distance herself against adults, e.g. when Ellie describes her way of writing in oppose to a serious history book and claims that “[I]f they don’t like my way they’ll have to find someone else.” (p. 3). It is possible that Ellie is referring to her friends, but it is more likely she refers to the publishers of books, which consequently are adults.

In addition, the characters are both realistic and compelling. Much has to do with the group coming off as a normal set of teenagers, resembling your own friends. Also, the pictures are vividly described, both in regards to the environmental settings as well as the carried out actions, making it easy for the reader to picture herself in Marsden’s diegesis.

Moreover, the plot is thrilling with a varied set of actions. The group is proactive, and is lead into new dangers several times. The story ends with an epilogue, where Ellie questions human kindness, courage and love. Her head is unsure, but her heart wants to believe in goodness (p. 284). The story ends with a spark of hope, lit from a place of despair.

Based on Beach et al (2011, p. 92) criteria, as well as Marsden's popularity, it can be concluded that the novel is suited as a young adult novel appropriate to work with, in the Swedish EFL classroom. It can be used in a multitude of ways, and a postcolonial use is one of them.

### **Marsden's Postcolonial Flip**

By applying the principles of the Escher sketch on the novel, i.e. to display the double-voicedness, on the novel, the reader will find new dimensions to the text. One cannot merely say that the book is a child of its time, responding to the scare of the "Asian threat", which existed in Australia during the early 1990's. By putting the novel in a postcolonial framework, it is evident that Marsden is making a comment on the colonial powers which shaped Australia into what it is today. As early as the very first page, directly after the cover page, Marsden has made a comment on his approach to writing. He states that what he writes is a description of worlds which lives inside of him. He writes about them in order to preserve them, not caring about good or bad, simply writing because it is a part of his life. His comment reveals an awareness of the contemporary political troubles, and hints that his work might be viewed as xenophobic. By commenting on it, he clears his conscious and allows the reader to just enjoy the story, not necessarily caring about the contemporary political climate. By dropping gentle hints of postcolonial discourse, Marsden reminds the reader of past events and the fact that Westerners are the dominant ones. It is almost absurd to think of an oppressed, poverty-stricken nation, successfully invading such a vast country as Australia. By doing so, Marsden illuminate the reader of the Prime Ministers nonsense talk.

Nevertheless, the postcolonial rhetorical flip is so evident, that it is hard to believe how anyone could have read the novel in any other way. The reader does not have to know

Australian history in order to figure out that the text is comment on both imperialism and colonialism.

**The indigenous Australians.** In the very first chapter, Ellie tells the reader about Australia being colonized by ancestors (p. 3). When the friends later are looking for a way down Taylor's Stich, Robyn discovers a bridge. They realise that the stories of the Hermit of Hell must be true. Robyn ponders on how many humans actually have been down the valley. She suggests that they are the only ones, besides the hermit, to be down the valley. "I mean, why would the kooris have bothered? Why would the early explorers, or settlers, have bothered?" (p. 31). Robyn is making the reader aware of that colonial settlement has taken place. Robyn's use of the word *kooris* is worth highlighting. To use the term, means that the speaker respects the culture of a particular tribe of the indigenous Australians. On the other hand it is possible that Robyn's use of the politically correct term is just an expression which fits Robyn's character. She is described as the perfect child. If she would ever give her parents problem, it would be because she would be late to church, and that would probably be due to helping a boy scout crossing the street (p. 12). It is quite clear that Marsden allows his characters to stay true to themselves, as his own writing skills are questioned in benefits for Ellie's narration.

However, the politically correct mentioning of *kooris* adds to the theory of Marsden rhetorical flip as a comment on colonialism. Also, by letting Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* be a part of the book, Marsden is pointing at his own novel being a story which could exist in a postcolonial tradition.

**Penetrating the heart of darkness.** When Ellie finds the Hermit's cottage, she is going through an old chest. In the chest she finds "half of a hardbound book called *Heart of*

*Darkness*, by Joseph Conrad. [...] It fell open to a beautiful colour plate of a boat penetrating the jungle.” (p. 189). By including Conrad’s novella in the story Marsden’s intentions of making a comment on the imperial settlement in Australian, are revealed. By using the word *penetrating* it is implied that the binary opposites of dominance and submissiveness are at play. The boat in the picture is piloted by an Englishman, and the jungle being penetrated is located in the Congo. As stated in the theoretical part of this essay, the dominant is the West, and the submissive ones are the “others”.

The use of the word *penetration* also leads the reader to make sexual interpretations. It is the dominant male West, who penetrates the submissive feminine Orient. The fact that Joseph Conrad himself uses the term in order to describe the boat ride along the river, which Ellie could impossibly know, as she has never read the book – in fact, she has never heard of it – reveals Marsden’s knowledge of the novella. It is hard to think of Ellie’s word use as a coincident in relation to the book she has a hold of. Again, Marsden is making a postcolonial comment; or rather he gently brings in the postcolonial discourse into his YAL-novel, making it a part of the postcolonial tradition. His gentle hints leave a key to decipher the novel, and leads to the thought of him truly trying to make a comment on the colonization of Australia.

**The others.** In Marsden’s novel, the “others” are the depicted as the invaders. They are described as having dark features and speaking an unknown language. By Robyn’s statements and the announcement on the radio, the reader understands that the invaders are coming from a more primitive country, living in misery without the comforts which is custom to most Westerners (p. 170f).

In Ellie’s soliloquy at the top of Mt. Martin, she is wondering about the opposites created by man. McLeod (2010) uses Said’s concept of orientalism and describes common literary tendencies as “[w]here there is Western civilisation there is daylight, but a sinister darkness

resides otherwise.” (p. 72), in order to conceptualize the idea of binary opposites. In postcolonial criticism, the idea of binary opposites is a key element. The idea is that there are two points of something, often in the extreme end of each other. At the same time McLeod (ibid) manages to include the Western prejudice of the “others” as something not human. In Conrad’s depiction of the “others”, words such as “specimen” and “savages” are used, which leads the thoughts to a biologist categorizing flora and fauna. It is easy to imagine the untamed being sinister, while in fact, it is just the circle of life at play. Even though opposites might be found in nature, it is humans who prescribe them with value – good and evil. Ellie states that “[n]ature recognised no opposites.” (p. 217). She concludes that the opposites are just labels and names. Still she is wondering about the “others” – the invaders. They are an opposite of her and her friends, but just because Ellie values herself as good, it does not necessarily make the “others” evil. She wonders if it is valid for her to kill others in order to save her own life, and if so, when does she condemn herself to Hell. Ellie is trying to unchain herself from the bonds of opposites, by imagining herself as murderer and an evil person (p. 217). Although, by depicting herself as an opponent to the invaders, she is able to fight against them. Had she not made a distinction between herself and the others, she would not be able to justify her actions. Ellie is suffering an internal struggle dictated by the duality of being a spectator or an actor (Freire, 1993, p. 30). But she is driven by love of her family and friends (p. 141), and she does include the invaders to the “others”.

Had I killed out of love of my friends, as part of a noble crusade to rescue friends and family and keep our land free? Or had I killed because I valued my life above that of others? Would it be OK for me to kill a dozen others to keep myself alive? (Marsden, 2011, p. 216).

Freire (1993, p. 70f) states that love cannot be sentimental when it is an act of bravery. In a radical world, Freire might be right, but Ellie is an authentic character and she struggles with her conscience. She does not feel well after killing the soldiers, and she has the insight to

realize that she is not like murderers and evil people. She is not confident that she is right, and that is what separates her from those she feels are evil (p. 217).

Ellie is questioning the moral aspects of dichotomies. She is critically examining herself, the situation and the binary opposites at play. Ellie's soliloquy is an excellent tool to bring into the classroom. By contrasting Ellie's own words with Borsheim-Black et al (2014, p. 124f) method of reading *against* a text, students can get a better understanding on how to critically read a text in benefit of learning about social justice.

### **Is it Possible to Teach Social Justice Through the Novel?**

In the following section, the questions posed by Glasgow (2001, p. 57) are used in order to analyse if it is possible to use Marsden's novel in the Swedish Upper Secondary EFL-classroom in order to teach social justice.

The first question asks about the oppression. The oppression taken place is the invasion of Australia, and the robbing of the freedom of the Australians. An unknown force invades the country, imprisoning the group's family and friends. Ellie and her friends never figure out who is invading them, and that might not be interesting. The invaders are described as having an unknown language (p. 90), and it is implied that they are originally from a country which is crowded and poor (p. 168). The situation the invaders must have found themselves in, before the invasion, is probably one many countries are in today.

The second question regards the naïve stage, which is the fact that Ellie and her friends do not acknowledge the political situation in the country. In the first chapter, the reader is provided with an image of the instable political climate.

It was getting hard to use the phone, because the TV was yelling at me. [...]. An angry face filled the screen. [...]. 'We've got a wimp for a Foreign Minister,' the face was shouting. 'He's weak, he's gutless, he's the new Neville Chamberlain. He doesn't understand the people he's dealing with. They respect strength, not weakness!' 'Do you think defense is high on the Government's

agenda?’ the interviewer asked. ‘High? High? You must be joking! Do you know what they’ve cut from the defense budget?’ (Marsden, 1993, p. 9)

Instead of taking interest in the political matters, displayed on the TV, Ellie is relieved to get away from it all, for a few days. She does not take the time to reflect on what it all means. She imagines herself being safe, which is the most naïve thing of all, which she later concludes (p. 107). When returning back to Hell, their hide-out, the group listens to the transistor radio. The news from the surrounding world comforts them, but also confuses them. It is clear that they do not know how foreign policies work. “‘But don’t they have treaties and stuff?’ Kevin asked” (p. 170). Ellie reveals that no one knew the answer, and that they were all thinking that they should have taken an interest before it was too late.

Schekels (2014) discusses the vigilance approach and the obvious message of being better prepared, referring to the “Asian threat”. In above mentioned quote, the message is quite transparent, but does not necessarily has to be a message in regards to the “Asian threat”. It could just be a proposition of awakening an interest in politics and policy making for the young adults. The attempt to get adolescents interested of the surrounding world is not uncommon. Marsden could send a message of the importance of being informed and educated of social justice, in an early age. In today’s society, we should question norms such as race, class, and gender. In Sweden it is even stated in the syllabus. However, the questioning of norms cannot just stay within the Swedish society. When speaking of women’s right for example, we should not just speak of salaries and maternity leave, but also include the right to attend school for women in Third World countries. So, when Marsden writes “we should have taken an interest in all these things a long time ago, before it was too late” (p. 170), he might not refer to be ready for an invasion, but simply to be human, and help our fellow man no matter where from where he comes.

Lastly, the group never shows any acceptance of the dominant values. As there has not yet been any sign of cultural influences from the invaders in the novel, the dominant values

refer to the dominant upper hand which the invaders have on the Australian people. The idea of surrendering or hiding until the war ends is not an option for them (p. 172). Although Robyn claims to understand why the invaders have left their own country in order to come to Australia, she does not approve of the invasion. She claims that there does not have to be a wrong or a right, but rather that both countries are wrong (p. 171). When listening to the radio for news, the group discovers that the invasion was “aimed at ‘reducing imbalance within the region’” (p. 168). In Robyn’s idea of the invaders motif for invasion, the invaders have always been oppressed, being forced to live under terrible conditions – which these terrible conditions are, the reader never finds out. Freire (1993) claims that “in their alienation the oppressed want at any cost to resemble the oppressors, to imitate them, to follow them”. (p. 44). In order to resemble the oppressors, the oppressed ones in the novel, go and take what they want with force. They have violently taken the land of those with plenty. Freire (1993, p. 29) states that the only way to be free, is to win by fight. Freedom is never just handed to the oppressed. By critically recognizing their situation, and by taking action, the oppressed can transform their situation into a new one.

Even though it might not be the Australians themselves who oppress those who invade, Australia is a part of the First World, and the invaders are probably part of the Third World. In extension, Australia becomes the oppressors and the invaders the oppressed ones. The irony is that by imprisoning the Australians, the table turns. The oppressed becomes the oppressors. In the struggle of social justice, Freire (1993, p. 26) establishes the importance of the oppressed not becoming oppressors themselves. In order to become truly just, the humanity of them both must be restored, meaning one cannot dominate or oppress the other. The new situation is violently enforced and the unjust imbalance of the region is not restored, but rather distorted, as the oppressed are now oppressing the oppressors.

Eventually, the group jointly decides to take action against the invaders. Some of the friends, led by Ellie, return to Wirrawee, and manage to pull off a guerrilla strike on enemy territory. The group does not know if their attack will do any difference in the large scheme of things, but at least they can take pride in actively resisting the dominance of their oppressors.

### **Advice for Educators**

Teachers should trust in their students' ability to reason and let them have the proper space in order to reflect upon the text. Freire (1993, p. 48) states that true reflection leads to action. The students' emotions should never be taken advantage of, and ideas must never be forced upon the students. By providing a safe environment for dialogue, reflection and communications, the students can get a greater knowledge of social justice.

There are several different ways teachers can use *Tomorrow, when the war began* in the Swedish Upper Secondary EFL classroom in order to teach social justice. Glasgow (2001) suggests using quotes from a novel in order to illuminate certain issues. The students then put the quotes in a band descriptor, in order to get the full image of the text. As social justice includes issues such as race, gender and class, the students could be divided into groups, each group reading the text with one issue in mind. By then jointly fitting quotes into a band descriptor, the whole class can benefit from each other's reading, provided that the students are able to do so under a whole class discussion, moderated by the teacher. In the whole class discussion, issues of race, gender and class could enter in to a broader perspective for the students in order to get greater knowledge of social justice.

Another approach on teaching social justice through the novel is to role-play. Role-playing is a great way to teach empathy as the students get a chance to live the part of someone else. Beach et al (2011, p. 166) suggest using the "Hot Seat" as it is a student centred

activity. The “Hot Seat” operates by letting one student play the role of one of the characters in the novel. It could be the protagonist, one of her friends, one of the captives, or even some of the “others” – the invaders. Imagine there is a class of 25 students. The teacher could let 5 students play characters who are to take place in the “Hot Seat”. They should have some time to prepare their role, e.g. by re-reading certain sections of the novel. The other students could be put in groups of four, letting each group construct questions for one of the characters who are to appear in the “Hot Seat”. During the role-play, the teachers should provide space for the other students to improvise questions as well, in order to create an authentic questioning. The character in the “Hot Seat” is able to explain what s/he might have thought during a certain episode, and why s/he did something in a particular way. When teaching social justice, it is extra interesting to hear the thoughts of the “others”. In Marsden’s novel, the “others” are the invaders, but as Robyn points out, they have their reasons for invading, which could be further examined whilst a character is in the “Hot Seat”. The radio news tells of imbalances within the regions, and this could be good to point out to the student playing an invader.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this essay was to examine if it was possible to teach social justice through John Marsden's young adult novel *Tomorrow, when the war began* (1993). By applying a postcolonial analysis on the novel, alongside theories of teaching social justice it could be concluded that the novel does function as a means of teaching social justice in the Swedish Upper Secondary EFL classroom. It has also been made clear that the book is a high quality young adult novel, in accordance with the criteria set up by Beach et al (2011, p. 92).

When applying a critical theory on a novel, it is possible to find connections where we would not expect to find any (McLeod, 2010, p. 3). By applying postcolonial criticism on Marsden's novel, connections such as the Indigenous Australians; the canonicalized novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899); and the dichotomy of "others" were found.

Tyson (2006, p. 431) suggests to examine if the text is colonialist, anti-colonialist or in fact both. After doing an analysis, where the results show that the text does a postcolonial rhetorical flip back unto the dichotomy of the colonising settlers during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Indigenous Australians, Marsden takes an anti-colonialist stand. However, it is also colonialist as the other face of the Escher sketch reveals a story of the beginning of settlement of people at a new location, even if done so violently. I would like to propose that Marsden's novel is both colonialist and anti-colonialist, and could function within a postcolonial discourse.

Finally, future studies related to this essay could be to examine how educational projects carried out in order to organize the oppressed, such as suggested by Freire (1993, p. 36) functions the Swedish EFL classroom. In the curriculum it is clearly stated to teach democratic values and the inviolability of human life. But at the same time, it is not allowed to push students in any political direction. Also, Freire's (1993) theory of education as banking, meaning teachers depositing knowledge into students seems like an ancient notion.

Although it might still be true for some parts of the world, the Swedish curriculum and the Teacher Training Programmes are built on a socio-cultural view of pedagogy, and therefore do not support the view of stuffing passive students with knowledge. Freire (1993, p. 54) claims that education as banking mirrors the oppressive structures of society. Perhaps then, conclusions can be made that there is an ambition in Sweden of a society free from oppression. When students are engaged in critical literacy and working with a literary piece, which they find interesting, discussions of transforming the society becomes a natural topic in the EFL classroom, without necessary pushing students into a political direction. It is stated in the curriculum that students should learn and practice democratic values, and that can certainly be done without any political pushes, simply by bringing issues such as social justice into the Swedish Upper Secondary EFL classroom.

## List of References

- Abednia, A. and Izadinia, M. (2013). Critical pedagogy in ELT classroom: exploring contributions of critical literacy to learners' critical consciousness. *Language Awareness*, 22(4),338-352.
- ALMA (2016). *About the award*. Retrieved from <http://www.alma.se/en/About-the-award/>.
- Beach, R. et al (2011). *Teaching literature to adolescents*. New York: Routledge.
- Board of Studies NSW (2003). *Fiction, film and other texts - a support document for the English years 7-10 syllabus*. Sydney: Board of Studies NSW.
- Borsheim-Black, C., Macaluso, M. & Petrone, R. (2014). Critical literature pedagogy – teaching canonical literature for critical literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 58(2), 123-133.
- Brizee, A., Tompkins, C.J., Chernouski, L. & Boyle, E. (2015). Post-colonial criticism (1990s-present). Retrieved from <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/722/10/>
- Bull, K. (2011). Connecting with texts: teacher candidates reading young adult literature. *Theory Into Practice*, 50, 223-230.
- Conrad, J. (1999). *Heart of darkness & other stories*. (Originally published in 1899). London: Wordsworth Editions Limited.
- Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Penguin Group.
- Glasgow, J. N. (2001). Teaching social justice through young adult literature. *The English Journal* 90(6), 54-61.
- Janks, H. (2013). Critical literacy in teaching and research. *Education Inquiry* 4(2), 225-242.
- Marsden, J. (2011). *Tomorrow, when the war began*. (Originally published in 1993). London: Quercus.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Said, E. (1993). *Culture & imperialism*. London: The Random House Group Limited.

- Schekels, T. (2014). The complex politics and rhetoric of John Marsden's "Tomorrow" series. *Antipodes*, 28(2), 436-449.
- Schröttner, B. T. (2009). The value of post-colonial literature for education process: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's children*. *European Educational Research Journal* 8(2), 285-298.
- Skolverket. (2011<sub>a</sub>). *Curriculum for upper secondary school*. Stockholm.
- Skolverket. (2011<sub>b</sub>). *English subject syllabus*. Stockholm.
- Stallworth, J. B. (2006). The relevance of young adult literature. *Educational Leadership* (April), 59-63.
- Tyson, L. (2006). *Critical theory today – A user-friendly guide*. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.