Mediating Poetry in the ESL Classroom: A Study of Swedish ESL Textbooks for Secondary School

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Abstract
This article situates the ESL textbook within current scholarship on intermediality and multimodality and, with poetry as the main focus, considers how the media ecology within the covers of the ESL textbook, as well as that implied outside those covers, e.g. web pages, workbooks, audio files and so on, affects the literary text. This qualitative study of how poetry figures in the Swedish ESL textbook series *Wings* 7, 8, and 9 analyses the case of Emily Dickinson's poem "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died," included in *Wings 9*, at length to uncover the rich textual web of which a poem in a textbook forms part, as well as the resources it asks learners to mobilize in the emergent event of classroom learning.

The inclusion of poems in ESL textbooks typically requires no editorial interventions in terms of abridgement, which makes this genre useful for considering the implications of the medium on the text itself. Poems in ESL textbooks continuously interact with other texts, themes, images and tasks within the textbook. Thus, the medium of the textbook has a transformative effect on the original literary texts it comprises.
Keywords: poetry; ESL; textbook; intermedial; multimodal; literary studies

1 Introduction

As instructors teaching English as a second or foreign language, we habitually ask our pupils to handle various materials that are called upon as resources in the language classroom. For instance, and in an unremarkable and ordinary scenario, many of us probably ask our pupils to open their textbooks and read one of the many texts within its covers, sometimes silently, sometimes in pairs, sometimes in groups, and sometimes aloud in front of the whole class. While we often do specify what *kind* of text it is that we are dealing with, using terms such as *dialogue*, *interview*, *poem*, *letter* or *short story*—most of them labelling genres—questions regarding the status of this particular arrangement of words within this overarching medium of the textbook are probably less common. Is a poem in an ESL textbook, for example, the same as the (same) poem in a collection of poetry or the (same) poem read online? Does the context in which the poem is placed, embedded, and encountered matter? And if it does—how? While the poem can arguably in all cases be considered authentic rather than pedagogical material—it was written for another purpose than language teaching (Lundahl 1998:59)—its embeddedness in other texts, in various contexts, and in a broader media ecology is not only important, but gives rise to questions that need to be addressed if we wish to take seriously pupils' engagement with literary texts in ESL settings. Thus, while the transformations that texts undergo as they are incorporated into a textbook have been discussed before, for example when it comes to the readers' perception of texts (e.g. Lundahl 2012:56), this present study considers the plurality of potential

contexts in which a text can be embedded—beyond the dichotomy of textbook and original.

"Texts," Nathaniel I. Córdova explains, "are multimodal in nature, and they are composed of various pieces that have been woven together that in turn mask that process" (2013:151). Thus, while texts "give the appearance of wholeness," they are really "woven together of various fragments, pieces, ideas, and other texts themselves" (Córdova 2013:152). This is also why "texts can travel in fragments, dissected, partitioned, and mediated, only to be put together as particular cultural logics and mediations might dictate" (Córdova 2013:152). While this basic tenet of texts is a commonplace in discussions of literary works and forms the basis of the condition of intertextuality, broadly defined as "the various relationships that a given text may have with other texts" (Baldick 2001:128), its relevance to the educational textbook and the practice of ESL teaching is not immediately apparent.[1] Yet teaching materials often depend upon the fragment as a resource. Anthologization, with its processes of selection, inclusion, exclusion and textual scaffolding in the form of introductory texts framing the excerpts, is one of the major methodologies of textbook construction, and without the remarkable ability of texts to "travel in fragments," to again borrow Córdova's phrasing, the various passages from literary and non-literary texts that pupils read during the course of their English classes would make very little sense.

Few literary forms are as conducive to anthologization as poetry. Whereas a novel, play or short story may require editing and abridgement, usually leaving only excerpts in the anthology or textbook, a poem can typically be accommodated in its entirety. Similarly, whereas easy readers may form the source of an excerpt from a novel, or retelling may be chosen as a substitute, poetry is typically retained in its original wording and resists the impulse to increase readability through such transformation practices.

This article considers how poetry is mediated in three ESL course books in the same series, all aimed at pupils in Swedish secondary school, primarily pupils between the ages of 13 and 15 attending grades 7 to 9. While the material for this article is thus restricted to a small sample of teaching materials used in some—not all, as there is a plethora of ESL textbooks available—Swedish schools, the analysis of the complex interactions between texts and other media is germane to the study of texts in schools, the study of teaching materials, and the teaching of poetry more broadly and in various national as well as international contexts. Similarly, while the scope of this study is not wide enough to substantiate quantitative assessments about poetry in ESL teaching, the close reading and qualitative analysis of this sample will increase our understanding of the functions of texts as learning

[1] I use the term ESL, English as a second language, rather than EFL, English as a foreign language. I am consistently referring to teaching carried out within Sweden and to pupils who, in most cases, have English as their second language, in a setting where Swedish is the majority language and where English is frequently encountered, not least due to the fact that most television shows in English are not dubbed.

materials, which in turn can affect the decisions we make as pedagogues in our classroom practice when we ask our pupils to engage with these materials.

2 The Roles of Poetry in ESL Learning

With the thrust towards ever more test-driven curricula in many countries, the role of poetry in the classroom has been the source of concern among scholars and pedagogues alike. While the Swedish school system is far from identical with the American or British ones, it too has seen an increased implementation of high-stakes testing. Thus, even with the substantial professional freedom and autonomy of Swedish educators—who are free to choose what particular texts to teach and whose pedagogical freedom is not limited to prescribed authors—it is not entirely unthinkable that testing will affect *what kinds* of texts are read in schools and *how* they are read. Indeed, from an L1 perspective, Sue Dymoke (2012:406) has asserted that "the assessment imperative is a key driver in determining course content." Thus, whereas Peter Benton (2000:92) concludes that, with the National Curriculum in the UK, "poetry has a much higher profile in schools" because it is part of the examination, he also warns that there is an increased risk of "teaching to the test" and decreased enjoyment. As Dymoke has phrased it regarding poetry at the GCSE level in England, "students' experiences of poetry are controlled and closely tied to examination board anthologies" (2012:407). In other words, within L1 English teaching, there is a fear that the importance of poetry to examinations might prompt specific approaches to poetry to the detriment of a more open form of reading that is not geared towards producing a specific interpretation or demonstrating an interpretative skill.

The presumed usefulness of poetry to language learning is apparent in the way poems are continuously used in language teaching. Not least, verse is known to be a useful mnemonic device. We need only recall Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to realize that the rhythmic quality of quantitative verse functions as an aid to memory. As for the accentual-syllabic verse common for poetry in English, the many examples of educational teaching poems or rhymes designed to help pupils remember rules of grammar and spelling testify to the role of poetry as a resource in language learning. Of course, there is also the invaluable role of poems as starting points for discussions and thus as promotors of pupils' oral language production: "Poems," as Albert B. Somers (1999:90) points out in *Teaching Poetry in High School*, "are perfect for talking about." Poems, it thus seems, can be employed in the language classroom in the service of language learning, either as rhymes or themes for discussion, and do not necessarily warrant a consideration of aesthetics.

Within the large field of the subject of English, both as a first and as a second language, poetry in teaching is much debated and highly theorised. Louise M. Rosenblatt, whose influential ideas of efferent (information-oriented) versus aesthetic reading have continued to shape present-day debates about literacy, argues that "ready-made responses" may prevent "students from understanding either the idea or the effect that the poem [is] aiming at" (1995:92). The basic argument here is that certain topics commonly found in poems—death and war being two

examples—tend to elicit emotions in readers that in turn prompt them to take recourse to an entire battery of pre-made and set responses and opinions. Coming from what would become known as a reader-response tradition of literary scholarship, Rosenblatt takes seriously the role of the reader in shaping the literary work, but she is also wary of the risk of superimposing the personal response onto the actual words on the page. In an ESL context, the question is understandably often differently phrased. If, in the vein of Somers (1999:90), a poem is used to spark a discussion, to be something to *talk about*, a personal pre-packaged response to the theme of the poem might be an asset rather than a flaw. It might even be the key to success, since the core content of the subject of English for grades 7 to 9 includes pupils' ability to communicate their own views and experiences (National Agency for Education 2018:36).

While poetry has a place in the ESL classroom, other literary forms are likely to be more prevalent. Sandra McKay's call for literature in the ESL classroom, for example, very noticeably avoids any mention of poetry, even as it makes a case for what Rosenblatt has called aesthetic reading. Instead, the novel—and particularly the "stylistically uncomplicated" novel featuring "themes with which the students can identify" (McKay 1982:532)—remains central to the argument, which posits that literature can benefit ESL teaching when it comes to "developing linguistic knowledge both on a usage and use level," increasing student motivation through enjoyment, and providing an increased understanding of "a foreign culture" (McKay 1982:531). McKay's most important point, however, is that literature can and should be used to teach language use—communication in practice—rather than only usage—e.g. linguistic rules—which has long been the prevailing rationale for including literature (1982:530).

The debate about literature as a service to language learning, rather than as a subject in its own right, has a long history. Thus, it is not surprising when various calls for poetry focus on the uses to which it may be put. Sylvia M. Vardell, Nancy L. Hadaway and Terrell A. Young propose that "poetry offers many benefits for ESL students," not least since poetry which rhymes "provides the sound qualities helpful for predicting words and phrases," just as "free-verse poetry helps students focus on the arrangement of words on the page and on the description and emotion that those words can provide" (2002:51). Another feature of poetry singled out by the authors as conducive to ESL learners' development is the sheer manageability of the format: "the brevity and short lines of poetry" are thus considered less "intimidating" than a full-length novel, for example (2002:51). Not only does this assessment presuppose a specific kind of poem—one that is, indeed, brief—but, the potential challenge of difficult vocabulary in poetry notwithstanding, it also targets the very features that easy readers have long displayed in their conversion of original material into abridged texts with increased readability, with their signature short lines featuring roughly clause by clause enjambment. This is not the only case where a certain kind of poetry is prescribed in discussions of poetry's worth as an educational tool. Indeed, it is difficult to deny that the term poetry in educational discourse almost always denotes the lyric, meaning a "fairly short poem expressing

the personal mood, feeling, or meditation of a single speaker," at least when it is not in the playful tradition of the nursery rhyme (Baldick 2001:143).

Mary-Elizabeth Vaquer (2016:37) points out that the uses of poetry go well beyond the immediate and measurable gains in the classroom, and here, again, a preference for the lyric is implied: "Poetry can be instrumental and invaluable in encouraging the development of a rich inner life and self-understanding. At the same time, poetry also can occupy important roles in building relationships with the world through understanding the other and developing a deeper sense of empathy." These are not qualities that specifically mark the syllabus for the subject of English, but they do permeate the entire *Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and school-age educare* (2018), which holds sense of self, empathy and self-assessment to be overarching goals for all subjects in school. Ethics is expressly stated as one of the most central perspectives in the Swedish school system, where an "*ethical perspective* […] should permeate schooling in order to provide a foundation and support pupils in developing their ability to form personal standpoints" (National Agency for Education 2018:8, italics in the original). The curriculum also emphasizes the interconnectedness of "[l]anguage, learning, and the development of a personal identity" and explicitly names "a wealth of opportunities for discussion, reading and writing" as essential (National Agency for Education 2018:7). Ethics, respect for "the intrinsic value of other people," and democratic values are overarching objectives for every pupil in the Swedish school system, and all staff must work actively to instil democratic values and "actively resist discrimination and degrading treatment of individuals or groups" (National Agency for Education, 2018:10).

There is no shortage of ideas of how and for what purposes poetry should be taught in ESL school settings. One particularly lively strand of research has focused on poetry writing in ESL classrooms, thus foregrounding student language production and the particular benefits of working creatively with poetry. Amy L. Freyn (2017:80) points out that poetry, while a common feature in EFL and ESL classrooms in the past, has long been deemed "too difficult" and has thus played a receding role in ESL learning. She has examined the attitudes towards learning poetry in the ESL classroom and concludes that "a learner-centered, multimodal approach should be used" rather than the "teacher-centered process" more commonly employed (Freyn 2017:82). What Freyn means by the term *multimodal approach* is, for example, the use of video material from Youtube and commercials, audio material and film clips where poetry is featured, rather than the reading of poetry on the page, as well as student-active creative productions of poetry using video or digital resources (2017:81–82). What Freyn's study does not take into account is the way in which the textbook is inherently multimodal. While text is the primary medium, the types of texts that coexist within the pages of the ESL textbook are variegated, and images and layout play a central role in the organization of this teaching material. Besides, in Hartmut Stöckl's phrasing, "the purely mono-modal text has always been an exception while the core practice in communication has essentially been multimodal all along" (2004:10).

All of these debates illuminate important aspects of ESL and the role of poetry in education, but how can we understand the place of poetry within the spaces assigned for institutional ESL learning without examining how poetry interacts with the teaching materials? And how can we speak of poetry in the ESL classroom as though a poem were not enmeshed in the materiality of all those other materials drawn upon to facilitate student learning? Last, taking account of the much bigger picture, how can we understand the poem as a resource in ESL education without considering its place within the media ecologies in which it finds itself enmeshed—be it literary history, book history, publication history, or the anthologization and teaching traditions of which it has formed a part?

3 Poetry in the Swedish Syllabus for English

Paired with "[s]ongs," "poems" are specifically mentioned as core content in grades 7–9 (National Agency for Education 2018:37). Yet, judging by the knowledge requirements, poetry is not a top priority in the subject of English in the Swedish syllabus for compulsory school. Rather than being specified as a genre in this section of the syllabus, it is found enmeshed in the much broader and amorphous category of "texts in various genres" and "texts and spoken language from different media" (National Agency for Education 2018:40). This broad phrasing can be interpreted as encompassing such varied forms of text as films, born-digital blogs, novels and instruction manuals. In other words, what is implicitly condoned within this formulation is a broad definition of the term *text* that can host visual, aural and textual materials, digital as well as analogue. Aside from the many functions of poetry as secondary to language learning, or, rather, as a genre whose role it is to be of service in the process of learning English and facilitating language production, there is, of course, the poem as a literary work. Here, poetry falls within the part of the subject of English devoted to literary studies or literary history, a part which is not very prominent for the years 7 to 9 in the syllabus for the compulsory school in Sweden, but which emerges as an aspect of English in the upper secondary school, where poetry, both contemporary and old, is mentioned among the genres to be studied for English 6. Because the subject of English in secondary school is conceived of mainly as one of applied skills and production, where pupils' active production of language remains at front and centre of the syllabus, it is perhaps not very surprising that poetry is not one of the most common genres in textbooks designed with this syllabus in mind. Nevertheless, poems do occur in Swedish ESL textbooks, and they do so in very specific ways that warrant critical study.

It should be stated at the onset that poetry is not a particularly frequent feature in Swedish ESL textbooks for grades 7 to 9, despite the fact that songs and poems are clearly named genres for receptive skills in the core content section of the syllabus for years 7 to 9 (National Agency for Education 2018:37). In fact, a quick, informal inventory of several of the primary textbooks offered by some of the major publishers within the genre reveals that more than a token number of poems is an exception rather than a rule in ESL textbooks for the compulsory school in Sweden. Strategies for inclusion range from displaying several short poems or limericks on

one page to displaying a single poem on one page, and the genre label poem or poetry is frequently found in conjunction with the actual poem. Here it should also be noted that I do not treat song lyrics as poetry in this particular article, despite several good arguments for doing so. First of all, a distinction is made between songs and poems in the core content in the curriculum. Another reason for this delimitation is that poetry is more likely to be a new genre to pupils than song lyrics, and this in turn creates a completely different learning opportunity, since many of the song lyrics included in textbooks are already known to pupils and, of course, come with their own set of multimodal concerns, first with the baggage of celebrity culture, and then quite literally with audio files meant for listening to the song as performed.

4 Textbooks and Mediation

With the kinds of work that poetry can potentially perform within the context of language learning, it is high time to consider how it is mediated in teaching materials. Here, it is not only crucial to consider what poems are included in textbooks or, if they are excerpted, what parts of poems are kept, but also the textual contexts in which they have been placed. In other words, just like scholars of Modernism (e.g. Churchill & McKible 2016) have shown the fundamental importance of the contexts in which its writers published their works—in this case the little magazines between whose covers literary works form their own particular media ecology and engage in intertextual as well as multimodal and often intermedial conversation—so the study of the poem in the ESL textbook has to account for and interrogate the contexts generated by the overarching medium of the textbook itself. As it gathers texts of different genres, excerpts as well as whole texts, custom-made material as well as authentic language taken from elsewhere, and various images ranging from photographs to drawings, typographical features, and references to workbooks, audio files or CDs and online resources, the ESL textbook houses its own intermedial sample that is in constant dialogue and whose interrelations affect the transactions between pupils and texts, between pupils, and between pupils and teacher and which play a constitutive role in the emergent learning situation.

The term *intermediality*, Gabriele Rippl (2015:1) explains, "refers to the relationships between media and is hence used to describe a huge range of cultural phenomena which involve more than one medium." Aside from housing various and radically different texts, images and connected audio, ESL textbooks tend to direct the actions of learners through explicit instructions, for example to speak, listen, read or write. In this sense, ESL textbooks recognize "the multimodal nature of meaning making" (Córdova 2013:145) as well as, in Gunther Kress' terms, "'multimodality' as the normal state of human communication" (2010:1).

5 Poetry in *Wings* 7, 8 and 9

There is much to consider in light of the scarcity of poetry in the Swedish compulsory-school ESL textbook. While this in itself is by no means an indication

that poetry is not studied in Swedish ESL settings—after all, poems are available online and can be projected in the classroom or listened to as sound recordings—it is an indication of the structural priority of other genres. The absence of poetry is in itself conspicuous and calls for theorization. Before taking on that major task, however, it important to account for the actual uses and functions of poetry in textbooks that actually do engage with the genre. In the following, thus, an analysis of the most recent edition of the textbook series *Wings* (2nd ed., by Kevin Frato, Anna Cederwall, Susanna Rinnesjö, Mary Glover, Richard Glover, Bo Hedberg, and Per Malmberg, published in 2015, 2016, and 2017 respectively by Natur & Kultur) will be conducted with a view to theorizing the role of poetry in ESL teaching materials. *Wings* includes poems in each of its textbooks, which is why this teaching material has been chosen for this analysis.

In the textbook *Wings 7*, aimed at pupils in the 7th grade in the Swedish school system, meaning primarily at 13-year-olds, there are two poems. One poem appears within a section devoted to the theme *Sports* and is called "My Dog Plays Invisible Frisbee" (Frato et al. 2015:116). It is written by Kenn Nesbitt and has four stanzas of four lines each, two of which rhyme within each stanza. The poem contains a twist at the end, where we learn that the dog that has played "invisible Frisbee" is actually itself the "invisible dog" of the speaker, who thus has no actual dog (Frato et al. 2015:116). It is, in other words, a poem that is meant to be funny, but whose inclusion in the textbook seems ostensibly justified mainly through its containing the word *Frisbee* in the title and the name of other sports in the poem itself, thus relating to the theme. The other poem, "Deep in Our Refrigerator" by Jack Prelutsky, is found in a section devoted to *Food*, and is, like Nesbitt's poem, funny and thematically appropriate (Frato et al. 2015: 89).

In the textbook *Wings 8*, aimed at pupils in the 8th grade in the Swedish school system and thus primarily at 14-year-olds, there are several poems. Except for a poem written by a character in the short story "All Summer in a Day" by Ray Bradbury, these are all placed in succession within the section of the book focusing on the theme of animals and are clearly marked with their genre label *poem*. This is a consistent feature in this book series, which raises pupils' awareness about genre by carefully labelling each text within its covers according to genre, with terms such as *pamphlet*, *informative text*, *dialogue*, *column*, *letter* and *journal*. As Tracey Bowen and Carl Whithaus point out, "naming a text as belonging to a particular genre helps situate that text within an interpretative framework" (2014:2). The three poems all involve animals. There is the poem "Cats" by Eleanor Farjeon, whose fast-paced, rhyming short lines encompass between one and three words each (Frato et al. 2016: 96); there is Arnold L. Shapiro's poem "I Speak, I Say, I Talk," whose three stanzas similarly feature short lines, here encompassing between two and three words each and whose educational content features an array of animals and the names of the sounds they make, to be contrasted to the privileged human position of a species which *speaks* (97); and there is the poem "The Bumblebee," whose typographical layout differs from that of the two previous poems (98). Here, lines are longer and the three stanzas feature free verse with only some rhyme and

then predominantly slant rhyme. For each of the poems, a brief glossary is provided, explaining unfamiliar words such as *cricket*, *readily*, or *aerodynamics*.

Wings 9, the book meant to succeed *Wings 8* as pupils enter the 9th and final grade of compulsory school, roughly at the age of 15, also has three poems in total, excepting excerpts of a poem in "The Story of Bonnie and Clyde" (Frato et al. 2017a:50). The poems appear in different sections of the book: one in the section devoted to the theme of *Love*, and the two others in the section devoted to the theme of *Life and Death*. Within the section about love, there is a poem by Sara Teasdale, a well-known American poet in the early 20th century, called "Advice to a Girl" (Frato et al. 2017a:25). Unlike the poems found in *Wings 8*, this one has the seriousness of much traditional poetry, with its philosophical couplet refrain starting and closing the poem: "No one worth possessing / Can be quite possessed" (25). It does not resemble a nursery rhyme, and nor does it have the cheerful upbeat fast-paced rhythm of the two poems with very short lines in *Wings 8*. As for the other two poems in the book, they too have known and acknowledged authors. The first is Emily Dickinson's "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died" (Frato et al. 2017a:100) and the second is Mary Elizabeth Frye's "Do not stand at my grave and weep" (Frato et al. 2017a:101). Whereas the first poem, consisting of four stanzas, bears the characteristics of Dickinson's verse, such as the dash and the slant rhyme, the second consists of only one stanza with a couplet rhyme and iambic tetrameter. Like in the course books for years 7 and 8, the poems are equipped with a separate glossary and references are made to exercises in the accompanying but separate workbook.

At first glance, it is clear that the poems in the ninth-grade course book are more demanding and structurally complex. In addition, while the themes of *Sports* and *Animals*, found in the books for year 7 and 8 respectively, relate to the subject of hobbies and ordinary day-to-day life, the themes of *Love* and *Life and Death* are more philosophical and, indeed, more commonly associated with poetic material and rendition, particularly with high diction and the lyric. What all of the poems in the textbooks have in common, however, is the fact that they each get their own page in the course book, typically together with some kind of illustration and the recurring features of glossary and workbook references.

6 Emily Dickinson's Multi-layered Materiality

In order to investigate the rich web of transformations a poem in a textbook might have undergone, the case of Emily Dickinson is here given substantial space. Not only is her poetry known for its material history, but her work has also given rise to some of the most fruitful discussions about poetry and materiality. In Lori Emerson's media archaeological analysis, Emily Dickinson belongs to those writers "who self-consciously tinker with both the reading and the writing interface" (2014:133). She works, Emerson remarks, "equally with and against the limits and the possibilities of pen/pencil/paper as interface" and is thus a poet "through which we can productively read twenty-first-century digital literary texts" (129). Emerson's emphasis on the interface of Dickinson's work forms part of an

overarching and insistent focus on the materiality of Dickinson's poems. With the publication of Ralph W. Franklin's *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson: A Facsimile Edition* in two volumes (1981) and the more recent *The Gorgeous Nothings* (2013) – also a facsimile edition, but one which presents her works on envelopes, just as she wrote them – Dickinson's poems have received ample critical attention precisely for their materiality. As most serious readers of Dickinson's work are aware, her characteristic dashes, often but not always at the end of a line, have previously been edited out of several renditions of her work. The dashes are included in the version in the textbook *Wings 9*. Just like the materiality of the envelope is thought to bring us closer to Dickinson's poetry as she actually wrote it, so those dashes have been deemed invaluable by scholars. Indeed, Ena Jung (2015:1) has called them "among the most widely contested diacriticals in the modern literary canon." Domhnall Mitchell remarks that it has been common in Dickinson scholarship to see reading Dickinson in a "standard typographic edition" as "effectively to read her in translation," since "line arrangements, the shape of words and letters, and the deployment of blank spaces are all potentially integral to any given poem's meaning" (2001:479). Furthermore, writing on envelopes, Mitchell observes, means that the "angle of the writing is determined by the angle of the lines of the paper," so that "it is prompted by the material" (481). It is clear that in the case of Dickinson a host of issues regarding media, interface and materiality predate the poem's inclusion in a textbook aimed at teaching English to speakers of other languages in a Swedish educational setting. This latter transformation is instead only one in a long line of prior transformations and remediations, but one which must nevertheless be met with the same seriousness of analysis as those preceding it.

As Lars Elleström has pointed out, "every intermedial relation seems to be more or less an anomaly where the supposedly essentially different characteristics of allegedly separate media are presumed to be more or less transformed, combined or blended in a unique way" (2010:14). What I would like to borrow from Elleström here, however, is especially his discussion of what he calls the "semiotic modality," which has to do with "the creation of meaning in the spatiotemporally conceived medium by way of different sorts of thinking and sign interpretation" (2010:22). The process of meaning-making is complex and very much involves the medium: "The creation of meaning already starts in the unconscious apprehension and arrangement of sense-data perceived by the receptors and it continues in the conscious act of finding relevant connections within the spatiotemporal structure of the medium and between the medium and the surrounding world" (2010:22). Here it is useful to remember that learners' encounter with a poem like Dickinson's is, first and foremost, a meeting between the learner and the textbook, already familiar in its properties, layout and thematic groupings. It is a book whose entire structure signals a purpose—learning English— and whose use is highly connected to the institutional environment of the ESL classroom. Most likely, the use of this book is at least partially ritualised, with recurring patterns of use in the weekly schedule and established practices for working with chapters, vocabulary and so on. Second,

it is a meeting situated within the overarching theme of *Life and death* that characterizes the chapter, all reinforced by the title of the poem itself, which contains the word "died." The focus on a theme might function as an "advance organizer" that helps activate students' pre-knowledge about a topic in order to enhance understanding in L2 teaching (Tornberg 2009:107). Third, the glossary and references to workbook exercises point to a task-oriented reading, where the language, either as presented in the instruction materials or as produced by the pupils with the poem as a stepping stone carries more weight than the theme discussed in the textbook. Only within this mixture of emergent properties embedded in the intermedial and multimodal medium of the textbook can we begin to think about what it means for the learners to encounter and engage with the poem.

If we consider the meaning of Dickinson's poem, like all of her poems highly suggestive and plural in meaning, much of the pupils' response is likely to be framed through the poem's placement within the textbook. Not only, thus, is the poem inside a book designed for a repeated pattern of reading and reacting, implemented textually by the sequence of text and questions or text and reference to workbook tasks, but it is also remediated as a textbook text, while carrying with it its long history of prior remediation, from manuscript to edited poem to facsimile and now, most tellingly, as Amherst Manuscript #fascicle 84 in the digitalized Dickinson holdings of Amherst College, where the manuscript can be seen, zoomed in on, and is made freely available to scholars across the globe through the website edickinson.org. The theme of life and death has been established prior to the pupils' engagement with the poem, as has its genre label, through the clear designation *poetry* at the top left corner of the page. Knowledge of the genre, as well as the set responses identified by Rosenblatt, are possible resources that pupils will mobilize when trying to fill in what Wolfgang Iser has influentially labelled "gaps" and which "function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves" (2001:1676–77). It is the activity of filling in those gaps which helps realize the literary work, which emerges in that meeting between reader and text. Dickinson's poem comes after a story about a boy who babysits his toddler brother, who almost dies, thus confirming the preoccupation with the theme of this section of the textbook, and before the section's second poem "Do not stand at my grave and weep," by Mary Elizabeth Frye, whose title, like Dickinson's, advertises death as a major concern.

Readers of Dickinson tend to agree that her poems are packed with meaning and thus almost inordinately challenging for a novice reader of poetry. For example, Thomas H. Johnson goes so far as a to say that Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who was asked by the poet herself to assess some of her poems in 1862, faced a task akin to "measur[ing] a cube by the rules of plane geometry" (Johnson 1960:vi). At the same time, the brevity of the lines and the condensed format of many of the poems render them at least visually manageable, and perhaps also, from an ESL-perspective, less daunting in terms of the primary labour of decoding the words on the page.

"I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –" is the opening line of a poem that juxtaposes the ordinary event of a buzzing fly in a room with what is from the individual person's point of view the extraordinary affair of dying, which, however, on a societal and historical level is also most ordinary. At the close of the poem, we struggle to make sense of the fly that seems to separate the speaker from "the light" and the closing line's "I could not see to see –" which may or may not be related to the presence of the fly (Frato et al. 2017a:100). With the conjunction of the closing of the poem and the lack of eyesight, it is fitting that the succession within the textbook is to death as a fact. In the poem following, Frye writes about the mourning of the speaker after her death but urges her addressee not to "stand at my grave and weep," since she will not be there. What the poem ultimately does in its final line is to undo death as well by having the speaker exclaim: "I am not there; I did not die" (Frato et al. 2017a:101). Seasoned readers of poetry might recognize this poetic move as one of monument, suggesting the longevity of the poem as a counteract to death: the poet is forever alive in the poem. In Frye's poem as textbook material, the meaning of the line is most likely read against another set of assumptions and background knowledge, leading pupils to conclude that the speaker is still alive in the memory of her loved ones, who can sense her in the elements (Frato et al. 2017a:101).

The companion workbook to *Wings 9* contains exercises of different kinds, ranging from questions on the texts in the textbook to exercises on grammar and vocabulary. The set of questions on Dickinson's poem is introduced by an instruction that tells pupils that "there is no right or wrong answer" (Frato et al. 2017b:77). Despite this instruction, the questions are all multiple choice, which is a format usually reserved for tests and exercises where there is one correct alternative. This choice should, however, probably be understood as a way of ensuring discussion by providing radically different stances that pupils can use as starting points. A particularly interesting question, likely to haunt generations of readers of the poem, is the role of the fly in the final stanza of the poem. Here, pupils can choose between three different roles for the fly, which "interrupts the narrator's thoughts," "shows the narrator that there is no reason to worry," or "kills the narrator" (77). The workbook contains one more task specific to the two poems: pupils are asked to choose one of the two poems to read carefully and then find as an online audio recording. The point of the task is to consider ways of reading a poem, effects of different placement of emphasis and stress, mode and tone by comparing a reading found online with one's own (85). Elleström considers the differences between reading a poem and listening to one and argues that a recorded poem is akin to music in that "the interface of the medium must be said to have fixed sequentiality" (2010:19). If a poem is being read live, however, the listener will "perceive a medium hovering between the fixed sequence and the non-fixed sequence" (2010:19). Reading a poem in print, on the other hand, instantly involves other considerations, for while it entails perceiving "a medium with a clearly spatial material interface," taking into consideration "the conventional semiotic aspect of language" means that "the perception also incorporates temporality and fixed

sequentiality (for most standard poems) or at least partly fixed sequentiality (for poems lacking clearly distinguishable lines)" (19). For the pupil doing the tasks in the workbook for *Wings 9*, the same poem will emerge in an array of media, with vastly different properties and vastly different sequentiality.

By referring to the Internet and then to an audio recording of the poem displayed in the textbook, the workbook for *Wings 9* emplaces Dickinson's poem in a highly multimodal web of relations, and one which it asks its readers to realize through their actions: by reading the poem in the textbook, going online, choosing a search engine, doing a search, choosing a recording, listening to an audio file, and comparing it with their own readings. Reading a poem has, thus, quickly become an activity that depends upon a number of actions and resources that are all mobilized in order for the task to be performed. This is wholly in line with the mediated nature of communication as such. As Crispin Thurlow explains, "[l]anguage never takes place, never makes sense, outside of its situated, embodied, multi-sensory uses – whether gushing from the pages of a book, reverberating in the ears of speakers, or glistening on city billboards" (2015:619).

7 Possibilities and Problems with Poems in ESL Learning

The fact that poems can be encountered in ESL textbooks, often then outside their original contexts of publication or at least outside their ordinary poetry book habitat, is testimony to their ability to travel more or less effortlessly through anthologization. ESL textbooks can offer valuable scaffolding that helps pupils approach a poem in English, perhaps for the first time. By overtly signalling aspects such as genre label and year of composition, the textbook can direct pupils' attention to aspects that could potentially help them mobilize their resources and draw on previous knowledge, if not on that particular poem, poet or period, then at least on poetry as such, meaning expectations on the forms of reading inherent in the medium of poetry itself. Such expectations have, in a study of secondary-school readers, been shown to result in readings that focus on "multiple meanings, metaphoric content and significance" (Peskin 2007:31). In the case of Dickinson, her name as well as the year of her birth and death provide additional information to pupils, who can infer that the poet is female and no longer alive, and, in addition, that the poem must be from the 1800s and is thus relatively old. In thematically organized textbooks, such as *Wings*, where section headings announce overarching concerns connecting the various texts within the chapter, further scaffolding is offered to help pupils organize their encounter with the poem through previous knowledge about things outside the poem itself, be it love, death or less grave themes such as sports. Further complicating and framing the encounter with the poem, the images presented on the same page function as points towards which pupils may orient as they scan the page, pausing, perhaps, to ponder on the fly drawn below "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died" or the grey background upon which the whole text is set and which recalls a window with faint light seeping in through sheer curtains.

These thematic, sometimes intermedial, resources all work to create an affordance for the kind of ready-made responses of which Louise Rosenblatt warns in her discussion of student reading and literacy. However, with the textbook context of the poem, such responses must be seen as resources drawn upon to complete a task, just as all other tasks in the textbook and workbook assist in coordinating pupils' actions and help them mobilize their resources to solve the task. Indeed, the glossary and workbook references in conjunction with the poem reinforce the idea of the poem as the basis for a task, as a starting point for further actions, even for those external to the textbook itself, for example in the workbook or online, and thus are bound to call forth set practices common in textbook material and task-oriented activities. Here, the conditions guiding the study and use of poetry in L1 and L2 settings differ, but not in every respect. While poetry in an ESL setting may be task-oriented, poetry in L1 teaching is not exempt from such framing. Mary-Elizabeth Vaquer holds that, due to restrictions in the curriculum and a culture of standardized testing, students do not like poetry: "The students do not like having to look for hidden meanings. They feel that it is like looking for a treasure in a haystack when nothing else will substitute" (2016:48). Not only that, but "poetry only serves to teach strategies or themes, and it is not taught as an art or a way of real expression" (48). Indeed, Daniel Xerri has found that, in an L1 English class where poetry was taught in preparation for central examinations, "lessons were very teacher-centred and the balance of power was strictly in favour of teachers, who occupied the role of gatekeepers to a text's meaning" (2016:6). In *Wings workbook 9*, there are no incorrect answers to the questions on the poem, even though the multiple-choice format might be seen as scripting pupils' responses. This suggests another purpose with the inclusion of the poem in the textbook and with the questions, namely as the kind of starting-point for discussion that Somers (1999: 90) notes. Language production seems again to be emphasised, as opposed to silent contemplation of the questions the poem raises in itself, without the workbook questions.

Here we enter into the final consideration of this article, namely the scarcity of poetry in Swedish ESL textbooks. The sample of poetry in the *Wings* series shows a wide range, from upbeat poems with few or no difficult words about approachable topics such as animals to complex poems about death. Whereas the first kind is easily readable, both in terms of deciphering the words on the page and understanding the ideas communicated, the second is not. Similarly, while a difficult poem may well engender discussion, chances are that an image or a short non-poetic text launching a theme such as love might perform the same function without the perceived difficultly of a poetic text, which might alienate pupils who are unused to reading poems. Given the status of poetry as a prescribed genre in the Swedish syllabus for English in grades 7 to 9, it is perhaps not very surprising that poetry seems to be included to perform the role of being poetry in ESL textbooks. After all, this is the sole function that no other text or image can perform, whereas the roles of mnemonic device and conversation starter can be filled by a variety of other texts and media.

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