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EFL and the literary canon

Attitudes and practices in Swedish classrooms



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Abstract

The teaching of English as a foreign language in upper secondary school classrooms across Sweden is as self-evident as the school system itself, the subject being mandatory to a different extent across all programs. According to the curriculum, the use of English literature should be part of the courses, with the purpose of exposing the students to different types of written texts. The history of English literature stretches back for more than a millennium, hence offering a plethora of poetry, drama and novels for teachers to choose from. From this old and vast treasure, what dainty morsels are brought to the modern-day classroom? What reasons do teachers cite for such choices? This study intends to shed some light on these questions by means of interviews with practicing teachers along with a course book analysis.

The study revealed that the heritage of classic literature came from two primary sources, the exposure of classics during university studies and the books teachers read on their spare time. Both categories were integrated to various degrees in the classroom, in combination with course book contributions. Teachers generally found it challenging to engage students in reading older fiction; still, the teachers considered older literature to be a good tool when teaching English. Focus ranged from aesthetic qualities to critical analysis, but depended much on both what proficiency the student group possessed and what books were used. All teachers agreed that Swedish students' reading skills have steadily declined during their years of practice.

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1 Introduction

Within the Swedish upper secondary school system, the English language has a dominant position when it comes to learning a foreign language. It is mandatory for all programs and most students understand very well the importance of knowledge of and basic skills in English. It is a *Lingua Franca* to most Swedish citizens, without most of them knowing what a *Lingua Franca* is. The aim of teaching English is stated in the national curriculum for upper secondary schools as “students developing language and global knowledge in order to want and be able to use English in different situations and for different purposes” (Skolverket 2011 p. 53). The demands clearly indicate broadness in social and cultural contexts, performance and participation in meaningful and authentic activities to improve and hone the four basic skills, reading, writing, listening and speaking. Additionally, there are clear instructions within the overarching goals to include literature (p. 9), which is further emphasized in the English course descriptions (pp. 55, 60). With the aforementioned aims taken into consideration, the literature used would have to cover many different areas.

The goals and guidelines expressed by the curriculum and course plans are clear and logical when read, no formulation seems irrelevant or out of place. Considering how shortened and compressed the steering documents have been, compared to their 1970s counterparts, what they do not say is of more interest. If the purpose was to give teachers more room to adjust their teaching according to their own expertise and taste, then one would certainly be able to agree that the changes to a more sparsely formulated curriculum has done just that. When thinking in terms of English literature, there are no specific suggestions as to what works or authors should be included. With more than a thousand years of English literature from all corners of the world, there are endless options. In accord with Vygotskian theory, closeness in geography, time and other factors make it simpler for Swedish students to take in new sources of knowledge and information. How then, do teachers deal with English literature in their classrooms?

1.1 Previous research

In 2011, Ståhlberg conducted a study in which she interviewed teachers at upper secondary school about their use of literature in general within their EFL teaching. The results of this study showed, on the one hand, teachers to be in favour of using literature as a pedagogical tool, it being a great source for teaching the English language to students and something they

would like to have more time to integrate in their teaching. On the other hand, students' attitudes towards books and literature and low motivation were considerable problems along with the time constraints of the English courses themselves. Due to the many similarities between Ståhlberg's study and this one, it has been influential during the initial stages of this study.

Furthermore, there have been a number of bachelor's essays dealing with various aspects of literature, EFL teaching and attitudes. Edwards (2008) presented for instance suggestions on how to work with literature, arguing that classics and canonical literature are bad choices as they are not as easy for students to identify with, as opposed to newer, "popular" fiction.

In contrast to Edwards, Hansson (2010) wrote an essay in which she showed how one could work with English classic literature (Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* from 1813). Hence, whether or not classic literature suits the EFL classroom may be a matter of personal opinion to some extent. Bengtsson's study (2012) gives an example of how problematic certain literary classics (R.M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* from 1858) can be concerning dated views and opinions mediated through them. Articles by West (1987) and Glazier & Seo (2005) show further that working with literary classics and literature in general always runs a risk of excluding some students or making them feel alienated from the text.

1.2 Curriculum and course plans

As shown in a previously conducted study (Larsson 2014), the explicit guidelines of Swedish steering documents have shrunk in size considerably since the curriculum of the 1970s. From having two different curriculae (Skolöverstyrelsen 1971 and 1973), depending on the length of the program (2 or 3-4 years respectively), to one (Lpf 94 followed by GY 2011) (Skolverket 2000 and 2011), there has also been a move away from solely subject directives to both subject and course directives, where each course has its separate paragraphs on what types of literature to include. In practice, the later courses expand the time span from which teachers are supposed to bring in literature. As a consequence, the demands on working with literature are higher for students taking 2 or 3 courses at school than those who only take the basic course.

1.3 Approaches to reading and working with literature

There are essentially two approaches to literature. On the one hand we have the aesthetic/romantic view of literature and on the other a critical theory-based sociology of literature. The aesthetic view focuses its analysis on message, form, vocabulary, and the experience of great art, a “canonical strangeness” (Bloom 1995 p. 3). The critical theory-based sociology views literature as a tool for understanding the world and takes on many forms depending on what perspective the critic reads from. Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial positions are among the most common, but there are many more (Peck & Coyle 2002 pp. 177-221). Both aesthetic analysis and critical theory analysis are included in the school curriculum as skills to be obtained, albeit not described in such exact terms (Skolverket 2011 p. 9).

1.4 Aims

The above-mentioned studies have either discussed literature in general terms or certain books, specific literature-based classroom projects or consciously narrowed critical analyses on literature. What this study seeks to investigate is the actual use of classic or canonical literature in the EFL classroom, along with mapping out the thought process in connection to the subject. When working with classic literature in the classroom, firstly, the teacher has to have some understanding of what “classic” literature is. Secondly, a purpose for bringing in such literature must be clearly motivated both for oneself as a teacher and for the students. Thirdly, the teacher must give the students tasks that are both feasible and rewarding in their learning of English.

The research questions explored in this study are therefore as follows:

What works do Swedish EFL teachers consider to be classic literature?

How is classic literature used in school?

What factors form teachers’ views on classic literature?

This study hopes to shed some light on an area of the teaching of English literature which some teachers may be reluctant to delve too deeply into within the confines of education. The research questions are the basis for six teacher interviews and for the questions asked during these interviews, in an effort to obtain spontaneous answers from practicing teachers. In addition to these interviews, course books used will be surveyed in order to reveal what literature is included and suggested that teachers should use in the classroom.

This paper begins with an account of what method and materials were used. After that there will be a result section where the data and information collected will be presented in order and in accordance with the above stated research questions. A discussion of the results will then follow, together with a concluding statement.

2 Method and material

The purpose of the study was to survey what works are considered classic literature (or canonical) in the eyes of practicing Swedish EFL teachers, which of these works are used in the classroom, and how and why are they used. Since this study explored both facts on teaching methods, the attitudes of the teachers and what authors and works were used, an exploratory sequential mixed method was used (Creswell p. 16). The collection of data was primarily done via qualitative interviews (p. 190), with complementary personal data collected via a short questionnaire. All interviewees were guaranteed full confidentiality before any data was collected and informed that they were free to leave the study at any given time. Since only a small group of teachers were interviewed, the results are not to be seen as a general truth, but rather as examples of contemporary thoughts and practices from some EFL teachers. As a result of the answers given during the interviews, an added quantitative survey (p. 12-13) of the various English course books used at the school was made to map out what works of literature were included in these books. The collected qualitative and quantitative data were then analysed together in a pragmatic fashion (p. 10-11).

2.1 Informants

The informants were a group of six teachers at the only public upper secondary school in an ordinary, mid-sized, Swedish town. These teachers represented a choice of convenience (p. 168), since the author was assigned to this school as a part of the teacher trainee program, therefore obtaining permission to carry out the interviews was not a problem. The six teachers were all actively teaching English to various extents within the courses English 5, English 6 and English 7. All of the interviewees taught in an additional subject for which they had a matching teacher's qualification, both for other languages and non-language subjects. Their ages ranged from 29 to 58 years old (average 42) and the gender was spread evenly within the group, giving three male and three female teachers. Four out of six teachers had themselves gone to school under the Lgy 70 curriculum and two under the Lpf 94 curriculum. All six

teachers had their teacher trainee education at university when Lpf 94 was in effect, and five out of six started teaching with it. One teacher commenced teaching as the GY 2011 curriculum was implemented. The teachers taught a mixture of theoretical and practical program classes. The teachers will henceforth be named teacher A through to F.

2.2 Interviews

The semi-structured case studies were conducted during February and March of 2016. When asking for permission from the teachers in question they received, on accepting the terms for the interview, a small list with the 10 questions that the interview would revolve around (Appendix A). These questions were formulated in as general and neutral terms as possible (p. 125) in order to provide a full picture, with certain questions being very much integrated with each other. This was done on purpose, so as not to miss any aspect of the overarching theme during the interviews. The questions were handed over to the teachers before the interviews, so as to let the teachers start thinking and preparing. The questions were deliberately neutral in terms of not specifically mentioning critical analysis categories such as gender or post-colonial in an effort to avoid leading questions (p. 9-10). Instead, each teacher was free to construct his or her own interpretation and meaning to the questions (p. 8-9). There was no expressed time limit for each interview on the part of the interviewer (time and place was always chosen by the interviewee), and the interviewer role was one of restraint, so as not to influence the interviewee's answers with outside opinions. Follow-up questions were added where the interviewee was asked to elaborate or clarify. The interviews were conducted in Swedish so as to make the thoughts and comments as spontaneous and honest as possible by not adding the aspect of having to grasp for the correct terminology in English unless the teachers themselves wanted to. In addition, the teachers were asked to fill in information about their age, gender and what curriculae they had experience of during their school years, university education and as practicing teachers. The audio was recorded and summarized as written transcripts (in Swedish) along with a quantitative summary of authors and books mentioned during the interviews. The choice of qualitative interviews over a quantitative questionnaire (which was the initial idea) was influenced by Ståhlberg's study (2011), which showed a great deal of in-depth detail of the thought processes of each teacher. This was deemed vital to understanding the intricate co-dependence of the many factors present in the classroom, and how it affects the choices teachers make.

2.3 Course books analysis

Following the interviews and the quantitative compilation of books and authors, an additional quantitative survey (p. 12-13) on course books was added. The course books were collected with the help of one of the teacher interviewees, who assisted in scouring the workspace of the other interviewees. A total of 11 course books were found. The books were sorted by year of release and results presented in the same fashion. Authors and works were compiled chronologically with notations on what format the works appeared in the course books. The idea to analyse course books came when the analysis of the interviews had already commenced, hence this part of the study suffered from a lack of proper preparation due to time constraints, and no previous study in the area was therefore brought in as a model. Therefore certain useful data, such as what course books were used by which teacher, was not collected. The consequences of this will be addressed further in the discussion section.

3 Results

This section will present the data collected from the interviews, each subsection corresponding to the previously stated research questions. After the interview-based results follows the course book survey.

3.1 How teachers envision the classics and canonical literature

Below is a table summarising what authors and works were mentioned during the interviews. The first question asked was: “What works/authors do you associate with the concept “English literary classic?” which explicitly asked for this information but, as the interviews proceeded, additional authors and works were mentioned. Two teachers mentioned “Shelley” but did not specify whether they meant Mary Shelley or Percy Bysshe Shelley, hence both are present in the table with equal amounts of “mention points”. In the case of Emily Brontë, she was mentioned twice as herself, and twice as the “Brontë sisters”, therefore she is counted as mentioned four times, while her two sisters are only mentioned twice. Mention points are only distributed the first time an author or work is mentioned during an interview. Hence, no author or work can acquire more than one point per teacher or six points in total. On occasion, the teachers mention authors and works which they do not include in their teaching practice, but these mentions are also included since they come to mind when discussing canonical literature as a concept, rather than the practice in the classroom. Included are also some

authors and works only mentioned during the interviews but not necessarily considered by the teachers to be canonical.

NAL = Nationality, M.P. = Mention Point(s)

| Author (birth-death) | NAL | M.P. | Work (year written) | M.P. |
|-----------------------------------|-----|------|--|------|
| Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400) | GB | 2 | <i>The Canterbury Tales</i> (1386-1400) | 1 |
| William Shakespeare (1564-1616) | GB | 6 | <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (1591) | 2 |
| | | | <i>Richard III</i> (1593) | 1 |
| | | | <i>Hamlet</i> (1599-1602) | 1 |
| John Milton (1608-1674) | GB | 1 | <i>Paradise Lost</i> (1667) | 1 |
| Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) | IE | 1 | <i>Gulliver's Travels</i> (1726) | 1 |
| | | | <i>A Modest Proposal</i> (1729) | 1 |
| William Blake (1757-1827) | GB | 1 | <i>The Chimney Sweeper</i> (1789) | 1 |
| William Wordsworth (1770-1850) | GB | 1 | | |
| Jane Austen (1775-1817) | GB | 3 | <i>Sense and Sensibility</i> (1811) | 1 |
| | | | <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> (1813) | 2 |
| Lord Byron (1788-1824) | GB | 1 | | |
| Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) | GB | 2 | | |
| Mary Shelley (1797-1851) | GB | 2 | | |
| Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) | US | 1 | | |
| Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) | GB | 1 | <i>Ulysses</i> (1833) | 1 |
| Charles Dickens (1812-1870) | GB | 5 | <i>Oliver Twist</i> (1838) | 2 |
| Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) | GB | 2 | | |
| Emily Brontë (1818-1848) | GB | 4 | | |
| Anne Brontë (1820-1849) | GB | 2 | | |
| Mark Twain (1835-1910) | GB | 2 | | |
| Kate Chopin (1850-1904) | US | 2 | <i>The Story of an Hour</i> (1894) | 1 |
| Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) | IE | 1 | <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> (1895) | 1 |
| Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1939) | GB | 1 | <i>Sherlock Holmes</i> series (1887-1927) | 1 |
| | | | <i>The Hound of the Baskervilles</i> (1901-02) | 1 |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|----|---|---|--------|
| Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) | US | 2 | <i>The Yellow Wallpaper</i> (1892) | 2 |
| Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) | GB | 1 | <i>Brave New World</i> (1932) | 1 |
| F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) | US | 1 | <i>The Great Gatsby</i> (1925) | 1 |
| William Faulkner (1897-1962) | US | 1 | | |
| Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) | US | 4 | <i>The Snows of Kilimanjaro</i> (1936) <i>The Old Man and the Sea</i> (1952) | 1 1 |
| John Steinbeck (1902-1968) | US | 1 | <i>Of Mice and Men</i> (1937) | 1 |
| George Orwell (1903-1950) | GB | 5 | <i>Animal Farm</i> (1945) <i>1984</i> (1949) | 2 3 |
| Roald Dahl (1916-1990) | GB | 1 | | |
| Ray Bradbury (1920-2012) | US | 1 | <i>Fahrenheit 451</i> (1953) | 1 |
| Harper Lee (1926-2016) | US | 2 | <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> (1960) | 2 |
| Joyce Carol Oates (1938-) | US | 1 | <i>Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?</i> (1993) | 1 |
| Suzanne Collins (1962-) | US | 1 | <i>The Hunger Games</i> (2008) | 1 |
| J.K. Rowling (1965-) | GB | 1 | <i>Harry Potter</i> series (1997-) | 1 |

From this table one can establish that male authors were mentioned almost twice as often as female ones (41 male and 22 female). The most common authors were William Shakespeare (mentioned by all 6 teachers), Charles Dickens and George Orwell (mentioned by all but one), Emily Brontë and Ernest Hemingway (4 out of 6), and Jane Austen (3 times). Between 7 and 17 authors were mentioned, with a mean of 10.5 authors per teacher interviewee. Female teachers had a ratio of 44.6% female authors while male teachers had a ratio of 21% for the same category. Of 33 authors mentioned, 20 were from Great Britain (61%), 2 from Ireland (6%) and 11 from the United States (33%). 29 works were mentioned in total, George Orwell's *1984* was mentioned the most (3 times), other works only mentioned once or twice. Emily Brontë, despite being mentioned 4 times, had no specific work mentioned in connection with her.

As to where the break between old (canonical) classics and new/modern classics occurred, teacher answers ranged from the break of the 20th century up to the 1920s and the pre-Ernest Hemingway era. Teacher B had a reference to the time where he started reading

himself as the era of modern classics (the 1960s), and everything written prior to that time were old classics.

3.2 The practice of classics and canonical literature in the classroom

In order not to obstruct the clarity of the accounts, this section will be divided into one separate section per teacher interviewee.

3.2.1 Teacher A – Short, colourful and dystopic

Teacher A preferred poetry and small excerpts when working with the oldest material in his repertoire, which were William Shakespeare and Geoffrey Chaucer. Shakespeare was touched upon through various poems and *Romeo & Juliet*; Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* was only sometimes mentioned and shown "because this is important". William Blake's "The Chimney Sweeper" was an old personal favourite which was brought into the classroom suitable for discussions on child labour. Works by Ernest Hemingway were considered a suitable level of difficulty and therefore used on occasion. Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" were used to show women's situation during the 19th century; the teacher also considered them to be written with a sense of brilliance and timelessness, which rendered them classic in his view.

On the more modern side, the teacher sometimes used themes and multiple books, one being dystopia-themed novels, which would include Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, George Orwell's *1984*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* along with recent additions such as Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*. Students read different books during a period of time to do concluding theme-based work; however this required a lot more input from the teacher, if relevant study questions were to be prepared for all books used.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* gave a good description of past contemporary society but was not very often used due to it being "heavy as lead" to read, and students in general can not bear to read through 150-300 pages. This caused the teacher to work more with short excerpts from typical works from certain literary periods, often chosen from what is presented in the course books or what works were processed during the literature courses at university. Time constraints also come into play, all epochs had to be surveyed quickly to fit into the course plans and to give a broad presentation and all-around knowledge of English

literature. Works like Shakespeare's *Richard III* or Lord Tennyson's *Ulysses* would not be used, since the teacher saw them as too challenging for students overall. Charles Dickens was also left out in favour of Romantic authors.

The latest movie adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* from 2013 was sometimes used, but the teacher felt that using the movie instead of the book caused a loss of the past; it is no longer a product of the time the book was written, but something else. Students tend to focus on the visual aspects rather than the language or dialogue, and the movie lacks the nuances and narrative of the book. The teacher would not use Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* movie adaptation from 1995; he said the students would react with "they're wearing old clothes", "it's too much grey, we don't wanna watch" and lose interest quickly.

When it came to the analysis of literature, Teacher A preferred form analysis, aesthetics, language and message to critical analysis such as postcolonial or feminist. He thought that students did not have the tools to make any deeper analyses and that their attempts, more often than not, ended up as purely subjective opinions without any real justification. He did not lessen the importance of critical analysis, but the students' reading habits just did not lend any room for such tasks, he felt that his students generally had no interest in spontaneous reading at all. He still felt that he managed to engage his students in reading activities in class and get them to understand and discuss the works, and have them feel the satisfaction of successfully reading books.

3.2.2 Teacher B – Lectures and the challenges of modern technology

Teacher B used Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and some novel by Charles Dickens, usually *Oliver Twist*. He also used excerpts from various Shakespeare works such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*. Among newer works were *1984* and *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. On occasion he had also done a lecture-styled project where he presented the history of English literature from Geoffrey Chaucer and onwards. He assigned various authors to the students, which they had to research and present to their classmates. With namedropping and discussion of references to modern day culture his goals were to bridge the gap between past and present, and show his students that new culture may very well be revamped and modernised old culture.

The teacher often used extracts from works when discussing with the class, if for example some extract from a course book created interest, he would pick up and expand on that. He let the students pick and choose books from what the school had to offer, since few books had enough copies to suffice for a whole class. The use of e-books enhanced this aspect of teaching in recent years; physical copies are not always the issue anymore. Books the teacher read himself during the school years also came into consideration. When recommending books to students, it was a balance between what the teacher thought are important works and authors and what he believed each student managed to read, according to their individual reading skills. He said that it is hard to keep track of each student's reading skills and make sure that they do not give up on their reading assignments. Poor readers are not just poor when it comes to reading classic literature, but they are poor readers in general.

When assessing his students, the teacher preferred oral discussions individually or in groups to written reports, since he seemed to be aware of various methods students used to plagiarise and avoid doing their written assignment properly. Even if he saw movies as a potential risk for students to fast track past a reading assignment, he did see the positive boon of films such as the 2005 *Pride and Prejudice* adaptation. It is a good way to expose students to "beautiful English" and a chance to watch the kind of movies they would not normally come across.

According to Teacher B, literature is a good tool when teaching English, but required a lot of time. Depending on the course, he felt he is able to work more and more with literature the further up he teaches. His focus is on aesthetic qualities and language was important to him. He wanted his students to be exposed to written and spoken forms of "real" and "well spoken" English. He was of course aware that the curriculum pushes for critical analysis also, but thought that there is room for that within his teaching, even if he focused more on the aesthetic side.

3.2.3 Teacher C – Themes, pedestals and pleasurable reading

When teacher C does an English 5 course, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* was a recurring book, due to its accessible language and the possibilities to gradually work on different levels, from concrete interpretations to deeper political analysis. Orwell's *1984* is another suitable book for this course, with its connection to current discussions about surveillance and social injustice. Additionally, he used crime fiction such as Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* series and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, but even with such themes it is hard to get the

students hooked initially, they are reluctant readers and always request concrete thoughts and ideas beforehand on how the reading tasks are thought to proceed.

On the follow-up courses, English 6 and 7, the teacher used a lot of short stories, Mark Twain and the Norton anthologies of English and American Literature. Ernest Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" is used due to its clear theme and interesting questions raised. The teacher was often surprised by some students' ability to draw advanced conclusions beyond his expectations. With Shakespeare it is more difficult, since he felt that his students normally deem old literature automatically to be "old crap". Yet he tried to present universal themes even from these works and have students work with the interpretation of the message to prepare them for future reading of debate articles, newspaper leaders, "alternative" media and other sorts of obviously angled or skewed texts. The teacher was surprised, however, that his students did not show any real proficiency in, or previous knowledge of, critical reading from their years in elementary school; also the gap between the students' reading proficiency and the proficiency required for reading classics has widened during his years as a practicing teacher.

Teacher C felt that it is harder than before to get students to read and make them understand that reading good literature can be a pleasurable experience in itself. The role of books as history and storytelling devices has not as self-evident a status anymore, and movies and computer games are seen as equal or better for that. Forty or fifty years ago, literature stood on a pedestal, unquestioned, and in the future, the teacher doubted that classic literature would have such a clear role in education. But using works that he himself knew well, is the key to success along with good work material and clear tasks and hands-on leadership, not leaving students to read on their own too much. Teacher C repeatedly referred to the pleasurable experience of reading which is clearly an aesthetic view of literature, but within teaching he very much preferred the critical analysis if he had to choose, this stance is something he has maintained since his literature courses at university. What he would like to see is possible cross-subject collaboration, for example with the Swedish courses, to be able to place the works in a historic context. The English courses have so much more than literature, hence time is insufficient for all things literature-related that he would like to include.

3.2.4 Teacher D – Student influence and altering practice

When teacher D chose her classic literature, it depended on what type of group of students she had, but she also allowed for students' wishes to influence her choices. She liked to switch between different ways of working with literature, both for her and her students' enjoyment. To what extent literature is used also differs from one group to another. Also when choosing how to work with literature, students were given the opportunity to have their voices heard. Select passages from novels were subject to close reading, interpretation and discussion. Sometimes there were general presentations on authorship, skimming of multiple works, content, language and style, sometimes in connection to periods of time in order to be able to place authors in different movements. When whole novels were read, logbooks were used for recording thoughts and ideas, but always in connection to tasks decided by the teacher. When students read different books, it was followed by cross-presentations.

The teacher liked to change her teaching methods often, both for the students' and her own sake, in order not to grow tired of her own teaching and maintain an enthusiasm that she hoped would rub off on the students. Giving her predetermined options of books and work procedures for the students to choose from creates a level of influence over the classroom work, which helps the approach to working with classic literature. Generally, students' increased unfamiliarity with reading fiction resulted in a shift from novels to short stories, but also time constraints come into play, along with her perception that, over the fifteen years she has been practising the profession, students do not spend as much time on homework as they used to along with having less previous knowledge. She wanted the students to feel that they have the chance to actually be able to finish the books within what the students consider to be a reasonable time and effort.

Even if she did not exclude classic literature automatically, she felt that newer literature is more easily accessible and joyful to the students, and she believed that forcing students to read classics caused them not to learn as much as they would if reading more favourable literature. Modern literature may act as a gateway to classic literature and not to have literature at all would feel strange to the teacher. She thought it important for fantasy, empathy and expanded ways of thought.

Teacher D believed both aesthetic and critical analytic approaches were important, but that students need help to be able to make proper analyses. Also they have a hard time expanding their understanding of reading as more than just something one would do for entertainment value. Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* and *Gulliver's Travels* work for

such analyses even if the older style of writing may cause problems for some students. George Orwell is frequently read and allows for students to feel a sense of familiarity. When comparing to her second subject, Swedish, she saw a lot of similarities, the unfamiliarity with reading fiction, which causes a limited vocabulary. Students feel safe in their use of colloquial spoken English, but more formal speech becomes challenging and tedious.

3.2.5 Teacher E – Feminism and meta-discussions

Teacher E usually brought up Shakespeare in her class, talked about his life, and let the students read a few sonnets and extracts from the plays. She would have liked to bring in a whole work, but feared this may be too challenging for the students. Other than Shakespeare, the choices for teaching literature were mixed and sporadic due to the lack of class-sized numbers of copies of most books. George Orwell's *1984* and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* are a few of the books in circulation. Especially during English 6 courses she tried to fit in a proper classic book, depending on what she could find. Further, she went through assorted epochs, the Renaissance, Elizabethan theatre, the Romantic era and some of its poets. The students picked a classic of their own choice (from choices presented to them by the teacher), usually with follow-up discussions of aesthetic qualities, ideas, themes and meta-discussions as to why this book has become a classic and lived on since the time it was written. The students read mostly for content, so she had to help them out quite a lot with the aesthetic qualities. She tried to steer their choices of literature to works she has read herself, but at the same time admitted that it is a challenge to find the time to read new fiction.

A reason for presenting classic literature to the students was to give them some common knowledge within the area, but generally it is hard to get the students to read. If her students were to read one book per term, she would consider it a success on her part since students normally demand long time spans in which to finish a book. Film adaptations sometimes replace reading of books because of this, but can also function as an interest-raiser for reading the book, for instance *The Great Gatsby* (2013).

When choosing books, teacher E picked from famous authors available at the school, her own personal references, but she also deliberately tried to bring in a fair amount of female authors for gender equality reasons. She felt that reading classic literature and reading (books) overall was great for teaching English, and she wished the school would buy more books for the students to read, but at the same time commented that such a thought would label her as retrogressive in the eyes of others.

Teacher E thought aesthetics and critical analysis were both important, but leaned a little more towards the latter: what students make of a story and if they are able to identify with them. How do society and the time show themselves in the text? Such questions were often discussed in smaller groups. The ability to make analyses of this kind differs a lot between both classes and students. The teacher also called for improved and more positive reading habits in elementary schools and homes alike, in order to make reading fiction something students do not just do because it is demanded of them in class.

3.2.6 Teacher F – Movie adaptations and individualised reading

Teacher F touched upon lots of works in her teaching, but not very deeply. The course book had some Charles Dickens excerpts, and she brought in assorted sonnets by Shakespeare but never complete works, since they are too difficult. The movie *Shakespeare in Love* was used to give the students some feel for the times when William Shakespeare lived and worked, even if the story itself is pure fiction. Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* was used to present the Victorian epoch, here the 2005 movie adaptation also came in handy since most students do not know of the original book or have read it, not even in Swedish. But this work was only used if the students have a fair level of reading proficiency. Poetry, by Lord Byron among others, was discussed in larger groups due to the difficulty students generally have with reading and understanding it.

For English 6 she used 20th century literature such as John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and personal favourites such as Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* or Joyce Carol Oates' *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?*, but the latter books, she normally only suggested to students deemed able to read them, since the level of reading skills within classes always differs greatly. How students perceive works also differs from time to time, causing the teacher to value the works not so much by her own opinions but how well students like them. There has been a gradual change over the past 10-15 years, along with a general decrease in non-vernacular vocabulary and reading. Everyday conversational skills are good but written production seldom reaches these levels.

Teacher F thought that classic literature is a good tool for teaching, but troublesome due to the students' general inability to appropriate older texts. For example she would never use John Milton's *Paradise Lost* just for the sake of it being an old classic, nor would she bring in personal favourites such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* only for the sake of increasing students' reading skills, without appropriation there would be no point in reading, she reasoned.

Both aesthetics and critical analysis were of value when teaching literature, but the analyses are perhaps more appropriate for advanced courses such as English 7, the teacher reckoned. She believed the ability to analyse literature properly improved with age and that the time restraints of the courses did not allow the amount of literature work she would wish. A proper course focused solely on literature analysis would be something the teacher would like to conduct with her students.

3.3 Why teachers define classics and the canon the way they do

When the teacher interviewees recall their own English education at school and what works of classic literature they encountered, most of them had no or very sparse recollection of any specific works of classic literature being used. William Shakespeare and Charles Dickens were recalled, as well as 20th century author Roald Dahl. Teacher A recalled reading William Blake outside of school, something that impacted on his practice in the classroom, but at school he never read anything written before the 1950s. Teacher B thought that many of the works that he used in his teaching were the same as when he went to school. Teacher C remembered his reading as fragmentary, especially in contrast to reading Swedish classics in the old Swedish B literature course. Teacher D remembered excerpts from course books, but no specific works or authors. Teachers E and F could not recall classic literature being used at all when learning English at school.

Teachers A and C recalled the time at university as influential on their views of what classic literature is. The books worked with as part of the university courses had stayed with them, the “archetypes” from certain movements. Teacher F mentioned that she worked with the same book for 20 years, a book that was introduced to her during her university years. But also works and authors included in the course books they use with their students strengthened those views. Teacher B said the way he looks at literature and classics is a little like a “heritage”. Recurring descriptions of classic literature are “common knowledge”, big questions and recognizable themes.

3.4 Course books survey

Since all six teachers mentioned course books, short stories and excerpts as factors in the way they use literature in their teaching, this brought the need to survey what these course books

contain. When revisiting the school in question, a total of 11 books were collected, which were in use to various extents within the classrooms. They dated as far back as 1996 up to 2014, hence stretching across both the Lpf 94 and the GY 2011 curriculae, and all courses (English A and B for Lpf 94, and English 5, 6 and 7 for GY 2011) were covered. Non-fiction texts, such as news articles and related types were omitted from this survey.

3.4.1 Impact 3

Formats: Q = Quote, P = Poem

E = Excerpt (novels unless otherwise noted)

M = Mentioned, SR = Suggested Read, SS = Short Story

Authors/works in *italic* mentioned in in-depth interviews

| | | | |
|---|-----------|--|--------|
| <u>Title:</u> <i>Impact 3</i> (200 pages) | | <u>Publisher:</u> Almqvist & Wiksell (1996) | |
| <u>Course:</u> English B (Lpg 94) | | <u>Authors:</u> Christina Hargevik, Stieg Hargevik | |
| Author (birth-death) | NAL | Work (year written) | Format |
| <i>William Shakespeare</i> (1564-1616) | GB | <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (1591) | Q |
| <i>Alfred, Lord Tennyson</i> (1809-1892) | GB | <i>The Lady of Shalott</i> (1842) | P, (E) |
| Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) | US | <i>I Never Saw a Moor</i> (1890) | P |
| Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953) | FR, GB | Fatigue | P |
| Alan Paton (1903-1988) | ZA | <i>Cry, the Beloved Country</i> (1948) | M |
| | | <i>Debbie Go Home</i> (1960) | E |
| William Golding (1911-1993) | GB | <i>Lord of the Flies</i> (1954) | SR |
| Sidney Sheldon (1917-2007) | US | <i>Master of the Game</i> (1982) | E |
| Doris Lessing (1919-2013) | GB | <i>The Grass is Singing</i> (1950) | E |
| | | <i>The Children of Violence</i> series (1952-1969) | M |
| Nadine Gordimer (1923-2014) | ZA | | M |
| Alex La Guma (1925-1985) | ZA | <i>A Walk in the Night</i> (1962) | M |
| | | <i>The Stone Country</i> (1967) | E |
| Fay Weldon (1931-) | GB | <i>The Life and Loves of a She-Devil</i> (1983) | E |

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|----|----------------------------------|----|
| Adrian Mitchell (1932-2008) | GB | Celia Celia (1982) | P |
| Jenny Joseph (1932-) | GB | Warning (1992) | P |
| André Brink (1935-2015) | ZA | The Ambassador (1963) | M |
| | | A Chain of Voices (1982) | M |
| | | The Wall of the Plague (1984) | E |
| Jane Auel (1936-) | US | The Clan of the Cave Bear (1980) | E |
| Jeffrey Archer (1940-) | GB | Cheap at Half the Price (1994) | SS |
| Alice Walker (1944-) | US | The Color Purple (1982) | SR |
| Tom Clancy (1947-2013) | US | Debt of Honour (1994) | SR |
| Dave Barry (1947-) | US | Earning a Collie Degree (1988) | SS |
| Terry Pratchett (1948-2015) | GB | Reaper Man (1991) | SR |
| M.G. Vassanji (1950-) | CA | Leaving (1992) | SS |

Impact 3 was the oldest of the books and had a span of literary works between 1591 and 1994. It featured two authors also mentioned in the interviews. 4 of 21 authors were born before 1900. One chapter had a South African theme, where 4 South African authors were brought up. Other than that, all authors were from North America or Great Britain. The book contained 3 short stories, 7 novel excerpts, 5 poems and 1 quote. The pre-1900 authors were all represented with works of poetry under the header “Poems with Impact”, implying their lasting impression on literature, but not further described as such. Lord Tennyson however, was described as “one of the most successful and generally accepted poets” of his time, and was presented in connection with a larger theme on King Arthur, which in turn was presented both in a historic context and as a legend. The subsequent tasks were of a summarising and fact-finding nature. The authors, on occasion, suggested certain literary fiction to the reader for off-study reading.

3.4.2 Fair Play 1

Formats: P = Poem, E = Excerpt

Authors/works in *italic* mentioned in in-depth interviews

| | | | |
|---|-----|---|--------|
| <u>Title:</u> <i>Fair Play I</i> (184 pages) | | <u>Publisher:</u> Bonniers (1998) | |
| <u>Course:</u> English A (for vocational programs) (Lpg 94) | | <u>Authors:</u> Margaretha Oredsson, Ulla Martinson, Patricia Nilsson | |
| Author (birth-death) | NAL | Work (year written) | Format |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----|---------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Ernest Hemingway</i> (1899-1961) | US | <i>The Old Man and the Sea</i> (1952) | E |
| <i>Roald Dahl</i> (1916-1990) | GB | <i>Boy</i> (1984) | E |
| Eve Merriam (1916-1992) | US | TeeVee | P |
| David Bischoff (1951-) | US | Hackers (1995) | E |
| Miriam Hershenson | US | Husbands and Wives | P |

Fair Play 1 for English A did not feature many literary works, only 3 novel excerpts and 2 poems. However, two authors were also authors mentioned specifically by teachers in the interviews. All authors were from the US or Great Britain. Ernest Hemingway was introduced as a Nobel Prize winner, and connections between Hemmingway’s personal life and the excerpt from “The Old Man and the Sea” were made, such as the recurring concept of fear and his personal interest in fishing. Subsequent exercises were fact- and discussion-based. The excerpt from Roald Dahl’s autobiography *Boy* was only presented as an initial summary, and the author was not discussed at all as Hemingway was. The follow-up exercises focused on finding factual answers to questions in the text.

3.4.3 Route 21 Textbook A

Formats: P = Poem, E = Excerpt

SS = Short Story, F = Fable

Authors/works in *italic* mentioned in in-depth interviews

| | | | |
|--|-----|--|--------|
| <u>Title</u> : <i>Route 21 Textbook A</i> (238 pages) | | <u>Publisher</u> : Gleerups (1999) | |
| <u>Course</u> : English A (also adult education) (Lpg 94) | | <u>Authors</u> : Christer Amnéus, Britt-Marie Brovik, John Brovik | |
| Author (birth-death) | NAL | Work (year written) | Format |
| Aesop (620BC-564BC) | GR | The Tortoise and the Hare | F |
| Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) | GB | Robinson Crusoe (1719) | E |
| Agatha Christie (1890-1976) | GB | And Then There Were None (1939) | E |
| J.R.R. Tolkien (1892-1973) | GB | The Lord of the Rings (1954) | E |
| Dashiell Hammett (1894-1961) | US | The Gutting of Cuoffignal (1925) | SS |
| Nevil Chute (1899-1960) | GB | A Town Like Alice (1950) | E |
| William Golding (1911-1993) | GB | Lord of the Flies (1954) | E |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|--|---------|
| <i>Roald Dahl</i> (1916-1990) | GB | The Last Act (1965) Going Solo (1986) | SS E |
| Brian Friel (1920-2015) | IE | Mr. Singh and My Heart's Delight (1960) | E |
| Ruth Rendell (1930-2015) | GB | Live Flesh (1986) | E |
| Shirley Conran (1932-) | GB | Savages (1987) | E |
| Wole Soyinka (1934-) | NG, GB | Telephone Conversation | P |
| Richard Bach (1936-) | US | Jonathan Livingston Seagull (1970) | E |
| Seamus Heaney (1939-2013) | IE | Digging (1966) | P |
| J.M. Coetzee (1940-) | ZA, AU | Foe (1986) | E |
| Michael Crichton (1942-2008) | US | The Lost World (1995) | E |
| Buchi Emecheta (1944-) | NG | Gwendolen (1989) | E |
| Sue Townsend (1946-2014) | GB | Rebuilding Coventry (1988) | E |
| Terry Pratchett (1948-2015) | GB | Small Gods (1992) | E |
| John Agard (1949-) | GY | Stereotype (1983) | P |
| Alan Duff (1950-) | NZ | What Becomes of the Broken Hearted? (1996) | E |
| Kate Atkinson (1951-) | GB | Behind the Scenes at the Museum (1995) | E |
| Douglas Adams (1952-2001) | GB | So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish (1984) | E |
| Oupa Thando Mthimkulu (1953-) | ZA | Like a Wheel | P |
| Marika Cobbold (1956-) | SE, GB | Guppies for Tea (1993) | E |
| Michael O'Loughlin (1958-) | IE | Rock'n'Roll Death (2000) | E |
| Virginia Were (1960-) | NZ | Levuka (1988) | SS |
| Tom Holt (1961-) | GB | Expecting Someone Taller (1987) | E |
| Christine Usher | | Short and Sweet | SS |

Route 21 had a total of 30 authors featured, with 2 chapters focusing on Irish and African authors, respectively. The book featured many British authors, but only 2 American ones.

Although 6 authors were born pre-1900, only 2 works predated the 20th century, one a fable of ancient Greek origin. The majority of literary texts were excerpts (21), complemented by a few short stories and poems (4 of each). There were no initial presentations of texts or authors, but following the texts, there were minimal descriptive sections on occasion. Most questions on the texts were closed-ended, focusing on facts and comprehension of the content. There was additional web-based working material for this course book that was not explored.

3.4.4 Solid Ground 1

Formats: P = Poem, E = Excerpt

SS = Short Story, SUM = Summary, SR = Suggested Read

| <u>Title: Solid Ground 1</u> (304 pages) | | <u>Publisher: Bonniers</u> (2003) | |
|--|-----|---|----------|
| <u>Course: English A</u> (Lpg 94) | | <u>Authors: Fred Nilsson, Gunnar Svedberg</u> | |
| Author (birth-death) | NAL | Work (year written) | Format |
| Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) | GB | Treasure Island (1883) | SUM |
| Robert Frost (1874-1963) | US | The Road Not Taken (1916) | P |
| Richard Parker (1914-1990) | GB | The Wheelbarrow Boy (1950) | SS |
| Walter Macken (1915-1967) | IE | The Kiss (1969) | SS |
| Dick King-Smith (1922-2011) | GB | Godfrey's Revenge (1994) | SS |
| T.T. Cloete (1924-2015) | ZA | Disaster (1987) | SS |
| Ed McBain (1926-2005) | US | The Last Spin (1960) | SS |
| Henry Slesar (1927-2002) | US | Examination Day (1958) | SS |
| Dennis L. McKiernan (1932) | US | Darkness (1999) | SS |
| Roger McGough (1937-) | GB | Cinema Poem (1983) | P |
| Avi Wortis (1937-) | US | Talk to Me (1997) | SS SR |
| Robert Swindells (1939-) | GB | Stone Cold (1993) | P SR |
| Louis Sachar (1954->) | US | Holes (1998) | E SR |
| Ben Rice (1972-) | GB | Pobby and Dingan (2000) | E SR |

| | | | |
|----------------|----|---------------------------|---------|
| Dyan Sheldon | US | And Baby Makes Two (2000) | E SR |
| Marilyn Helmer | CA | The Porcelain Box (2001) | SS |

Solid Ground 1 did not incorporate any authors or literary works mentioned by the teachers, and the only pre-1900 work featured was a summary of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, and was used as a verb tense exercise, with no focus on the message of the story. Most works were short stories (9), but novel excerpts and poems were also featured (3 each). There were no presentations of the older texts in any way. The course book authors gave suggestions on further reading of some books featured.

3.4.5 Solid Ground 2

Formats: P = Poem, E = Excerpt

SS = Short Story, SR = Suggested Read

Authors/works in *italic* mentioned in in-depth interviews

| | | | |
|---|-----|---|---------|
| <u>Title:</u> <i>Solid Ground 2</i> (320 pages) | | <u>Publisher:</u> Bonniers (2005) | |
| <u>Course:</u> English B (Lpg 94) | | <u>Authors:</u> Fred Nilsson, Gunnar Svedberg | |
| Author (birth-death) | NAL | Work (year written) | Format |
| <i>Charles Dickens</i> (1812-1870) | GB | Hard Times (1854) | E |
| <i>Charlotte Brontë</i> (1816-1855) | GB | Jane Eyre (1847) | E |
| W. Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) | GB | Mr. Know-All (1924) | SS |
| <i>Ernest Hemingway</i> (1899-1961) | US | Hills Like White Elephants (1927) | SS |
| William E. Barrett (1900-1986) | US | Señor Payroll (1944) | SS |
| Samuel Selvon (1923-1994) | TT | Brackley and the Bed (1957) | SS |
| Ed McBain (1926-2005) | US | Nocturne (1997) | E |
| Ira Levin (1929-2007) | US | This Perfect Day (1970) | E |
| Ellen Gilchrist (1935-) | US | Revenge (1981) | SS |
| Roger McGough (1937-) | GB | Survivor (1979) | P |
| Gene Brewer (1937-) | US | K-PAX (2003) | E SR |
| Wendy Cope (1945-) | GB | He Tells Her | P |

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|--|----------|
| John Grisham (1955-) | US | The Testament (1999) | SS SR |
| Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (1956-) | IN, US | The Bats (1995) | SS SR |
| Jackie Kay (1961-) | GB | Attention Seeking (1994) | P |
| Ben Rice (1972-) | GB | Look at Me, I'm Beautiful! (2003) | SS |
| Kate Nivison | | Just Below the Surface (1993) | SS |
| Mil Millington | GB | Things My Girlfriend and I Have Argued About (2002) | E SR |

The second book in the *Solid Ground* series had a slightly broader time span, 4 pre-1900 authors, of which 3 were mentioned during interviews and their works were in form of excerpts and short stories. The two oldest texts, those by Charles Dickens and Charlotte Brontë, both had initial paragraphs explaining the times and places where the stories of the text were set. Following Brontë's text, it was mentioned that many Victorian readers deemed such texts as highly immoral. Many discussion questions were open-ended in character. The book contained 6 excerpts, 9 short stories and 3 poems. As with the previous book, certain works were namedropped as suggested readings.

3.4.6 Professional – The Book

Formats: E = Excerpt

| | | | |
|--|-----|-----------------------------------|--------|
| <u>Title:</u> <i>Professional – The Book</i> (240 pages) | | <u>Publisher:</u> Bonniers (2007) | |
| <u>Course:</u> English A (Lpg 94) | | <u>Authors:</u> Christer Amnéus | |
| Author (birth-death) | NAL | Work (year written) | Format |
| Nick Hornby (1957-) | GB | About a Boy (1998) | E |
| Bobbette Bryan | US | Pier (2004) | E |

Professional – The Book did contain many texts for the students to work with, 9 chapters with 3 texts each totals 21 texts, but only 2, both excerpts, were written by outside, literary fiction authors, during the latter part of the 20th century and beyond. Texts were only worked with from a glossary and questions for facts view. Texts were not presented in any way.

3.4.7 Context 1

Formats: E = Excerpt, SS = Short Story

Authors/works in *italic* mentioned in in-depth interviews

| | | | |
|--|-----|--|--------|
| <u>Title:</u> <i>Context 1</i> (336 pages) | | <u>Publisher:</u> Gleerups (2011) | |
| <u>Course:</u> English 5 (GY 2011) | | <u>Authors:</u> Svante Skoglund, Tony Cutler | |
| Author (birth-death) | NAL | Work (year written) | Format |
| Frank Sargeson (1903-1982) | NZ | A Great Day (1940) | SS |
| <i>Roald Dahl</i> (1916-1990) | GB | The Landlady (1960) | SS |
| Robert Barnard (1936-2013) | GB | Going Through a Phase (2004) | SS |
| Simon Hoggart (1946-2014) | GB | Don't Tell Mum (2006) | E |
| David Sedaris (1956-) | US | City of Angels (2000) | SS |
| Jeremy Clarkson (1960-) | GB | I Know You Got Soul (2004) | E |
| Malorie Blackman (1962-) | GB | Dad, Can I Come Home? (1990) | SS |
| Marian Keyes (1963-) | IE | Swinging London (2011) | SS |
| Arthur Bradford (1969-) | US | Mollusks (2002) | SS |
| Amanthi Harris (1970-) | LK | Red Sari (2003) | SS |
| Adam Bagdasarian | US | Going Steady (2003) | E |

Context 1 was the oldest of books written for the current curriculum (GY 2011) and was published in the same year as it was implemented (autumn of 2011). It contained post-1900 authors only, and only texts in the form of short stories (8) or novel excerpts (8). All authors but one were from countries where English is the official language (in Ireland only official in practise), and only one of the 11 authors was mentioned during previous interviews. All texts were followed by short informative sections called “Writers in Context”, where the authors were presented along with the featured texts and assorted other works. Following that were factual questions, reading between the lines questions and open-ended questions, called “Beyond the text”, where students were to connect the text to themselves.

3.4.8 Pick & Mix

| | | | |
|---|-----|---|--------|
| <u>Title:</u> <i>Pick & Mix</i> (224 pages) | | <u>Publisher:</u> Gleerups (2013) | |
| <u>Course:</u> English 5 (GY 2011) | | <u>Authors:</u> Simon Philips, Tove Philips | |
| Author (birth-death) | NAL | Work (year written) | Format |

| | | | |
|------|---|------|---|
| none | - | none | - |
|------|---|------|---|

This 10-chapter, theme- and skill-based course book had no texts by outside authors at all. Follow-up exercises were on glossary, multiple choice questions and reading between the lines discussions. The course book was structured on themes for each chapter, and on skills within each chapter, the latter allowing for students to easily put extra focus on certain skills if needed.

3.4.9 Worldwide English 5

Formats: E = Excerpt, SS = Short Story

| | | | |
|--|-----------|---|--------|
| <u>Title:</u> <i>Worldwide English 5</i> (374 pages) | | <u>Publisher:</u> Sanoma (2014) | |
| <u>Course:</u> English 5 (GY 2011) | | <u>Authors:</u> Christer Johansson, Kerstin Tuthill, Ulf Hörmander | |
| Author (birth-death) | NAL | Work (year written) | Format |
| Isaac Asimov (1920-1992) | US | Earth: Our Home Base (1988) | E |
| Gary Paulsen (1939-) | US | Battle Hymn One (1986) | SS |
| Michael Z. Lewin (1942-) | US | The Hand That Feeds Me (2002) | SS |
| Nick Hornby (1957-) | GB | Slam (2007) | E |
| Bruce Cameron (1960-) | US | 8 Simple Rules for Dating My Teenage Daughter (2001) | E |
| Barack Obama (1961-) | US | Dreams from My Father (1995) | E |
| Malorie Blackman (1962-) | GB | Jessica's Secret (2002) | SS |
| Mark Haddon (1962-) | GB | The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (2003) | E |
| Bali Rai (1971-) | GB | My Best Friend's Dad (2005) | SS |
| Chika Unigwe (1974-) | NG, BE | The Vision | SS |
| Elaine Sishton | GB | A Prawn in the Game (1998) | SS |
| Susan Costello | NZ | With Sincere Intent (2007) | SS |
| Judy Handel | | Noise! Noise! Noise! (2008) | SS |
| Archana Mohan | IN | The American (2009) | SS |
| Rachel Tucker | ZA | Thembi's Bicycle (2010) | SS |

| | | | |
|---------------------|----|----------------------|----|
| Lydia Vonwyler | GD | Sister Rose (2010) | SS |
| Mary Hooper | GB | Once Upon a Time | SS |
| Tai Dong Huai | US | Ankles | SS |
| Dev Kumar Vasudevan | IN | An Arranged Marriage | SS |

This course book contained 19 late 20th century and early 21st century authors, none mentioned during previous interviews. Formats included short stories (14) and novel excerpts (5). The book consisted of 25 chapters, each chapter started with a fiction or non-fiction text (only fiction authors and texts are listed). The texts were all presented through small fact sections, where facts about the authors and the texts were presented briefly. Follow-up work revolved around fact questions on the texts and open-ended discussion questions.

3.4.10 Worldwide English 6

Formats: P = Poem, E = Excerpt

SS = Short Story, SUM = Summary

Authors/works in *italic* mentioned in in-depth interviews

| | | | |
|--|-----|---|--------|
| <u>Title:</u> <i>Worldwide English 6</i> (406 pages) | | <u>Publisher:</u> Sanoma (2014) | |
| <u>Course:</u> English 6 (GY 2011) | | <u>Authors:</u> Christer Johansson, Kerstin Tuthill, Ulf Hörmander | |
| Author (birth-death) | NAL | Work (year written) | Format |
| <i>William Shakespeare</i> (1564-1616) | GB | Twelfth Night (1602) | E |
| Lucy Terry Prince (1730-1821) | US | Bars Fight (1746) | P |
| <i>William Blake</i> (1757-1827) | GB | You Don't Believe (1809) | P |
| <i>Jane Austen</i> (1775-1817) | GB | <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> (1813) | E |
| <i>Charles Dickens</i> (1812-1870) | GB | David Copperfield (1850) | E |
| Christina Georgina Rosetti (1830-1894) | GB | How Many Seconds in a Minute? (1893) | P |
| <i>Kate Chopin</i> (1850-1904) | US | The Kiss | SS |
| O. Henry (1862-1910) | US | The Gift of the Magi (1905) | SS |
| Robert Frost (1874-1963) | US | The Road Not Taken (1916) | P |
| Stevie Smith (1902-1971) | GB | Now Waving but Drowning (1957) | P |
| Frank O'Connor (1903-1966) | IE | First Confession (1939) | SS |

| | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------|--|-----|
| Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) | NG | Marriage Is a Private Affair (1958) | SS |
| V.S. Naipaul (1932-) | TT, GB | The Raffle (1967) | SS |
| Roger McGough (1937-) | GB | You and I (1982) | P |
| Joyce Carol Oates (1938-) | US | The Falls (2004) | E |
| Barbara Ehrenreich (1941-) | US | Nickel and Dimed (2001) | E |
| John Taggart (1942-) | US | Pastorelle 8 (2004) | P |
| Keith Devlin (1947-) | GB, US | The Maths Gene (2000) | E |
| Ian Rankin (1960-) | GB | An Afternoon (1984) | SS |
| Amy L. Chua (1962-) | US | Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother (2011) | E |
| Monica Ali (1967-) | GB | In the Kitchen (2009) | E |
| Rebecca Skloot (1972-) | US | The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks (2010) | SUM |
| Michael Williams | ZA | Red Sports Car (1997) | SS |
| Ruth Micka | AU | Land-locked (2005) | SS |
| Mary-Ellen Lang Collura | CA | Winners (2006) | E |
| Corinne Pentecost | AU | Synchronicity (2008) | SS |
| Tai Dong Huai | US | Thump (2009) | SS |
| Neluka Silva | LK | Our Neighbours (2009) | SS |
| Kachi A. Ozumba | NG | The Story of a Smile (2009) | E |
| Susan Maushart | US | The Winter of Our Disconnect (2010) | E |
| Carin Makuz | CA | You Got a Problem? (2012) | SS |
| Princeton Ebanks | JM | Caramel (2012) | SS |
| Rose Doyle | IE | Taking Pictures | SS |

Worldwide English 6 featured 33 authors in total, ranking it the most author-packed of all 11 course books in this survey. Nine of these 33 authors were born before 1900, of which 6 were mentioned during interviews along with 1 literary work which was mentioned by 2 teachers (B and E) during their respective interviews (Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*). The formats were short stories (14), novel extracts (11), poems (7) and 1 summary. All authors and texts

were presented in the same manner as in *Worldwide English 5* but most of these introduction prefaces were much longer and elaborated much more on both the authors' past lives and works. The older authors and their works were all placed within 5 succeeding chapters in the second half of the book. The discussions and questions ranged from fact-based to open-ended, as with the previous course book in the series.

3.4.11 Viewpoints 3

Formats: P = Poem, SS = Short Story

E = Excerpt (novels unless otherwise noted), PL = Play

Authors/works in *italic* mentioned in in-depth interviews

| | | | |
|--|-----------|---|--------|
| <u>Title:</u> <i>Viewpoints 3</i> (208 pages) | | <u>Publisher:</u> Gleerups (2014) | |
| <u>Course:</u> English 7 (also adult education) (GY 2011) | | <u>Authors:</u> Linda Gustafsson, Uno Wivast | |
| Author (birth-death) | NAL | Work (year written) | Format |
| <i>Percy Bysshe Shelley</i> (1792-1822) | GB | Ozymandias (1818) | P |
| Robert Frost (1874-1963) | US | The Road Not Taken (1916) | P |
| <i>Aldous Huxley</i> (1894-1963) | GB | <i>Brave New World</i> (1931) | E |
| Tennessee Williams (1911-1983) | US | The Glass Menagerie (1944) | PL, E |
| Margaret Atwood (1939-) | CA | Journey to the Interior (1964) | P |
| Stephen Hawking (1942-) | GB | A Brief History of Time (1988) | E |
| Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (1956-) | IN, US | The Palace of Illusions (2008) | E |
| Pietra Rivoli (1957-) | US | The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy (2009) | E |
| Mary Roach (1959-) | US | Packing for Mars: The Curious Science of Life in the Void (2010) | E |
| Neil Gaiman (1960-) | GB | Troll Bridge (1993) | SS |
| Dan Ariely (1967-) | US | The (Honest) Truth about Dishonesty (2012) | E |
| Christ Cleave (1973-) | GB | Little Bee (2008) | E |

| | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|----|
| Janette Turner Hospital | AU, CA, US | After Long Absence (1998) | SS |
|-------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|----|

The most recent course book in this study, *Viewpoints 3*, was the only book intended for the elective English 7 course. It features 13 authors, 3 of which were born before the 20th century and 2 of these mentioned in earlier interviews. One previously mentioned literary work was indicated, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. Along with an assortment of novel excerpts (7), poems (3) and short stories (2), there was also an excerpt from Tennessee Williams' 1944 play, *The Glass Menagerie*. Each text had a few general questions for the students to reflect on before they started reading, and after reading the questions were on analysis and interpretation. Some glossary exercises then followed and lastly, there were writing tasks based on the texts.

4 Discussion and analysis

4.1 Representation of epochs in interviews and course books

It is apparent that little has changed from the old 1994 curriculum to its current 2011 counterpart when comparing the authors featured in the course books. The books for the basic courses, English A for Lgy 94 and English 5 for GY 2011, generally only contain a few Modernist era authors from the late 19th century and onwards, along with a wide range of Post-Modern authors. For the English B and English 6-7 course books, the span widens back as far as the English Renaissance and Shakespeare, but there is greater focus on Romantic and Victorian authors. This mirrors quite well what literary periods are referred to by teachers, there is Shakespeare from the Renaissance, Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, Blake and Austen from the Romantic era, Dickens, Brontë, Tennyson and Wilde from the Victorian period, and somewhere during the Modernist era, teachers tend to namedrop certain authors (George Orwell and Ernest Hemingway) at a higher frequency than later in time, both in reference to what they use when teaching through literature and what they consider to be classic literature. The Enlightenment era sticks out as not being represented to any greater extent, the only author mentioned is Jonathan Swift, namedropped by teacher D, along with his perhaps most well-known works, *Gulliver's Travels* and "A Modest Proposal", both of which mocked the Enlightenment rather than favoured it. The lack of examples of authors in

favour of the Enlightenment ideals within both course books and the teachers' minds is interesting. The perceived breaking point between classics and modern classics seems to be somewhere during the Modernist era, according to the teachers in this study, with authors born in the late 19th and early 20th century. While the quality stamp of "literary classic" is not yet applied to Post-Modern or late Modernist works, it is not necessarily teachers devaluing the modern epochs of literature. Rather, the literary works of these epochs have not yet shown their ability to survive over time (Bloom 1995 p. 38), and being books worthy of being reread by both individuals and from one generation to the next (p. 30). There are proportionately still more Modernist and Post-Modern authors in course books for the later courses (B, 6 and 7) than pre-Modernist authors, but since no data were collected on what books were used and how by which teacher, there is no telling whether this is problematic or not. All teachers claim that time constraint of the courses is an important factor; hence one may assume that teachers have to pick and choose from the course books to some degree. But if so, what would those choices be? Would they pick solely from the older material or would they pick material representing the same Modernist and Post-Modernist eras featured in the books for the basic course? The curriculum does not explicitly say anything against the latter, but since time is scarce, would teachers still prioritize working with modern literature during the later courses?

4.2 Classics in practise

When working with literature in school, the reading of complete works appears to be a rare activity in general. This is due to time constraints and students' declining reading proficiency. And even if whole books were assigned to students, there would still be limits as to what teachers find it reasonable for their students to manage, one book per term, at most. But in combination with the time restraints and the demands of the follow-up courses to cover a multitude of literary epochs in addition to other skills such as speaking, listening, writing and grammar, it seems to be of low priority to have students read whole books as part of school work. Many course books for the later courses (B and 6-7) cover a lot of ground time-wise in the form of shorter texts, extracts, short stories and poems, however, teachers still seem eager to bring in their own choice of texts into their teaching.

Shakespeare, while being hard to work with, seems obligatory to incorporate to most, if not all teachers, and his *archetypical* (Peck & Coyle 2002 p. 145) status finds support across all disciplines of literary criticism (Bloom 1995 p. 24, Peck & Coyle 2002 p. 102) on the grounds of his unique writing style. George Orwell, a Modernist author at the younger end of

the literary classics time span, is mentioned almost as often and is considered both relevant and much easier to work with compared to Shakespeare, echoing what Edwards hints at in his study (2009 p. 8) Although Emily Brontë is mentioned the most of all female authors, Jane Austen is also mentioned along with specific works (*Pride and Prejudice*), which may indicate that she is in fact more often used in the classroom than Emily Brontë. One example on how to successfully use Jane Austen in the classroom is described in Hansson's essay (2011). The number of times an author is namedropped does not necessarily match how much that author is used in teaching, but rather shows his or her place within the personal literary canon of each teacher. Teacher E specifically picks certain female authors for gender analysis, and all teachers consider more modern literature to be more easily accessible and that appropriation is the key to student engagement (Edwards 2009 p. 7 and Hansson 2011 p. 7). Teacher B hopes that references in popular culture along with namedropping will help to raise an interest in literary classics. He wants to show the students that culture is recycled and reworked, and that not every new book or movie is as new as it seems.

Whether the aesthetic or critical analysis view is favoured comes down to each teacher. Most teachers consider both approaches to be relevant, but the latter seems the most challenging when it comes to students doing actual analyses. Teacher A refrained from doing this type of work with his students, because he thought the results were generally of poor quality, due to the students' lack of experience and schooling in such work. He was annoyed with something he described as "interpretations without limits", where anyone is allowed to interpret a text in any way imaginable without having to defend those interpretations. This would be a rather generous definition of literary criticism (Peck & Coyle 2002 p. 178) where all interpretations are equally relevant. The other teachers express similar views on students' poor abilities at critical analyses in general, but are still more open to having students work with literature in that way. Teacher B also clearly favoured form, but said there is room for both approaches. But the curriculum clearly states that both approaches should be a part of the literature studies in the classroom (Skolverket 2011 pp. 9-10). Very often teachers work through different themes, which may include also working with different books simultaneously.

Teachers often bring up the use of movie adaptations instead of books. One reason for this is to save precious time, which would otherwise be needed to read the corresponding books. It is also favoured by students, but only if the movies are pleasing to the eye. Old movies have a hard time, according to teachers A and B, so there must be some balance even when picking what movies to show in class. Teachers feel that movie adaptations are

sometimes the only way to expose students to older literary works that they would never have seen, and much less read, otherwise. Teacher B liked to expose students to beautifully spoken English and therefore favoured the use of movies. Teacher C explicitly pointed to a surprisingly big lack of pre-existing reading skills from elementary school in general, inflation of grades and a feeling that there are no incentives for teachers to hold students back until they have acquired the skills required for a passing grade.

4.3 Discrepancies in expectations and attitudes

In general, teachers paint a picture of general student resistance to reading fiction in general and old, literary classics in particular. The attitude towards fiction is proportionately more negative the older the literary work is. But even when students join the follow-up courses, where the course objectives specifically mention older fiction, they generally still have a hard time accepting the demands put on them. Even if teachers are clear about what the courses are supposed to include, and they themselves have a positive view of both the literature itself and its potential as a pedagogical tool, they are still aware of the fact that they will meet with resistance. In reality, this means that teachers want to be able to teach in a considerably more advanced and elaborate way than their students in general can manage, resulting in teachers being forced to present literature in less challenging ways.

4.4 Formation of a literary canon

When reflecting about their view of what classic literature and canonical works are, none of the teachers in this study had any real recollection of literature being read during their own time at school. The time at university however made a lasting impression, both when it came to specific books and how to work with them, showing that the heritage of literature studies courses is of lasting importance, something also mentioned by Bloom (1995 p. 15). But besides higher education, the only additions are some of those books the teachers have read in their spare time. The books in their personal canon are not works bearing undisputed truths but rather certainly aesthetic or thematic qualities that have left a lasting memory (Bloom p. 17 and Bengtsson pp. 7, 26).

5 Conclusion and pedagogical implications

From this study one can draw the conclusion that classic literature and canonical texts have an increasingly difficult time in the EFL classroom according to the teachers participating in this study. This very closely echoes the conclusions drawn in Ståhlberg's study (2011), even if her study focused on literature in general. With short stories, excerpts and poems, the teachers try to cover as much ground as possible and in ways accessible to students, especially in these days of continually decreasing reading skills. But if students are only presented with fiction in English in shorter text formats, how does this prepare them for the time when they are required to read longer (and non-fictional) texts in English at a higher level? To cover longer texts, teachers sometimes take help from movie adaptations. However, the transfer of literary works from text to film also changes what skills students train and develop. All teachers consider the poor reading proficiency of students in general to be an increasing problem for how they as teachers apply their classroom practise. Using movies instead of books means letting students avoid developing their reading skills, putting the focus on listening and viewing skills instead. With the current grading system, one skill may act as a disadvantage for the final grade of a subject. Another consequence of switching from reading may be that students in reality are not even taught to be better readers than what is required for a low pass grade for each English course. Teachers struggle to pass on to students what they themselves as teachers have learned of classic literature, both their own reading history and their university education.

Some of the teachers in this study wanted more trans-subject collaboration (primarily with Swedish and history) in order to raise the students' level of interest in English literature. By doing this, teachers would not have to start at square one every time they introduced an older text to the class. Hopefully students would be familiar with the theme or topic in some connecting way before. Teacher E ended her interview with an appeal where she urged elementary school teachers to develop children's curiosity about reading not just in connection to school, but also as a pastime. As with all skills, the earlier one starts practising them, the better. The task of fostering proficient readers would also include parents and guardians. Thus, the whole question of reading, both new texts and old, is interlinked at every level of the personal development of the students.

The ability to read is significantly correlated to the EFL vocabulary size, as shown in a recent study by Şen and Kuleli (2015). Therefore it would be prudent to closely monitor vocabulary size and reading skills from early school years, both in Swedish and later in

English. Projects such as “Läslyftet” should be an integral part of all Swedish schools and some type of testing on reading comprehension and vocabulary size should continually be used to measure the students’ progression in these areas. Furthermore, teachers must not lessen the difficulty on reading tasks or avoid them altogether, as is the case when using movie adaptations instead of books. When choosing literature, the increased difficulty of classic literature should be seen as a welcome challenge instead of an annoying obstacle, something teachers must clarify for their students. Learning is a progression, not a state. When using course books, teachers also need to be aware of what material is presented, so as not to use material equal to that of the English 5 course.

As mentioned, what literary material from course books is actually used in the classrooms (by the teachers participating in this study) has not been answered and could be an area for future studies. Also, since the correlation between vocabulary size and reading proficiency is well documented for EFL studies, it would be interesting to study the same factors on native Swedish students reading in Swedish, how they develop over time and what types of vocabulary benefit overall reading skills the most.

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Appendix

A - handout form:

Hej, detta är ett formulär där jag ämnar samla in lite personlig information som ska komplettera den intervju som kommer att äga rum. Intervjufrågorna berör attityder till och användning av litterära klassiker i engelskämnet i svensk gymnasieskola, vilket innefattar kurserna Engelska 5, 6 och 7. Självklart är ert deltagande frivilligt och kan när som helst avbrytas. Insamlad data kommer att vara anonymiserad både vid insamling och efterföljande presentation. Tack på förhand!

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Intervju nr: | |
|--------------|--|

Följande frågor utgör grunden för den kommande intervjun. Läs igenom och reflektera inför intervjun, för gärna anteckningar vid behov.

1. Vilka verk/författare associerar ni till begreppet ”engelska litterära klassiker”?
2. Vilka verk ur denna kategori använder ni i er undervisning?
3. På vilket sätt använder ni er av dessa verk?
4. Varför använder ni er av dessa verk på dessa sätt?
5. Vilka erfarenheter och faktorer inverkar på era val av engelska litterära klassiker?
6. Vilka åsikter och attityder har ni gentemot engelska litterära klassiker (både specifikt och generellt)?
7. Är användandet av engelska litterära klassiker ett bra medel inom engelskundervisningen?
8. Vilken erfarenhet har ni av engelska litterära klassiker från er egen skolgång?
9. Vilken faktor av engelska litterära klassiker anser ni är viktigast i undervisningen?
Den estetiska kvaliteten eller möjligheten till kritisk analys? Båda?
10. Har du något mer som du vill tillägga?

Inför intervju får ni väldigt gärna fylla i nedanstående information, vilket i kombination med intervjusvaren kommer att ligga till grund för min efterkommande analys:

| | |
|--------|------|
| Ålder: | Kön: |
|--------|------|

| | Lgy 70 | Lpf 94 | GY 2011 | Annan |
|---|--------|--------|---------|-------|
| Vilken läroplan var aktuell när ni gick I gymnasiet (eller motsvarande skolform)? | | | | |
| Vilken läroplan var aktuell när ni utbildade er till lärare? | | | | |
| Vilken läroplan var aktuell när ni började arbeta som lärare? | | | | |

| |
|--|
| Vilka fler ämnen undervisar ni i? |
| Vilka fler ämnen har ni utbildning inom? |

Kontakt:

*****@*****

*****_*****