Shall I Compare Thee To Textbooks?

The Selection and Tasks Associated with Shakespeare in Upper Secondary Textbooks

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Abstract
This essay has investigated the use of Shakespearean texts as well as tasks associated with those texts in upper secondary textbooks. The investigation looked at both which texts of Shakespeare’s are most frequent and how students are supposed to work with the texts. Furthermore the textbooks cover 20 years (1995-2015) and as such the study also analysed whether or not the selection and tasks have changed, i.e. whether they remain the same today as they did 20 years ago. The findings indicated that Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet were the two most frequent texts and that the tasks have gone from being individual to focusing on group work. The analysis also showed that while Shakespeare during the beginning of the 20 year period was the most dominant or sole author mentioned, this role has been reduced during more recent years. The conclusions drawn concerning the findings emphasise the syllabi and how they influence the content and format of the textbooks as well as the importance of canonicity.

Keywords
Textbooks, Shakespeare, teaching Shakespeare, selection, material, tasks, activities, exercises, Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet.
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1 Introduction

I have been a student all my life. I began preschool at the age of six and graduated from upper secondary school at the age of eighteen. I have spent quite a great deal of time in school, studying and simply being in a learning state of mind. I have written essays, taken countless tests and read probably hundreds of textbooks. The textbooks were especially fascinating. They were books filled with the right type of approved school oriented knowledge and books that you knew without having to ask the teacher that you were going to use during all English lessons. One just brought the textbook to class and the teacher told you to read this and that page and answer those questions. Bo Lundahl and Sten-Olof Ullström both discuss question types and activities in textbooks and from experience certain tasks are more recurring than others (Lundahl 363, Ullström 123).

Out of all the textbooks I have had, certain topics have been recurring. William Shakespeare has featured in the majority, if not in all of my textbooks in one form or another and, is as such the most recurring author. Shakespeare is that one author that all students studying English can be guaranteed to learn about. I myself have read passages from plays, sonnets and biographical facts about Shakespeare and at one point my class even acted out Romeo and Juliet on stage. It was completely terrifying. Nevertheless, Shakespeare has always been there in all my years studying English. Shakespeare has been there to the masses, greeted and educated students throughout years. Robert Eaglestone recalls an interview with a teacher who admitted that all students should read Shakespeare because she herself was required to read Shakespeare as a student (63). In a not too distant future I am going to be a teacher, and as I now stand on some sort of borderline of being a student and being a teacher, it is rather interesting looking at Shakespeare and analysing how the author is and has been present
in the classroom or in the case of this study, how Shakespeare is and has been present in
textbooks.

It is an unwritten law to read Shakespeare when learning English. Josephine Ryan mentions that Shakespeare is the head of the literary hierarchy and is featured in most schools (7). He is perhaps the definition of a literary canon and all people who claim to be well-educated are familiar with texts of his. The very name of Shakespeare is commonly associated with status and so, about 400 years after his death, his literature is still read and found in schools all over the world. Swedish teenagers read *Hamlet* perhaps just like I did. I at first questioned the need to read it, then I complained about the strange and difficult language, later I got engaged in the story, wondering what was going to happen and if all the characters were mad.

Shakespeare is commonly regarded as an essential author to learn about when studying English. This study will therefore analyse the selection of Shakespearean texts and tasks associated with those texts in textbooks. More precisely the study will make use of thirteen textbooks targeting upper secondary level of English in Sweden. The textbooks all target the second year of English, a course that nowadays is called English 6. The reason for selecting to focus on this particular course is due to how the syllabus from Skolverket (2011) emphasises literature, literary periods and authors in English 6 and students are thus far much more likelier to come across Shakespeare there than in English 5 or 7. Furthermore the thirteen textbooks cover 20 years, as the oldest book is published in 1995 and the most current being published in 2015. The textbooks will be analysed in terms of selection and tasks and the aim is to find out if teaching Shakespeare is the same today as it was 20 years ago or if differences in those two aspects, i.e. selection and tasks, can be noted and what speculations can be made based upon the findings.
1.1 Aim and research questions

As mentioned previously, the aim with this study is to investigate whether or not teaching Shakespeare through textbooks remains the same today as it did 20 years ago or if differences can be seen in terms of selection of Shakespeare’s texts and tasks, activities and exercises. The analysis will furthermore be able to make conclusions concerning the context and themes that are related to Shakespeare in the textbooks. In order to achieve the aim of the study the following three research questions have been developed:

1. What Shakespearean texts are used in the textbooks?

2. What are the tasks associated with Shakespeare like, i.e. what are the students supposed to do with the literature?

3. In terms of selection of Shakespearean texts and tasks related to those texts, in what ways, if at all, do the new textbooks today differ or share similarities with the textbooks from 20 years ago?

The purpose with this study, beyond researching the use of Shakespeare, is that by examining the textbooks certain conclusions can be made concerning how English teaching develops over time. The aim is that the results will answer if Shakespeare is taught in a similar fashion today as he was 20 years ago or if the teaching has changed and what the possible reasons for this might be. By extension the results will provide knowledge and indications about textbooks’ content and didactical methods when teaching literature.
1.2 Hypothesis

Early on the initial idea was to make this study heuristic and thus make premature assumptions and perform the analysis with an open mind. However, as my preparatory work moved on a hypothesis was forming. Firstly I believe the analysis will show less use of Shakespeare in newer textbooks and that he will not be the centre of attention when discussing literature. Instead the assumption is that Shakespeare will be accompanied by other authors. It is important to note that while the belief is that Shakespeare will not be the sole author mentioned in the textbooks, he will still have his moment in the limelight. Secondly I believe that only the most well-known of Shakespeare’s texts will be used, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* and that plays less known, such as *Antony and Cleopatra* will not be mentioned at all.

Thirdly and lastly the assumption is that the tasks or questions related to Shakespeare’s texts will very much focus on language and how the texts may be rewritten to function in contemporary English and also that they will focus on subjective reflections in terms of what the individual student thought of the text. Furthermore I do not believe that the tasks have changed in a significant manner over the years, and that the assignments in the textbooks will appear very much similar. This belief may contradict my first assumption, namely that Shakespeare today will be accompanied by other authors, however I would like to state that assignments and tasks do not need to be affected by how thoroughly Shakespeare is mentioned.

2 Contextual background

In this section of the essay previous research and various types of studies and ideas will be presented. The background will include main points and criteria from two different syllabi and some thoughts on literature teaching with a focus on Shakespearean
literature. This will provide some insight to how Shakespeare is commonly used in teaching situations. Additionally this section will include some information about tasks, activities and different types of questions that are used when working with literature, as this kind of information will be useful when analysing and discussing the textbooks from such a perspective.

2.1 The syllabi

According to Lundahl and Ullström the textbook is a concretisied version of the syllabus (Lundahl 357-58, Ullström 120). It is the belief of the two authors that the textbook is designed to contain all aspects that are stated in the syllabus for the students to learn. For instance, if the syllabus requires students to learn about English speaking cultures the textbook would provide material and tasks that allow the students to achieve this aim. In addition, this belief is supported by Boel Englund who writes in a report by Skolverket and claims that “teachers view the textbook as a warranty that the aims of the curriculum and syllabus are met” (26). Because of this opinion, the textbook being a concrete reflection of the syllabus, some key points and criteria of the syllabus should be illustrated. As the textbooks in this particular study cover 20 years they also cover two different syllabi. The first syllabus is called Lpf94, which was also published in 1994, while the newer and current syllabus, Lgy11 was published in 2011. This means that the textbooks in the study were made under different circumstances and as the textbook is a reflection of the syllabus it is essential to note what the two syllabi state about literature.
2.1.1 Lpf 94

In the older syllabus for upper secondary school, Lpf94 by Skolverket several aims with the subject are listed. Students should by studying English for instance “develop their understanding of the English spoken in different parts of the English speaking world” and “develop their ability to be able to read fiction in English and be able to reflect about the texts from various perspectives” (“Ämne – Engelska”, my translation). In English B, which already mentioned, is the second year of English at upper secondary level, the students are supposed to develop their knowledge in an analytical manner. The syllabus states that the course will widen perspectives and focus on language use in varied and complicated situations, as well as the knowledge about English speaking cultures will be emphasised and that literature can be used as a gateway to do so (“Ämne – Engelska”). In terms of literature and reading fiction the criteria expressed by Lpf94 on Skolverket’s website explains that students after the end of the course should be able to “read, summarise and comment upon content in longer literary texts” (“Ämne – Engelska”, my translation). In addition, the syllabus mentions that the students should “have a basic understanding about English literature from different periods” (“Ämne – Engelska”, my translation).

2.1.2 Lgy11

Lgy11 is the new and current syllabus by Skolverket for upper secondary school level. In English 6, which is the new version of English B, and the course emphasise communication with the aim that the students should develop “an all-round communicative ability” (54, my translation). The idea is that learning English should increase the students’ knowledge about the language itself and the outside world so that they are able to use English in different situations and for different purposes. The term ‘globalisation’ is mentioned in the aim of the subject and it is described that learning
English can provide “enhanced opportunities to create contacts, and greater understanding of different ways of living” (53, my translation). Concerning literature in English 6 the syllabus states that students should develop their knowledge about “contemporary and older literature” (60, my translation). In addition to this the students should also learn about “themes, motives, form and content in film and literature; authorship and literary periods” (60, my translation). According to the syllabus the students should both in writing and orally be able to argue and interpret various types of texts and genres as it emphasises that students should “argue, report, apply, reason, summarise, comment, value and motivate their opinions” (61, my translation). Not only are the students expected to develop their knowledge about literature, they should also be able to discuss about “concrete and abstract subjects related to the students’ education and societal and working life; current issues; thoughts, opinions, ideas, experiences and feelings; ethical and existential issues” (60, my translation).

2.2 Teaching Shakespeare

Due to Shakespeare’s status and importance in literature and literature teaching, this subsection will emphasise how Shakespearean literature can be taught along with some comments about Shakespeare’s canonicity.

In her study of literature teaching Josephine Ryan claims that the works of Shakespeare have been present in all schools that she has visited except for one. Ryan goes on to mention that she has visited several different types of schools, such as Catholic schools, independent schools, single sex schools, co-educational schools and has met and interviewed 13 teachers and about 50 students. In all of these schools, with the exception of one, Shakespeare was an important aspect when teaching literature (7). The author states:
The predominant view of Shakespeare during the last 50 years has been that of seeing Shakespeare as the pinnacle of the literary hierarchy, a figure who may not be understood in his full grandeur by everyone, but who is nonetheless the indisputable master. (Ryan 7)

As Ryan based her study on English teaching in Australia, where English is considered a first language her findings may not entirely be relevant in this particular study as English in Sweden is considered a foreign language. Nevertheless Ryan’s study will be discussed as it provides this study with a wider and international perspective on how Shakespeare is used in teaching situations as well as attitudes towards Shakespeare. In other words Ryan’s article will provide the study with a depth as she emphasise Shakespeare, canonicity and responses to reading Shakespeare, both by teachers and students. Moreover, while Ryan argues that Shakespeare is the most frequently used and recurring author in literature teaching, she also raises the issue concerning in what manner Shakespeare is being taught and what students learn by reading his texts (7). It is said in the study that there is a certain mentality that accompanies teaching Shakespeare, namely that teaching Shakespeare’s texts is a requirement of the education system and that Shakespeare is part of the syllabus, i.e. in order for teachers to be successful teachers the students must read Shakespeare (7-8). Additionally Ryan finds in her interviews a certain way of thinking among the teachers. The teachers in the study are of the opinion that when they expose their students to Shakespearean literature they at the same time heighten the students’ awareness of great thinking and writing. One of the teachers interviewed claimed that in one cannot teach about life, and so instead the teacher decided to teach the form of Shakespeare and discuss issues that interest the students. The teacher continued and argued that students have a “natural interest” in Shakespeare (8-9). In the same study a student said in an interview that reading Shakespeare was like learning ‘a famous story’. The student stated that learning about
Shakespeare was like learning something of history and to understand how people spoke back then (10). Ryan remarks that most students interviewed for the study did appreciate and enjoy reading Shakespeare, particularly *Romeo and Juliet*. Only a small number of students admitted to not liking Shakespeare and these were students coming from working class schools in areas with economic disadvantages (11). Moreover Ryan clarifies that students are very much aware of the importance of Shakespeare and how the name Shakespeare equals status and that students believe liking Shakespeare is synonymous with a high grade (11).

While Ryan focused on English teaching as a first language, Christopher Dahl discusses textbooks and makes some reflections concerning Shakespeare in Swedish language teaching. While it is important to note that the textbooks analysed by Dahl are used in the subject of Swedish at upper secondary level, some of Dahl’s conclusions will be mentioned all the same as they will provide some insight to Shakespeare’s status in the Swedish school. What Dahl finds is that Shakespeare is made out to be the author taking the most space in the textbook and that *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are the two plays with the longest excerpts (178). Another aspect noted is how the author of the textbook via language implies that Shakespeare is the greatest or that Hamlet is “the world’s most famous play” (Dahl 179, my translation). It is with a certain voice that the textbook writer presents Shakespeare and his plays which provides him with a sense of authority and notions about how and why the literature should be read (180).

The issue of why Shakespeare should be read is widely discussed by Eaglestone as an entire chapter in his book is devoted to Shakespeare. Eaglestone refers to an interview during which a teacher recalled a student asking why they had to read Shakespeare and that his writing was plain boring. The teacher found herself searching for the right words to say, but coming up short. The teacher admitted asking herself that
very same question and although she did not say this to the student, she claimed that the students had to read Shakespeare because she had been required to do so herself (63).

The author lists three arguments laid out by traditionalists as reasons for why Shakespeare should be studied (64). It is the belief of traditionalists that Shakespeare is the greatest writer and that studying his texts is essential (64). According to Eaglestone the traditionalists even consider the words by Ben Jonson, namely that Shakespeare is “not of an age, but for all time” (64) to be their motto. Concerning the three arguments listed above the traditionalists believe that Shakespeare teaches many important values and that these values are expressed within his writing. It is mentioned that Shakespeare is a source of wisdom and truth on both good and bad aspects of human behaviour. Eaglestone states that reading Shakespeare will teach the reader about values and ideals that are examples of “the human spirit at its finest” (65). The second argument made by traditionalists is that people should learn about the worth of Shakespeare’s writing, both in an aesthetic and artistic manner. The view is that Shakespeare is brilliant with his words and is thus the greatest of all writers. The third and last argument claims that there is a universal appeal to Shakespeare, namely that Shakespeare indicates status and affects all readers. Eaglestone notes a universal appeal towards Shakespeare and that all well educated people should possess knowledge about him and his work (64). This universal appeal also includes that all people are moved and affected by Shakespeare and that he has something to say to all. The arguments laid out by Eaglestone present notions and reflections on the topic of why Shakespeare is an important author and why the literature written by Shakespeare should be considered valuable and canonical (64-65).
2.3 Tasks, activities and questions in textbooks

As mentioned previously, this subsection is of importance to the study as it will provide knowledge about how tasks dealing with literature in school and textbooks often are conducted. This knowledge will prove beneficial when reading both the results of the textbooks as well as the discussion.

On the notion of tasks related to intensive reading, i.e. reading performed in the classroom, Jeremy Harmer states that comprehension tasks are often given to students from their textbook (283). In that sense the students are then asked to answer questions that someone else has asked, i.e. the author of the textbook. This means that the students have given predesigned questions and that it may be problematic for the students to integrate their own individual response to the actual text. Harmer continues by claiming that the most important question to ask a student concerning a text is whether or not they like the text (283-84).

Continuing on the matter of tasks related to literature in teaching, or more precisely, tasks related to literature in textbooks, Sten-Olof Ullström provides several views concerning various types of questions and activities that are common in textbooks (122). Three different categories of questions can be identified, namely: Questions dealing with content, questions to evaluate the text and lastly questions of identification. The first type of questions are according to Ullström questions to find out if the students have read the text as the questions revolve around the text’s plot. The second category of questions is questions in which the students discuss their opinions concerning the text, i.e. if the students found the text to be either good or bad and motivate their thoughts. The last category is self-reflective as the students are asked if they have ever found themselves in a similar situation as the characters in the text or how they would act or solve that sort of situation (122-24).
Furthermore Ullström remarks that three different kinds of activities are common when teaching literature (126-36). The first activity is very similar to the first category of questions, more precisely content-oriented, which often act as a means to find out the a text has been read. The second activity is one that escapes the text and deals with other issues more related to the students’ own lives. For instance if a text deals with a theme of bullying the teaching will not focus on anything else besides that particular theme and the theme will furthermore be discussed from the students’ own perspective. The last type of activity is a kind that uses literature as an inspiration for students to improve their own creative writing. If the students for example were to read a poem the task would then be for the students to attempt to write their own poem (126-36).

The ideas expressed by Ullström are echoed in Lundahl’s book. The book focuses off English didactics, which by extension includes literature. Similar to what Ullström describes Lundahl claims that there are several different types of questions associated with reading (363). These question types are called factual questions, questions of interpretation, open/closed questions, yes/no questions, vocabulary questions and lastly experience questions. While Ullström gives the questions other names than Lundahl, the basic principles of the question types are fairly similar. For instance the questions deal with content, relate to the reader’s own experiences and beliefs and escape the text itself and focus on the topic in a generic sense (363).

Furthermore Lundahl discusses the limitations and requirements of questions used during reading (359-60). In order for the questions to be beneficial and ‘good’ some key points must be established. The author states that the questions must target the students’ understanding of the text and not only reflect the teacher’s interpretation of it (359). When discussing literature students often say what they believe the teacher think is correct and thus neglect their own individual response. Moreover the questions must not
act as a means to control that the text has been read, but instead make sure to encourage the students to express their understanding of the text and that yes/no questions should be avoided (unless the questions are followed by follow-up questions). The questions should in some sense be limited and it is mentioned that if the questions were handed to the students before having read the text, the reading will be concentrated solely towards finding out the answer to the questions. The emphasis on questions should not be too great and other types of tasks should be encouraged as well. Other tasks could include role play, where students adapt the text on stage or that the students perform written tasks and perhaps continue the story on their own. Such tasks could also provide the class with new perspectives of the text and by extension generate a greater understanding of its content. (359-60).

3 Methodology

In this section of the essay the methodology will be presented and described. The section will additionally contain information about the textbooks, the hypothesis, limitations and briefly describe in what manner the analysis will be conducted.

3.2 Material

For this study thirteen different textbooks have been gathered. These textbooks target students studying English at Swedish upper secondary school. More precisely the textbooks target the second year of learning English at upper secondary school, a course nowadays known as English 6, but that once referred to as English B. As mentioned previously this course has been chosen as it emphasises literature, literary periods and authors. It is therefore far much more likely that students find Shakespeare in English 6
than in English 5 or 7. Furthermore the textbooks have been collected as they all make use of William Shakespeare, his poems and plays or his life.


### 3.2.2 Analysing the data

The textbooks will be analysed by their use of Shakespeare in terms of what texts of his are used and what the tasks, activities, exercises and questions look like. Furthermore the analysis will investigate if these two factors, selection and task, have changed during the last 20 years. In addition, the examination of the textbooks will be able to make certain conclusions concerning the context in which Shakespeare is placed within the textbooks, i.e. in what kind of chapters or sections the students will encounter Shakespeare. Though it perhaps is not entirely related to the study’s purpose, but by including this in the analysis it will provide some insight what themes are connected to Shakespeare and whether or not that has changed during the 20 years that the textbooks cover. Following the results a discussion will follow where certain conclusions will be made based upon the findings.

### 3.3 Limitations

While the methodology presents a quantitative and reliable approach to learning about the use of Shakespearean literature in textbooks there are some blind spots. For instance...
20 years might not be a wide enough time frame to note any significant differences. Another limitation with the study’s methodology is that it may not result in a full understanding of the situation. As the purpose and aim with the study is to analyse and compare textbooks in terms of content, it will not investigate how the textbooks actually are used or have been used in the classroom by teachers.

4 Results

In this section the findings from the textbooks will be presented and described in terms of selection of Shakespearean texts and the tasks related to those texts. Furthermore the analysis will discuss if these two aspects, i.e. selection and tasks, have altered during the 20 years that the textbooks cover and if changes can be noted.

4.1 Selection of Shakespearean texts

In the thirteen textbooks a number of 40 excerpts can be seen. The diagram below shows the distribution of the excerpts.
Figure 1

Out of the 40 excerpts of Shakespeare’s texts that were found 18 of these were excerpts from plays, 18 were quotations and 4 were sonnets. The distinction between an excerpt and a quotation is that while the excerpt offers longer scenes or full acts of certain plays, the quotations are only a couple of sentences long. Furthermore it is clear that both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* featured each 12 times in the different textbooks. *As You Like It* was the third most common play found and was found in total 4 times. *Sonnet 116* came in fourth place having been featured 3 times in the textbooks. Other texts that also were found but only appeared once included *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Richard III*, *Othello*, *The Tempest*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night*, *Sonnet 18* and lastly *Macbeth*.

### 4.1.1 Romeo and Juliet and Hamlet

While *Romeo and Juliet* was found equally many times as *Hamlet*, they did not appear in similar form each time. Both plays were found 12 times each, but *Hamlet* appeared in quotes 8 out of 12 times, while *Romeo and Juliet* only appeared in quotations 4 out of 12 times.

When analysing the appearance of *Romeo and Juliet* further it is apparent that some acts are more popular than others. For instance, as the diagram shows Act II was by far the most common act to be found and was found a total of 8 times. Out of the 8 times that Act II was used, Scene II was found 7 times and Scene I was found 1 time. Furthermore summaries of the whole plot were found twice. Act III, Scene II was found once as well as Act V, Scene III.

As mentioned, *Hamlet* appeared in total 12 times; 8 times as only quotations and 4 times in longer excerpts. Unlike *Romeo and Juliet* where a particular scene was clearly being favoured, *Hamlet* offered a wider perspective. Act I was found
6 times, but referred to 4 different scenes, namely Scenes III and V which were both found twice each. Additional acts include Act II and Act III which were found twice, while a full summary of the plot appeared once.

4.2 Tasks and questions

In the thirteen textbooks several different tasks and types of questions are visible. It is furthermore clear that some of the activities are more popular and more frequently found than others. The most frequent tasks appearing in the textbooks will here be listed, described and various examples from the textbooks will be given.

4.2.1 Questions

In the textbooks the students are most often given questions to answer while reading or listening to an excerpt. These questions can be placed into certain categories based upon the aspects that they emphasise. In total six types of questions are noticeable and include questions focusing on language and vocabulary, content-oriented questions, questions that focus on the students’ own lives and experiences and questions of interpretation. The types of questions found greatly resembles and corresponds with the types of questions mentioned by both Ullström and Lundahl, as previously mentioned in Section 2.

In questions focusing on language and vocabulary the students are either expected to translate part of excerpts into modern English or they are supposed to explain the meaning of the Shakespearean words or find synonyms for them. For instance in Aerials the students are given a number of quotes from several plays, such as Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet and Macbeth and are then asked to “Discover as many of the special language features as possible: word order; thou; verb endings; use or lack of do-
construction” and “Use modern English to explain expressions” (81). A similar example can be found in Solid Gold 2 where the students are given sentences from Hamlet. In each sentence one word is in marked in bold and the students, with the help of three alternatives, should select the correct synonym (226-27).

The questions focusing on content are according to Ullström a means to find out if the students have read a particular text, as previously mentioned. In Short Cuts to English 2 the questions are listed under a heading called “Check Your Reading” (96-99) and centre around Sonnet 18 and As You Like It. The questions emphasise the rhyme scheme, what words such as thou and thee refer to, what the passage is about and what men and women are compared to (96-99). Content-oriented questions can be found in the majority of the textbooks and asks the students to answer what happens in a specific passage, what characters mean by saying certain things and so forth. Another example can be found in Core English 2 where the students should answer “What do we learn about the relationship between the Montagues and the Capulets?” after having listened to a passage from Romeo and Juliet.

Some questions in the textbooks are meant to function as the basis for discussions. In particular these are questions that emphasise the students’ own lives and realities. For instance in Master Plan 2 – Teacher’s Book (which is where the excerpt and task from Master Plan 2 is found) the students are first asked to read a piece from Romeo and Juliet followed by a discussion. The discussion focus on family as a theme by wanting the students to discuss questions such as “How important is family to you? In what situations should your family decide what you should do? In what situations should you decide for yourself?” (35).

Questions of interpretation are questions where the students are supposed to answer what they believe or think about a certain aspect of the excerpt. In Echo 6 Short Stories after having read a passage from The Merchant of Venice the students are
given questions where they should analyse for instance “From what you see in this extract do you think Shylock is a sympathetic character or a villain in the play?” (197). A similar example can be seen in Blueprint 2.0 combined with Sonnet 116, where the students are asked to “Explain how Time is a symbol for death in Shakespeare’s Sonnet 116” (38).

4.2.2 Shakespeare today

The works of Shakespeare are almost 400 years old and the language in his texts is not precisely the language commonly used today. In the textbooks the students are at times required to translate the Shakespearean language into modern English. For instance in Short Cuts to English 2 the students are asked to translate Sonnet 18 (96) as well as Act II Scene VII from As You Like It (99). Translating excerpts appear to be quite a trend among the textbooks and Romeo and Juliet are to be modernised in several textbooks, among others Master Plan 2 – Teacher’s Book (35) and Core English 2 (117). In Pioneer 2 however the students are given an excerpt from As You Like It along with a modern version and the idea is that the students should compare the two texts and look for differences and/or similarities (196-201).

4.2.3 Act It Out

The activity typically known as “Act It Out” is an exercise in which the students are asked to practice an act or even a whole play by Shakespeare and then perform it in front of their classmates. While Pick and Mix 2 allows the students to choose between ten different plays by Shakespeare to modernise and perform (209), Progress Gold B clearly specify that Romeo and Juliet should be performed (200) and so does Core English 2 (116) as well as Master Plan 2 – Teacher’s Book (35). In Solid Gold 2 a similar kind of task can be found, however it differs from the traditional “Act It Out”
exercise. Instead of performing a play or part of a play, the students should pretend that they are news anchors and present the events in *Hamlet* as a news story (228).

### 4.2.4 Creative writing

In some of the textbooks the students are supposed to write texts of their own. This is similar to a view expressed by Ullström that was mentioned in Section 2, namely that literature is used as a source of inspiration in order to produce your own individual texts (135-36). In the textbooks that feature a creative writing task, the excerpt related to that task is from *Romeo and Juliet*. In *Core English 2* the students are given a multiple choice and can choose between three different alternatives: write a love poem, a letter to your parents where you imagine yourself in Romeo and Juliet’s situation or write a story about unhappy love (117). In *Master Plan 2 – Teacher’s Book* the students can choose either to turn the excerpt into a direct dialogue or turn it into a film script (35). Moreover after having read the scene from the balcony in *Progress Gold B* the students should write a paper where they discuss the play and why they believe it became a classic (201).

### 4.3 Twenty years of Shakespeare

As mentioned previously, the textbooks cover a 20 year time period, namely from 1995 up until 2015. When analysing the textbooks as a unit it is clear that some plays and text by Shakespeare along with certain tasks and types of questions are found more often than others. However, when analysing the textbooks from a chronological perspective other conclusions can be drawn. The 20 years has included changes both in terms of texts and tasks. This section will discuss the findings from a chronological point of view
and compare how the selection of Shakespearean texts and the tasks associated with those texts have altered through the years.

4.3.1 The material through 20 years

In the three very first textbooks, namely Progress Topics, Aerials and Read and Proceed Shakespeare has quite a prominent role. In Progress Topics Shakespeare is found in a chapter called “The Traveller” (131) and in Read and Proceed he is found in a chapter called “Teenage Love” (47). Though other authors are visible in Progress Topics such as George Orwell, William Blake and Lord Tennyson (6-7), Shakespeare is given a more prominent role. In Read and Proceed no other author other than Shakespeare is found and Aerials even take a stand on the matter and refer to Shakespeare as “the greatest playwright of all times” (85). In these very earliest textbooks Hamlet is the most commonly found play, however not the only one. The textbooks like to include a great deal of quotes from various plays such as Macbeth, Richard III, The tempest and Twelfth night. However, Hamlet is the text which is found most often and also in longer excerpts where whole scenes could be read such as in Aerials (120) and Progress Topics (135).

Short cuts to English 2 is the first textbook to place Shakespeare in a literature section, appropriately called “Classics”. Shakespeare is found among 11 other authors, such as Charles Dickens, Jane Austen and Mark Twain (which can be seen in the table of contents of the textbook), although he is the first mentioned and is still the most dominant one. The excerpt found is from As you like it as well as Sonnet 18.

With the publication of Progress Gold B a change can be seen. Romeo and Juliet has up until this time had a quite modest and small role in the textbooks, but with Progress Gold B that changes. Between 2002 up until 2012 Romeo and Juliet is found
in all textbooks. The textbooks usually include more than one excerpt from the famous play and at times include other short pieces from Shakespeare, such as sonnets.

In 2009 a change can be seen. Shakespeare from this point forward is no longer the most prominent or only author mentioned. In Core English 2 Shakespeare is the first author mentioned, though he is accompanied by for instance Jane Austen, Mary Shelley and Daniel Defoe, which can be seen in the textbook’s table of content. Between 2009-2015 Shakespeare is still visible in the textbooks, but he no longer being favoured by the textbook writers and is instead given equally much status as other authors found. The textbook writers do not provide Shakespeare with any special treatment and they do not make subjective judgement about his works such as Aerials previously mentioned does. The more recent textbooks present Shakespeare in an objective light.

In 2012 when Context 2 was published Romeo and Juliet loses its position and is not found at all. Instead Hamlet is there alongside Sonnet 116 and an excerpt from As you like it (313-16) . Between 2012-2015 Hamlet starts to slowly regain its position as the most popular play, but just like the period of popularity the Prince had between 1995-2002 his reign is a bit more subtle than the Italian couple’s. When Romeo and Juliet was on top it was obvious as they occurred in all textbooks without falter, while Hamlet reigns slightly more unnoticed. When Hamlet comes back in 2012 it is in a similar manner, as a more gracious ruler than Romeo and Juliet. For example instead of using Romeo and Juliet as a gateway to discuss fate, love and family, Hamlet finds its way back to the textbooks along with The Merchant of Venice and As You Like It and together they emphasise new themes to discuss. In Echo 6 Short Stories The Merchant of Venice is used in a chapter called “Us and Them” (196) and discusses violence, racism and hate and in Context 2 the students should read a passage from As You Like It and compare society today and how it was during Shakespeare’s time (3).
4.3.2 The tasks through 20 years

Much can happen in 20 years. *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* can battle over being the number one play and Shakespeare can go from being the all-powerful Father of literature to being one in the crowd. The tasks also appear to go through some changes. In the earliest textbooks the tasks are quite basic and individual, i.e. the textbooks ask the students to answer questions about the plot in order to check their reading or listening comprehension, as is the case in *Read and Proceed* when the students should name the title of several plays based upon a quote and then summarise the plot of each play (56). Not only do the questions focus on content, they do also focus on language usage and asks the students what certain phrases might mean or how the phrases/words could be translated into modern English. For example in *Aerials* the students are given a list of quotes from Shakespearean plays that they should describe in modern English (80-81). Tasks that emphasise language use, particularly Shakespearean language versus modern language appear to be quite popular throughout the 20 years and can be seen in *Solid Gold 2* where the students should provide synonyms and/or translations for different Shakespearean words found in *Hamlet* (226-27).

With *Progress Gold B* enters a new type of exercise which remains popular even in the most recent textbooks, namely an “Act It Out” exercise. The basic principle of this task is that the students in groups perform an act or part of a Shakespearean play on stage in front of their other classmates. During approximately the same time creative writing as a task starts to gain recognition and grows all the more frequent. The students to rewrite *Sonnet 18* into modern English in *Short Cuts to English 2* (96), turn *Romeo and Juliet* into a film script in *Master Plan 2- Teacher’s Book* (35) or write a letter to ones parents imagining that you are in Romeo or Juliet’s position in *Core English 2* (117).
Nevertheless, *Progress Gold B* almost marks the time when the tasks gradually start to develop. During 1995-2002 the tasks were individual and focused on questions of content and translations. *Progress Gold B* for the first time introduces group work and from that point forward the tasks are influenced by this kind of communicative work. Questions of content and language are still recurring, but other types of questions feature as well which allow the students to compare opinions about characters, themes, symbols and meanings of the excerpts. In other words, the textbooks gradually start to emphasise discussions and the students are encouraged to work together, whether in an “Act It Out” as in *Progress Gold B* (200) or via “Let’s talk” about love at first sight in *Core English 2* (116). The communicative tasks remain up until the last textbook, *Solid Gold 2*, where the students in groups should pretend to be news anchors and report the event in Hamlet as breaking news (228).

5 Discussion

While the section of analysis presented the findings of the study, this section will discuss the findings and speculate in terms of why such findings were found and what the findings may tell us by reflecting upon canonicity as well as the influence of the syllabus. The discussion will also include the hypothesis and whether it may be proven or disproven. Lastly the section will reflect upon what we can learn from this study and what the results tell us in a wider perspective.

5.1 Canonicity

Canonicity is a tricky business. A majority of people, historic and social events are some of the factors behind the making of categorisation of literature, and more importantly the division between good and great literature. The works of William
Shakespeare is without a doubt such great and canonical literature. With approximately 400 years in the grave the literature written by Shakespeare is still read and widely discussed.

Shakespeare begins the 20 year time period strong and the textbook writers, as mentioned make subjective comments about him being the greatest. Just like Dahl found in his study, the textbook writers place personal, subjective and even canonical value upon Shakespeare by referring to him in a certain manner (179). By placing Shakespeare in a certain category and labelling him as better than other authors, it is my belief that students will interpret Shakespeare as more important. This is something that Ryan found and was mentioned in Section 2, namely that students believe that Shakespeare is greater and because of that greatness they must like him in order to achieve a high grade. If textbook writers clearly state that Shakespeare is the best of the best, as Aerials did (85), the students will automatically perceive Shakespeare in such a way. This kind of attitude was furthermore mentioned by Ryan as she claims that teaching Shakespeare is a requirement for teachers (7-8) as well as noted by Eaglestone where a teacher claimed that students had to read Shakespeare because she herself when she was a student had to (63). Teachers must teach Shakespearean literature and textbook writers claim that Shakespeare is above all other authors, i.e. the canon of Shakespeare secured. Students may not necessarily agree with this view, but by appearing to enjoy Shakespeare they will also be perceived as more educated than those who claim not to like Shakespeare. Textbook writers proclaim Shakespeare to be among the best and Eaglestone claims that there is a great worth in Shakespearean literature, both in form and content (64-65) then students who wish to achieve high grades and people in general who wish to be well-educated will admit that Shakespeare is the very best because society says so. My own opinion on the matter is that students are not given any choice to reflect honestly, because they are in one form or another told
that Shakespeare is the best and are not given any room to contradict that belief.

However, sometime during the 20 years Shakespeare is reduced in order to make room for other authors, such as Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Mary Shelley and Daniel Defoe. In addition the attitude towards Shakespeare seems to change, as he no longer is referred to in a subjective tone, but rather an objective one. In other words, Shakespeare’s role has changed, but he is still featured in the textbooks and he is often the first author mentioned which still indicates that his status remains. Furthermore I myself interpret this change as something good because by removing all personal and canonical judgement in the textbooks the students will have a freedom to express their true feelings without feeling that they do something wrong. The students will feel that it is much more okay to express a dislike towards Shakespeare without that being wrong and thus discussion will grow far more interesting and analytical as the students genuinely can discuss the artistic and aesthetic form along with content as is expressed by Eaglestone (64-65). The students can truly discuss and compare their views about the texts and express why they think like they do which will be a much more rewarding discussion.

In conclusion in the matter of Shakespeare and canonicity it has been noted that Shakespeare is a noticeable canon in the textbooks. Despite his changing role in the more recent textbooks Shakespeare remains which is a testament to his canonicity. Shakespeare could easily have been exchanged during the 20 years but he has remained, though how he remains may have altered. My explanation and conclusion to this changing attitude and role of Shakespeare lies in the syllabi and their ever-changing nature, which will be discussed in the following subsection.
5.2 Influence of syllabus

The previous subsection discussed the matter of canonicity. The results indicated a change in the textbooks in terms of selection of texts, tasks as well as the role of Shakespeare himself. It was observed that Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet are the two most popular plays, though they are popular on different occasions throughout the 20 years. The results also showed that while the earliest textbooks emphasise individual tasks focusing on language and content, the more recent textbooks emphasise communicative exercises. The reason behind all these changes I believe can be viewed in the two syllabi and their construction as it is the opinion of Lundahl (357-58) and Ullström (120) that the textbook is a concretised version of the syllabi. Due to this notion this subsection will discuss the influence of the syllabi on the textbooks.

5.2.1 The Shakespearean material and the syllabi

The thirteen textbooks included 40 different excerpts from twelve different texts by Shakespeare. Of these twelve texts Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet was the most popular. During the 20 years the two plays have, as previously mentioned, been in competition for the first position. There are a number of reasons why these particular plays have been selected to use in the textbooks. It could be because of a general belief that the plays are the best written by Shakespeare. It could also be that the two plays are particularly well-suited in a teaching situation and that students can gain much by reading them due to the many themes expressed or because that students easily can relate to the stories. A third belief as to why the two plays are likelier to occur than any other play by Shakespeare lies in the nature of the syllabi. If Lundahl and Ullström are correct in their assumptions then the textbooks are modelled after the syllabus which further would indicate that content and structure in the textbooks are based upon what
the syllabus emphasises. The first syllabus, Lpf94 was active between 1994-2011 which means that it was active during the first reign of popularity of *Hamlet* and the whole reign of *Romeo and Juliet*. The syllabus says that students should be able to “read, summarise and comment upon content in longer literary texts” (“Ämne – Engelska”). In the middle of Lp94 *Hamlet* is replaced by *Romeo and Juliet* in the textbooks and the reason for this is somewhat unclear. Perhaps the answer could be that textbook writers felt that new material was necessary or perhaps the media could have something to do with it as a modern film adaption of *Romeo and Juliet* was released in 1996 and it quite possible that it could take some years before the film found its way into Swedish schools. Nevertheless *Romeo and Juliet* replaces *Hamlet* in *Progress Gold B*, but the change that occurs in 2012 and *Hamlet* is once more the most popular play. This change is a bit more logical as the current syllabus, Lgy11, was published in 2011 and differences between this one and Lpf94 can be seen. Lgy11 states that students should discuss “opinions, ideas, experiences and feelings; ethical and existential issues” (60, my translation). It is important to note that no such aim is mentioned in Lpf94. It is likely that with the new syllabus’s needs *Hamlet* fit better than *Romeo and Juliet*. For instance, with the Lgy11 excerpts from *As You Like It* and *The Merchant of Venice* could be found alongside *Hamlet* in the textbooks. These three different plays and the excerpts chosen to represent them could be a gateway to discuss issues of racism, right and wrong, life, death and love in a more suitable manner than *Romeo and Juliet* could. Despite some of those themes being found in *Romeo and Juliet* as well, my belief is that the textbooks aim to target a new perspective on the issue. It is no longer simply about teenage love, but something wider that has to do with the world, globalisation and how people treat other each other. Lgy11 notes in the aim of English that globalisation is an important part of the subject and that students should learn about different ways of living (“Ämne – Engelska”).
5.2.2 The tasks and the syllabi

The Shakespearean texts have varied and the tasks have changed. In Aerials the students are asked about the plot to Hamlet and are asked to analyse the Shakespearean language found in various plays (120 and 80-81). The tasks in the earliest textbooks focused on precisely this, language and content and above all the textbooks indicated individual work. While language and content remain popular themes even in the most recent textbooks, the methods to perform these tasks have changed. The students very rarely work alone, but group work and communication are being emphasised and encouraged, such as in Solid Gold 2 where the students should perform a news cast based upon the events in Hamlet (228).

The oldest textbooks are characterised by questions. The questions that Ullström call content-oriented questions (122-24), which Lundahl refers to as factual questions (363) are typical. Lpf94 clearly states concerning literature that students should be able to “read, summarise and comment upon content in longer literary texts” (“Ämne – Engelska”, my translation). These content-oriented factual questions help reach that aim. Another type of question, which Lundahl calls vocabulary questions (363) is quite popular throughout the 20 years. That is in my opinion a natural task to have, as the goal with English teaching is to develop ones language skills. Vocabulary questions would help that aim by increasing the students’ vocabulary as well as understanding of the English language and how it changes, as Shakespearean language and modern English is a popular theme. The students are supposed to perform their tasks individually and no real opportunity is given so that the students could communicate, because the syllabus does not appear to emphasise oral language use.

In Short Cuts to English 2 the students are given questions to Sonnet 18 (99) that Ullström would call questions of identification. These questions use themes
from the sonnet and emphasise the students’ own lives and reality. Furthermore these questions are used as a discussion, which means that the students are supposed to talk to each other. In *Progress Gold B* comes a change. This is the first time an “Act It Out” exercise is found, in which the purpose is for the students to work together. According to Lundahl communicative work increases the students’ understanding of a text and exercises where plays are adapted to the stage will help provide new perspectives to the plot (359-60). It is clear that in the communicative tasks are slowly but steadily starting to establish themselves in the textbooks.

With the release of *Lgy11* it is stated that the aim of English is to “develop an all-round communicative ability” (54, my translation). By studying English the students should develop their language and be able to use it in different situations and for different purposes. While content and language are still popular themes in the textbooks, the “Act It Out” exercise grows stronger. The students are asked to perform parts of plays on stage, and in *Pick and Mix* the students are supposed to first adapt chosen play to modern times and then perform it on stage (209).

Another result from *Lgy11* is the role of Shakespeare in the textbooks. From being the most dominant author in the older textbooks, Shakespeare’s role is reduced, especially after the publication of *Lgy11*. It is clear that Shakespeare in the older textbooks was labelled the greatest or even the only author mentioned, while the more recent textbooks have diminished that role and instead placed Shakespeare in the company of other authors. This reduction I believe can be related to the content of the syllabus. While literature is mentioned and present in *Lpf94*, it is different from how literature is emphasised in the current syllabus. *Lgy11* however, states that teaching should emphasise “authorship and literary periods” (60, my translation) as well as “contemporary and older literature” (60, my translation). *Lpf94* does have a similar aim, claiming that students should “have a basic understanding about English literature from
different periods” (“Ämne – Engelska”, my translation). This is perhaps not entirely clear in the older textbooks, as Shakespeare most often is highlighted, but with Lgy11 it is my belief that the textbooks aimed to provide diversity and so while Shakespeare still is present and still remains a canon, he is presented alongside other famous names.

Many questions and tasks have been featured in the textbooks during the 20 years. However, I cannot help but think that something is missing. According to Harmer most important question to ask (283-84), all the textbooks in this study fail to do so. Instead the textbooks use questions of interpretation, but the questions are quite controlled and focus on specific aspects in a text, such as Time as a symbol for death in Sonnet 116 in Blueprint 2.0, and do not allow the students to reflect independently. If Harmer is correct then the textbooks have truly overlooked one crucial question that would result in the students’ individual reader-response of a text.

5.3 What we can learn from this

First and foremost this study has analysed the use of Shakespeare in textbooks. The study furthermore has been able to analyse the use of Shakespeare in textbooks through 20 years, which brings us closer to the wider purpose of the essay and beyond Shakespeare. This study has been able to look at textbook design, content and tasks through 20 years which has provided some insight into how textbooks develop over time. Through the examination of the textbooks it is clear that textbooks progress with time and adapt to especially the current syllabus, but other sources as well, such as films and globalisation may prove to affect textbook writers. Shakespeare has been the centre of the study, the vessel if you will, which has enabled certain conclusions to be made. The material has varied over time in terms of literature featured by Shakespeare, as well as literature by other authors in history. However, the perhaps most important aspect is
that the study showed how didactical methods develop as the earliest textbooks focused on individual tasks and the most recent textbooks emphasise communication and group work. In conclusion the study showed that textbooks progress and move forward in terms of content and teaching methods.

6 Conclusion

This study has investigated the use of Shakespearean literature in textbooks targeting Swedish upper secondary school. Not only has the material of Shakespeare’s texts been at focus, but also the tasks associated with those texts. Furthermore the study has emphasised Shakespeare in textbooks through the last 20 years, i.e from 1995 up until 2015 in order to determine if any differences or even similarities can be detected in terms of Shakespearean material and tasks. The hypothesis for the study was proven partly correct as it was observed that only the most well-known pieces of literature by Shakespeare was found, i.e. *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Another aspect proven correct was the spread of Shakespeare himself and it was learned in the analysis that Shakespeare during the early stages of the 20 year time frame had a prominent and dominant role, often the biggest or even only author found in the textbooks, while he towards the end of the 20 years had reduced as other authors were featured as well. The matter of the actual tasks and assignments that the textbooks required the students to perform when working with Shakespeare proved to have had a slow, but still existent change throughout the 20 years, which was not assumed in the hypothesis. The analysis have shown a slow progress from individual work dealing with content and language, while newer tasks focus on communication while performing various types of tasks. The conclusions drawn based upon the findings have emphasised the influence of the
syllabus, as it is a common belief that the textbook is a concretised version of the
syllabus as well as Shakespeare’s canonical value.

For further studies in the area, it would be both interesting and advised to investigate
how the textbook is actually used within the classroom. While this particular study has
emphasised the textbook itself and its content and structure, it is possible that the use of
it in the classroom might differ. It would therefore be a good idea to compare the
textbook’s recommendations to work with Shakespeare and how he in practice actually
is used. In order to do so, textbooks would be once again analysed and it would also be
proposed to interview a small number of teachers.
References

Primary sources


**Secondary sources**


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