

## Introduction: On Literature Education

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This special issue of the *Nordic Journal of English Studies* is dedicated to current research and practice in literature education (litteraturdidaktik) in English in Nordic academic settings. The publication was prompted by the various changes that English studies, in general, and the sub-discipline of literary studies, in particular, have undergone in the last two decades in Sweden, where the editors of this special issue are based. This period has meant significant changes for the shape of literary studies in English, sometimes as a direct result of new conditions for higher education institutions and of shifting conceptions of the purposes, content and standards of higher education. Comparable changes to the conditions for English studies have been noticeable over the last couple of decades also outside Sweden and they have led to a renewed concern with the uses and functions of the study of English and of English-language literary studies, internationally (Carter 2016: 13). The period, moreover, especially the past decade, has been characterised by a growing interest, within the academic English community in Sweden and in the Nordic countries, in literature education research and practice.

The special issue has two aims. First, it documents key questions for English-language literary studies in Swedish and Norwegian contexts and it disseminates innovative literature education practices. Second, it brings into sharp relief the manifold literature education research in English that is currently emerging in those settings. The special issue includes eleven contributions that, together, address the conditions, educational contexts and value of literary studies in English and that explore new ways of teaching English-language literature in higher education. As the articles included address practices that transcend the specific institutional or national context of each author, they have bearing on English studies internationally. Thereby, the special issue contributes to a larger discussion about the state and future of literary studies in English and about good teaching practices.

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What follows in this introduction describes somewhat more fully the changes that have prompted the present publication. A first section illustrates how the curricular organisation and substance of English literary studies in Sweden has shifted over a relatively brief period of time, in relation, not only to new ideas within the discipline of literary studies, but also to national policies and discourses of professionalisation. The Swedish example serves as a background for many of the articles included in the special issue and it functions as a basis for further investigations into the current state of literary studies in English in Nordic academic settings. A second section indicates, by referencing a substantial part of the recent Swedish-based literature education publications in English, that a sustained engagement with literature education is becoming evident in Sweden. Given that the special issue is the first since the journal's establishment in 2002 to be devoted to the theme of literature education, the review also serves to illustrate the thematic and methodological breadth that literature education research and shared practice accommodates, alongside the varied disciplinary traditions in which these are embedded. In a third and final section, the introduction presents the eleven contributions included in the special issue.

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As mentioned above, the last two decades have meant significant changes to the conditions and to the shape of literary studies in English in Swedish higher education. The following section offers a few examples of concrete curricular change that recur across educational institutions and so can be said to represent more or less dominant national trends for English studies. The examples have been chosen because they are conspicuous illustrations of change documented in research. Some of the curricular changes, which have coincided with recent national educational reforms and evaluations, suggest the influence on the organisation and orientation of English literary studies of policies and decision-making outside English departments. Other changes are suggestive of intra-disciplinary developments within the field of literary studies. Taken together, the examples addressed indicate a preoccupation within the academic subject community with the identity and educational priorities of English studies. They also point to an ongoing renegotiation of the position and function, and to some extent also the content, of literary studies in English.

When it comes to the shape of English studies, the period has seen a noticeable expansion of literary studies at undergraduate as well as advanced level at several institutions (Dodou 2020a). At undergraduate level, nationally, an increasing number of credits from the ones available for core courses in English have come to be devoted to literary studies—frequently at the expense of traditional courses on Culture and Society. At advanced level, the expansion has meant a substantial increase in the number of credits available for literary studies, and in some cases the establishment of one- or even two-year Master’s Degree programmes exclusively devoted to literary studies. Over the last two decades, moreover, English curricula have come to emphasise students’ disciplinary competences to a greater extent and they have offered students more opportunities for sub-disciplinary specialisation (Dodou 2020a).<sup>1</sup>

Many of these changes were made possible, or were precipitated, by the 2007 higher education reform. Known for its implementation of the Bologna Agreement, the reform inaugurated a new logic of three interdependent, but separate, educational cycles, which would harmonise with education in the rest of the European higher education area. This reform essentially launched the expansion of advanced level English studies in Sweden and it likely also accelerated the ongoing academisation of the subject. For instance, it is only after the reform that the practice of teaching literary theory in undergraduate courses became commonplace; before 2007, the norm was to introduce theory at English D, the equivalent of the advanced level. Some of these changes, especially regarding the academisation of English, were consolidated via the national quality evaluation of 2012, which arguably followed up on the 2007 reform. In that evaluation, the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (Högskoleverket) assessed educational quality based on the relation between the education on offer and students’ fulfilment of learning outcomes. On the basis of BA and MA theses in English, the committee

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<sup>1</sup> In an account of the discipline in Sweden from 2008, Lindblad (2008: 11) observed that: ‘In what appears to be a complete reversal of the earlier attitude to the study of English, a large number of the courses now offered are focused on developing language skills, emphasising oral and written proficiency, and English for specific purposes’. Whilst this may be the case with respect to the overall course portfolio of some universities, as noted above, the core courses in English curricula today instead demonstrate an ambition to focus on sub-disciplinary specialisation (Dodou 2020a).

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of mainly Swedish-based subject specialists deemed the education on offer at a significant number of institutions, nationally, to be of insufficient quality (Högskoleverket 2012). Following this evaluation, a new emphasis on (sub-)disciplinary competences is especially noticeable in curricula (Dodou 2020a). In its aftermath, undergraduate curricula in a couple of universities even introduced new courses specially designed to prepare students to write their BA thesis in literature, for instance by way of focusing on the compilation of annotated bibliographies.<sup>2</sup>

Other changes to the curricular substance of literary studies are more readily explained by way of intra-disciplinary developments. One such example is the reorientation of parts of English literature curricula by the mid-2010s away from an Anglo-American focus, which dominated in some English departments in the 1990s and early 2000s, to literature from different parts of the English-speaking world (Dodou 2020a). Even if courses in Anglo-American literature are still common—the presence of the British and American literature survey, for instance, is ubiquitous at Swedish institutions—there is a clear and often explicit ambition to teach English-language literature from different parts of the world, in English teacher education as well as in general English courses (Dodou 2020b; Dodou 2020c). This shift can be explained, at least partly, in light of literary theories of postcolonialism and world literature, which have profoundly affected recent understandings of what and how literature in English should be taught.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In a Danish study, Hultgren (2016: 134) concludes that Danish educational policies have had little effect on the undergraduate English studies curriculum at the University of Copenhagen. The English curriculum at that institution, she observes, is characterised by conservatism and it has hardly been affected by recent policies related to the massification and internationalisation of higher education, political calls for the professional relevance of higher education, and EU harmonisation via the Bologna Agreement. While she may correctly conclude that policies which target administrative and economically driven performance indicators may have limited impact on the content of English studies at some institutions, the examples from the Swedish context mentioned in the present introduction, instead, point to palpable effects on curricular organisation and orientation of evolving policies, especially when those are mainstreamed via the evaluation of higher education institutions.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the impact that globalisation discourses have had on literary scholarship in Sweden, see Ekelund (2016).

When it comes to the conditions for English and the impact on them of policy, the political intervention that has, perhaps, most visibly affected English literature curricula and staff in the last decade concerns teacher education. Teacher education, it is worth noting, is a crucial official duty for the academic English subject in Sweden. That the subject contributes to, and relies on, teacher education is nothing new, of course. In Sweden, as in the Nordic countries and on the European continent more broadly, the establishment of English as a university discipline around the turn of the last century was inseparable from the growing status of English as a language of international communication, from its establishment as a school subject and from the need for school teachers of English (Bratt 1984: 24–70; Haas 2000: 363–365; Nielsen 2000: 125–132; Sandved 2000: 103–106; Pahta 2008: 22–33). The expansion and durability of English studies in Sweden, and internationally, owes much to the continued demand for school teachers of English in compulsory and upper secondary education (Haas 2000: 363–365; English 2012: 119–120; Gupta 2015).

What has changed in Sweden in the last decade are the national requirements for teacher education, as a result largely of an ambition (also evident at European level) to professionalise teacher training. In Sweden, the 2011 teacher education reform required a stronger emphasis on subject teaching and learning to better prepare future teachers for their profession (*Bäst i klassen* Prop. 2009/10:89). In practice, the government's proposition was that teacher training programmes for all universities and university colleges would be revised and then assessed by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education before being awarded teacher degree rights (*Bäst i klassen* Prop. 2009/10:89, p. 48–50). In response to this call to accommodate teaching and learning approaches, a considerable portion of literature courses in English came to include elements of subject teaching and learning (Dodou 2020b). A direct consequence of this reform—and of the concurrent increase in the number of entrants to teacher training programmes over several consecutive years—has been that new competencies are required of English staff. This upshot has been visible for instance in the new type of post that has been advertised in the last decade, which combines expertise in literary studies with competence in school-oriented subject teaching and learning. Although the adjustments required by the reform have been a recurring topic of discussion in the past five biannual Swedish National Forum for English

Studies venues, organised under the auspices of the Swedish Society for the Study of English, SWESSE, the full extent of the implications have yet to be understood—for literary studies in teacher education and for its relation to the discipline, for staff competencies and their professional identities, as well as for teaching practices.

It is worth lingering briefly on this point of how institutional circumstances and national policies may affect the position and teaching of literary studies in English. One policy area that is useful to consider as an example of shaping factors that may not be immediately apparent concerns internationalisation. In the Swedish setting, policy on the internationalisation of higher education, especially after the signing of the Bologna Agreement in 1999 has been linked to ‘the ambition to position Sweden as a competitive knowledge nation in a global context’ (Alexiadou & Rönnerberg 2021: 1). As a colleague explained some five years ago, the practice of mainly hiring English staff trained not in Sweden, but foremost in Anglophone contexts at her institution was a direct result of what she called ‘the aggressive internationalisation policy’ at her university. To be sure, the tradition of hiring foreign lecturers in English has existed for some time in Sweden, and it can be traced at least to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bratt 1984: 30). Today, however, these new appointments are not meant to give students the opportunity to ‘hear and practice “the modern colloquial and spoken language”’ as was once the case (Bratt 1984: 30, my translation). Such appointments are rarely non-PhD holders, today, and they are foremost hired for their expertise in one of the sub-disciplines of English, usually English-language literary studies or English linguistics. Yet, given the disparity between subject conceptions of English in different parts of the world, when it comes to staffing, internationalisation may mean more than strengthened disciplinary expertise or a competitive edge for an institution. Simply put, English is not the same discipline globally; in many Anglophone contexts English is defined as literary studies, whereas it is normally defined as language studies in non-Anglophone contexts (English 2012: 118).<sup>4</sup> The curricular substance and the perceived purposes and value of the subject may vary considerably depending on how the discipline of English is understood. From this

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<sup>4</sup> In Sweden, for instance, English developed out of the subject of modern European linguistics and modern literature, *nyeuropeisk lingvistik och modern litteratur* (Söderlind 1976). For an explication of how English developed out of that discipline, see Bratt (1984: 24–55).

perspective, hiring practices motivated by internationalisation policies will likely engender new ways of understanding what English studies are and what literary studies in English are for in a Swedish context.

The forces that shape the conditions for literary studies, and for literary scholars, in English are, of course, many and they are manifold. They include the disappearance, or non-existence at most universities in Sweden, of English departments as administrative units and the merger of English with other academic subjects, often in interdisciplinary intellectual milieus. They involve the limited governmental funding granted to the teaching of humanities subjects nationally and the political calls for the professional relevance of the education on offer. At some institutions, they also include conditional research opportunities for English staff, which mean that internal funding is more readily available for, say, educational research than for literary studies. The various consequences for subject conceptions, staffing patterns and curricular development of such institutional conditions require further study. So do the effects of successive and incremental policies that have led, for instance, to the massification and marketisation of higher education.<sup>5</sup> To these factors that shape the understanding of the purposes of English studies and of teaching practices might be added in-built conflicts within English studies, between the disciplinary pursuit of knowledge and the training of academic professionals (especially school teachers), and between the expectations and logic of doing English where it is a foreign language and of doing it where English is the mother tongue (Engler 2000).

Given the changes outlined above—to the curricular organisation and substance of literary studies in English, to the demands on English of policy and to opportunities for disciplinary and educational renewal—it seems especially timely to consider how the academic subject community in Sweden, and beyond, has responded to new conditions for teaching literature. As the following section suggests, the changes have inspired new avenues of research for literary scholars, as well as new teaching practices. A goal with the special issue, noted above, is to spotlight literature education research and practice and to generate discussions about the ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ of English-language literary studies.

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion on how policy has affected aspects of Swedish higher education over the past two decades, see for instance Ankarloo and Friberg (2012), Rider, Hasselberg and Waluszewski (2013) and Ahlbäck Öberg et al. (2016).

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The contributors to the present special issue illustrate current concerns and ongoing initiatives for literature education and they formulate compelling arguments for practices of curricular design and literature teaching. In doing so, they provide a basis for thinking through principles for the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of literary studies in the current educational climate and they present good practices for how to teach literature across different educational settings.

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As indicated in the opening of this introduction, a contributing factor for the genesis of this special issue was the observation that a growing number of Swedish-based literary scholars of English are engaged in literature education research and shared practice. What follows maps a substantial number of Swedish publications in the area from the period 2011–2021.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of doing so is twofold. Partly, it is to illustrate key topics with which literary scholars in Sweden have been preoccupied and so to offer a backdrop against which to understand the matters addressed in the present volume. Partly, it is to highlight the manifold methodological approaches and theoretical underpinnings that characterise the field of literature education research, by way of broad, and tentative, categorisations, and so to help relative newcomers to the field navigate some of the assumptions and practices within the field of literature education.

One category of literature education research from the past decade can be called critical, or speculative, in the sense of non-empirical, and it seeks to explore how literature could be taught—that is, what are possible or desirable literature education practices. This research tends to answer questions about literature in education by theorising, by reasoning, or by arguing from first principles. Publications of this sort often consider the pedagogical benefits for academic Swedish, Nordic or other foreign language settings of teaching particular literary works or topics or of approaching literature in certain ways. In doing so, they rely on points of convergence between theories concerned with the cognitive, ethical and

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<sup>6</sup> For this mapping, library searches have been complemented with searches, in June 2021, of literature education research publications via individual staff webpages of literary scholars in English from most universities and university colleges nationally.

other educational potential of literature and theories concerned with the tasks of (language) education. Moreover, they use methodologies derived mainly from textual criticism and as such they are grounded in the logic and approach of much literary scholarship.

Some of this research stresses the value of careful, nuanced and slow modes of reading fostered in literary studies. In two recent publications, Charlotta Elmgren (2021) and Gül Bilge Han (2021) draw on theories of transnational, postcolonial and global literary studies as well as of intercultural learning to highlight opportunities of developing (teacher) students' intercultural attitudes via the teaching of English-language literature. Elmgren addresses the ethical and pedagogical potency in English studies of linguistic confusion in John M. Coetzee's novels, by way of close textual analysis of episodes from several works, mainly from *The Childhood of Jesus*. Han considers the trope of moving between worlds in children's literature; via readings of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* and Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, she shows the potential of literature education for developing students' intercultural communication and competence in English. By way of analysing Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Magnus Ullén (2016), on his part, argues that a rhetorical approach to literature is especially productive in academic English language teaching as it brings together the core subject elements of language, literature and culture.

Other critical research similarly highlights the value of literary studies in English, but does not contain the close textual analysis of specific literary works. Mats Tegmark (2012) has addressed, in relation to postmodern theories of history and narrative, the potential of literature to introduce foreign language students to aspects of history and culture and to motivate them to engage critically with historical narratives. He has also pointed out, with the help of Foucauldian theories of subjectivity and in relation to teaching international student cohorts in Sweden, the benefits to students' self-knowledge and capacity for self-expression of studying literature in English (Tegmark 2011). In an article that partly traces dominant practices of knowledge mediation, Katherina Dodou (2018) combines theories of literature education with profession theory and metacognitive theory to propose a new understanding of the knowledge that is important to mediate to student teachers of English in literary studies and of the role that the literary scholar can have in English teacher education. The latter example highlights another feature of Swedish-based

literature education research: namely that it regularly focuses on the teaching of pre-service English teachers and often explicitly refers to the stipulations for the English school subject.

In addition to this critical, or speculative, body of work, much Swedish-based literature education research from the past decade has been empirical in its approach. That is to say, literary scholars have sought to answer questions about literature and education ‘by obtaining direct, observable information from the world’ (Punch 2014: 3). Such data-driven research is usually qualitative and it encompasses different kinds of studies. These sometimes seek to test a new teaching design and to provide evidence for effective teaching practices. Sometimes they seek to describe what characterises current curricular practices or existing attitudes to literature. A noticeable feature in many of these publications is that the methodologies used for data collection and analysis draw on the field of education research, even as the studies normally also have their foundation in theories about literature and literature education.

A substantial part of this empirical literature education enquiry has been practice, and practitioner, based and it often involves case studies. Some of these explore the benefits of literature units created with the explicit aim of enhancing student learning. One recent example is Björn Sundmark and Cecilia Olsson Jers’ (2021) article on using wordless, randomised picture sequences in collaborative student tasks involving creative writing. Another is Anette Svensson’s (2020) discussion of how *The Walking Dead* text universe (that is, the graphic novel, the TV series adaptations, the novel, fan fiction and fan films) can be used as a basis for students’ creative re-representations of narrative in a different media format. In both examples, the teaching units have been incorporated into upper secondary teacher training programmes with the partial ambition to model pre-service English teachers’ school teaching practices (the former was also tested in a third-year upper secondary class). Both teaching units, further, were designed to promote student teachers’ literary competence as well as their visual or media literacy by way of creative learning. Other studies of academic teaching practices that focus on creative writing have examined the potential of using technology-enhanced collaborative fan fiction and fandom activities in English studies (Sauro & Sundmark 2016; 2019). These, too, have largely focused on English teacher education and they have considered creative writing activities as pedagogical tools for developing students’ literary and linguistic competence.

In these and other examples of educational action research, the starting point is the researchers-practitioners' own teaching practice, based on which they identify a problem that requires a solution or a question that requires an answer.<sup>7</sup> The practitioners-researchers may design an intervention to solve the problem, as is the case with the above-mentioned examples where the research becomes the evaluation of that intervention. In other instances, the researchers design a study to collect data that can answer the question posed. This is the case in Anna Thyberg's (2019) exploration of English students' subject literacy in literary studies on the basis of students' use of and views on literary terminology. Ulrika Andersson Hval and Celia Aijmer Rydsjö (2021), and Ellen Turner (2020), similarly, draw on this kind of practitioner research framework and study their own students' views, respectively, about the potential of using climate fiction in English school teaching and about the academic study of poetry in English. These studies rely on data gathered via a survey (Thyberg), a questionnaire and a knowledge test (Turner), and group discussions (Andersson Hval & Aijmer Rydsjö). The theoretical underpinnings of the articles include theories on disciplinary literacy, climate psychology, the psychology of learning, and literature teaching and learning.

A somewhat different strand of empirical research has considered effective pedagogical practices based not on student work or utterances, but on textual analyses of such documents as syllabi, study guides and examination assignments. In one such example, Anette Svensson, Lena Manderstedt and Annbritt Palo (2015) explore how a taxonomy-based course design can support students' qualitative learning processes in online academic literature courses in English and in comparative literature (litteraturvetenskap). In another, Dodou (2017) considers the challenges for developing students' scholarly reasoning posed by conventions for teaching literature in the academic English subject. Similarly to the critical, or speculative strand of literature education research mentioned above, the studies show a desire to reason about the pedagogical potential of various types of curricular and course design.

Finally, a strand of empirical research has sought to describe curricular practices that are common nationally and so to shed light on current praxis.

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the facets of action research, see, for instance, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011: 344–361).

In a series of publications, Dodou has mapped the position, aims and thematic-theoretical orientation of literary studies in English, in Sweden. This mapping is based on comprehensive reviews of syllabi that include the study of literature nationally in general English courses (Dodou 2020a; Dodou 2020b), in English teacher education courses (Dodou 2020c) and in primary teacher education courses in English (Dodou 2021). These curricular studies, which share with some of the above mentioned examples a concern with the value ascribed to literature in English, lie at the intersection between literature education research and academic subject history.

Besides literature education research, publications on literature education also include pieces that would perhaps best fall under the category of shared practice. In these publications, reflective practitioners disseminate teaching practices that have been tried and deemed to be effective, and they usually discuss those practices in relation to literary scholarship or educational research. What distinguishes these publications from the practice-based studies mentioned above is their focus foremost on sharing experiences and practices, rather than researching them. The experiences shared include the challenges and rewards of teaching William Shakespeare's plays through performance at Lund University (Lindell 2019) and of teaching Wallace Steven's poetry to undergraduate and master's students of English at Stockholm University (Han & Schreiber 2017). Publications which seek to describe effective practices have addressed ways of implementing multicultural education when teaching novels and children's books from different parts of the English-speaking world (Cananau & Sims 2017) and they have discussed ways of introducing English-language poetry in teacher education (and secondary school) via popular culture and of using Nikki Giovanni's poetry in the classroom (Proitsaki 2020). Similarly, publications in this genre include reflections on the uses of asynchronous digital discussion forums in a British and American literature survey course (Dodou & Land 2018) and on the uses of peer feedback in an elective creative and critical reading and writing course in English (Ahlin & Freij 2016).

It is worth mentioning that some literary scholars of English have also explored educational questions that involve the academic study of literature in English only tangentially, or that focus on the teaching of English-language literature outside higher education. Examples of the former include Maria Freij and Lena Ahlin's discussions of teacher

feedback on academic writing (2014) and of academic writing and reasoning in English studies (2015). Studies focused on the teaching of literature in the English school subject include Elin Käck's (2019) examination of how poetry is included in English textbooks for Swedish secondary school, Thorsten Schröter and Karin Molander Danielsson's (2016) discussion, among other issues, of the teaching of literature in English in grades 1–3 of primary school, and Thyberg's (2011; 2012; 2016) studies of how upper secondary pupils read literature in an English as a Foreign Language setting. Thyberg's 2012 study, it should be noted, is one of few PhD dissertations in literature education in English in the country.

In some cases, studies in education by literary scholars (often in collaboration with colleagues and/or supervisee PhD students) have extended beyond literature education in English to the teaching of literature in the Swedish school subject (e.g. Svensson & Haglind 2021; 2020; Svensson & Lundström 2019; Wintersparv, Sullivan & Lindgren Leavenworth 2017) and the potential of literature for education for sustainable development in Swedish primary schools (Lindgren Leavenworth & Manni 2021). They also extend to other aspects of English language teaching such as upper secondary school teachers' management of pupils' diverse knowledge of English (Svensson 2017). Likewise, they include such areas of school teaching as pupils' reading practices and literacy across school subjects (Vinterek et al. 2020) and school teachers' understanding of the relation between national test results and the act of grading in the compulsory school (Bonnevier, Borgström & Yassin 2017).

Taken together, these examples of literature education research and shared practice in higher education (and in school) settings point to an emerging interest among literary scholars and literature teachers of English in Sweden in the teaching and learning of literature, and in education research more broadly. They show ways in which these staff have explored teaching practices that are efficient, curricular practices that exist or that are widespread, as well as educational goals and teaching practices that are possible or desirable. The examples also indicate an emerging competence among literary scholars to use methods, such as questionnaires, interviews, observations, and study groups, which are not normally associated with literary studies in Sweden, where literary criticism is the dominant approach to literature. It is tempting to view the emergence of this research as a corollary of the various ways in which

Swedish politics and policies for teacher education—and, for that matter, for the professionalisation of academic teaching via higher education pedagogy—have impacted on the teaching, professional repertoires, and research interests of literature staff. Likewise, it seems possible, in the collaborative publications of English literature staff, to get of a glimpse of the work duties, but also of the institutional environments, intellectual networks and disciplinary contexts of literary scholars of English in Sweden.

As this account has suggested and as the special issue illustrates, regardless of its origins, the literature education research that is currently emerging is necessary. It helps to recognise the state of English literary studies, to understand current assumptions in light of historical developments as well as current conditions for English, and to think ahead about professional practice. The articles included in this issue contribute to this kind of disciplinary and professional self-understanding and they identify the potential of new teaching practices.

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The articles introduced below highlight some of the shifting conditions for literary studies in English across Sweden and Norway; they raise key questions about the tasks of literary studies and they explore good teaching practices. The contributors draw on theories about narrative ethics and transnationalism to examine questions of curricular design and teaching practice, but also on theories about the curriculum, about critical thinking, and about student and teacher feedback. Together, they show that an understanding of professional practice requires a variety of methods, empirical as well as speculative. They also show that this understanding is enriched by studying a wide range of material. Beyond literary works, the primary material for the articles comprises academic syllabi and PhD dissertations, as well as student reflections and faculty questionnaire responses. The articles showcase these features of literature education research and, in doing so, they also illustrate the variety of genres in which the academic community thinks through and communicates about aspects of the profession: from the critical argument, through the report of empirical research, to the thought piece.

The first four articles address the state of English-language literary studies and their purposes. In ‘English literary studies in Sweden 1950–

2019: Doctoral research projects and disciplinary renewal', Heidi Hansson considers the conditions for literary studies by highlighting the interrelation between the initial research orientation of individual scholars and the development of English as a university subject in Sweden. Specifically, Hansson is interested in the principle of individual topic choice for PhD research and the implications this has both for the disciplinary knowledge base of English literature developed nationally and for curricular construction. In this piece, she accounts for a review of PhD dissertations in English produced at Swedish universities since the mid-twentieth century, with special focus on dissertations in literary studies. Based on dissertation topics, she observes developments in the discipline. Today, she writes, dissertation topics display a dominance of modern and contemporary literature at the expense of older literature, as well as a growing interest in prose literature over other genres and in literatures outside the UK and the USA. They also display a predominance of contextual modes of criticism centred on social or political theories. Linking these trends in dissertation topics especially from the past two decades to current undergraduate curricula, Hansson recognises a strong connection between the orientation of first-term literature courses and that of the research. Ultimately, Hansson raises the issues of competence provision and of what the research foundation of the discipline should look like.

The impact of recent teacher education reforms and policy on what it means to be an academic teacher of English-language literature at Swedish universities is the topic of Katherina Dodou and David Gray's 'Literary scholar, teacher educator? English staff profiles and attitudes to teacher education'. In their article, they present the findings from a survey of the academic qualifications, research interests and school teaching experiences of English staff involved in the teaching of literature in teacher education programmes nationally, alongside their sample teaching duties and attitudes to teaching literature in those programmes. The study findings indicate that, although the respondents are a heterogeneous group, most staff have received research training in English literary studies and have an active research interest in that area. While many have some school teaching experience, few are qualified school teachers or are active researchers in the field of literature teaching and learning. The findings also suggest that, although most respondents have developed a form of dispositional ambidexterity when it comes to their teaching inside and

outside teacher education, several express feelings of inadequacy or frustration about their roles as teacher educators. As is pointed out in the article, these findings have implications for the strategic development of teacher education curricula, and for staffing at English departments.

Whilst these first two articles draw attention to the conditions for literary studies—their orientation and status—in Sweden, from the perspective of the discipline and of teacher education respectively, the two following articles focus mainly on the purposes of literature education.

In ‘Critical thinking and English literature in higher education: The theoretical models and the Swedish syllabi’, Iulian Cananau addresses the higher education goal of critical thinking in relation to English literary studies and to current undergraduate literature curricula in English. In particular, he seeks to introduce the field of critical thinking research to the subject community of English literary scholars and, thereby, to generate discussion about the potential for critical thinking in literature courses. Cananau outlines key tenets in recent models for understanding critical thinking. These span deeply rooted academic definitions of critical thinking as cognitive (evaluative and argumentative) skills or as both cognitive skills and dispositions, to theorisations that emphasise the emancipatory dimensions of developed critical thinking abilities and the significance of extending critical thinking beyond critical reason and reflection to critical action. As a second step, Cananau identifies the models of critical thinking that appear to be fostered in general (that is non-vocational) undergraduate-level English literature courses in Sweden, by way of academic syllabi. His review shows that the cognitive-argumentative skills approach dominates the conceptualisation of critical thinking in English literature syllabi. Against this backdrop, his article asks that the academic subject community discuss curricular and teaching practices that cultivate critical thinking.

Katherina Dodou similarly considers the ‘why’ of literature education, but in relation to the justifications for literature in English. Specifically, she considers what educational purposes and benefits for the engagement with English-language literature are legitimated in Swedish curricular documents. In ‘How Swedish curricula legitimise the engagement with literature in English’, she examines the functions of literature that are given the status of official legitimations in English syllabi in higher education and in teacher education, in relation to curricular documents for primary and secondary education. Her article presents a meta-discussion

that accounts for and synthesises three previous curricular studies. It shows that key justifications for literature in English that can be found across the education system rely on the links between literature and cultural learning (or analysis), as well as on the potential of furthering an understanding of the world by way of literature and of fostering a desired democratic citizen ethos. Dodou's cross-educational approach highlights the role of the academic English community in formulating the value of reading and studying English-language literature, not only in an academic context, but also in a school context. It also sheds light on some of the consequences of the inter-dependence between the parts of the education system—for the substance of literature teaching and for the discursive strategies employed to legitimate that teaching.

The subsequent four articles introduce new ways of teaching literature in English that have the potential to strengthen students' literary competence, their disciplinary know-how and their creative abilities.

The question of how the academic teaching of literature can meet the needs of teacher education lies at the heart of Anette Svensson's 'Aesthetic dimensions of literary studies: Multimodality and creative learning'. Her article outlines an innovative course design created to foster student teachers' creativity and to model school teaching practices that attend to aesthetic, rather than language learning, aspects of literature in English. The teaching unit focuses on text universes, that is on source texts and their various re-presentations across textual and media formats in remakes, makeovers and faction. The unit thereby meets school curricular stipulations that teaching develop pupils' narrative competence across different media formats and it takes into account pupils' own media habits. It combines pre-service teachers' literary analytical skills with multimodal creative tasks, by asking student teachers to create a re-presentation of a selected source text. The article reports on students' experiences of this teaching unit, based on a small-scale practice-based study involving some 16 students. Student responses in a questionnaire indicated that the teaching unit encouraged engagement with the stories, it impacted positively on students' narrative competence and it stimulated their analytical and creative abilities. The teaching unit, Svensson concludes, has significant potential for English teacher education, by virtue of combining two features. It introduces to student teachers teaching material in the form of text universes that they can use in their future classrooms

and it familiarises them with a teaching method that builds on creative tasks and creative learning.

Sara Håkansson, Ellen Turner and Cecilia Wadsö Lecaros' article 'Active and transformational engagement with writing feedback: Using reflection as a tool to access literary disciplinary knowledge' discusses a model for teaching that encourages active student engagement with formative feedback on literature essays. In the model, students' written responses to peer and teacher feedback become an integrated part of the essay writing process through a series of scaffolded reflection tasks. The model seeks to tackle two main concerns. The first is the tendency among some students to disregard written feedback or to mistake formative feedback as an end product. The second, and main concern, is the pedagogical challenge of how to help develop English students' discipline-specific learning in literary studies, and their academic writing abilities more generally, via feedback on literature essays. This model, which has been implemented in a first-term undergraduate course in English literature at a Swedish university, is evaluated in the article based on students' descriptions of how they used the feedback they received in their reflection texts. The empirical material consists of some 243 reflection texts produced by 138 students over the course of two terms. The results from a qualitative content analysis of these texts suggest that the model influenced positively students' metacognitive stance to disciplinary writing practices and to feedback.

The potential for disciplinary specific training in literary studies in teaching environments that are interdisciplinary is the topic of 'Discipline and prosper? A case study of interdisciplinary environments in English literature Master's level courses in Sweden'. In this article, Virginia Langum and Kirk Sullivan highlight an emerging context for English literary studies in Sweden, namely the medical humanities. The authors examine two online courses that join disability studies, psychology and medicine with English literary studies and that are open to students from various disciplinary backgrounds. The article evaluates the challenges and the potential these interdisciplinary teaching environments have for disciplinary learning, based on a study of 27 students' contributions to course online fora. Specifically, the authors seek to answer two questions: first, how interdisciplinary milieus can contribute to knowledge construction and, second, how students' disciplinary background (English or non-English) influences participation and performance in the course.

Their findings from a close reading of student comments in the asynchronous written fora indicate that the interdisciplinary environment supported what the writers call epistemic insight. The environment, they conclude, does not appear to disadvantage the development of English literature students and it allows students from other disciplines to develop literary analytical skills. At the same time, the authors point to the need for additional support for students with a non-literary background and make suggestions for the nature and shape of that support.

Where the previous three articles are practice-based, Anna Lindhé's 'Processes of empathy and othering in literature: Towards a new ethics of reading' is a critical discussion of how new perspectives on the ethics of reading can revitalise academic literature teaching in English. Lindhé problematises the often-held view that literature elicits empathy and instead teases out the ethical-pedagogical potential of attending to the ability of literature to block empathy and create the other. Building on various theories of narrative and ethics, Lindhé emphasises the moment when readers realise their own complicity in the creation of the other. She uses Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* to explore how literature can be taught and read with a focus on the students' own implication in processes of othering. As Lindhé argues, a recognition that literature invites us to both empathise and other may increase students' awareness in their own role and responsibility in acts of othering within literature as well as outside it. A teaching approach that facilitates this recognition, she maintains, does not only provide an occasion to explore the darker aspects of humanity; it can also help develop empathetic and critical citizens as well as enhance students' awareness of literary form.

The three companion thought pieces that close this special issue address the logic of curricular construction, whilst also offering insights into the Norwegian context. These companion pieces explore the significance of grouping English-language literature into national categories, with special focus on teaching a designated American literature survey course. The writers address questions that arise in teaching American literature, as distinct from British or other national literatures in English, in undergraduate level courses in Norway. At the same time, the American literature survey allows the writers to highlight opportunities and limitations of using the nation as an organising principle for literary studies, more generally. In the three thought pieces, which stem from a panel discussion on the value of teaching the American survey course at

Norwegian universities, the writers shed light on different arguments for and against the continued relevance of the national survey course.

In 'We need to talk about English: On national literature surveys and other aspects of the curriculum', Stephen Dougherty questions the purpose of the American literature survey in Norway. He begins by asking what the point of a national literature survey is, which presents the literary works read as belonging to and participating in American culture, when the students in Norway are not a part of that national culture. Having thus homed in on the questions of 'what' and 'why' of curricular construction, Dougherty proceeds to question practices and assumptions about literature instruction. He does so, first, by examining the role of the American literature survey in undergraduate Norwegian curricula of English and by highlighting ethico-political problems with making the nation a governing horizon of understanding literature. He continues by arguing for a reorientation of undergraduate literature teaching from the national to a global interpretative horizon, in relation to theories of world and global literature. He discusses the opportunities and implications of his proposed approach which he regards as a necessary paradigmatic shift in how literature in English is taught at Norwegian universities. In a final segment, where he embeds his discussion in the larger question of what English programmes are for in Norway, Dougherty maintains that a global English approach would highlight the relevance of literature for students' lives, for instance, by addressing the ways in which literature helps understand 'the hard facts of the world'.

Ken Hanssen, by contrast, argues that the American literature survey is essential to Scandinavian undergraduate English programmes and cannot be replaced by a course that includes literary expressions from across the entire English-speaking world without privileging received canonical authors and texts. In 'We are citizens of the world: A defence of the American literature survey (in the name of cosmopolitanism)', he regards, particularly, the Norwegian cultural space as largely defined by American terms. This condition, namely that 'American empire has universalised American concerns', makes the sustained consideration of writers who have articulated and interrogated the core values and beliefs of America a necessity. For Hanssen, an exploration of the literary tradition of the United States can provide students in Norway with the knowledge and skills they need to engage critically with the world in which they live. As he writes: 'The point is that by actually reading

American literature, you would be as quickly disabused of your notions of an exclusionary and intolerant intellectual tradition, as you would be of a triumphantly progressive one'. Ultimately, Hanssen maintains, the American literary tradition is an indispensable intellectual and artistic framework for rehearsing the common challenges that confront us, whether emotional, ethical, social, or political.

In 'Essentially the greatest poem: Teaching new ways of reading American literature', Cassandra Falke responds to Dougherty's and Hanssen's arguments by shifting the perspective on the debate from whether to include the American literature survey to how American literature might be taught. She argues for the potential of reading the American literary tradition in ways that can expose students to the contradictions of that tradition, as well as its beauty and force. Falke begins by historicising the place of American literature in Norway, which she notes 'has always been seen as a "function of society"'. Already in the 1940s when the first professorship in American literature was inaugurated in Norway, she observes, undergraduate American literature courses were closely tied to the goal to learn about America—rather than about American literature or about literature itself. Falke's argument abides by that goal and at the same time seeks to take into account lessons from the 'transnational turn' in American studies to renew the teaching of American literature. For her, the transnational perspective can facilitate students' questioning the purpose of the American literature course that Dougherty calls for, without abandoning the American literature survey. Likewise, the perspective can enable discussions that move beyond America, to the students' own Norwegian contexts, and that highlight the interpretive horizons that teachers and students operate within in relation to the horizons in which the literary works were created.

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Ultimately, the topics and perspectives that the articles included in the special issue engage with open up possibilities to consider English-language literary studies in new ways. They contribute to a collective taking stock and thinking ahead about the value and orientation of literary studies and about teaching practices that can facilitate manifold educational goals. It is the hope of the editors of this special issue that the articles will become a basis, and an occasion, for discussing ongoing

developments in English-language literary studies—in Norway, Sweden, and beyond.

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