CAPITOLO

11

Shakespeare the Poet

"So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this and this gives life to thee." — William Shakespeare, Sonnet 18

OBIETTIVI

1. I can tell the story of Shakespeare's life, distinguishing documented facts from probabilities and legends.
2. I can describe Shakespeare's narrative poems and the Sonnets: their publication, their groups and their main themes.
3. I can read and analyse Sonnets 18, 130 and 116, and explain how the Shakespearean sonnet works.
4. I can compare a Shakespeare sonnet with a sonnet by Petrarch.
5. I can say how big a difference is, using modified *as ... as*, comparatives and superlatives, *the more..., the more...*, *like / as* and *so / such*.
6. I can compare and contrast two texts or images, and write a comparative essay with a point-by-point structure.

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English 3 · Parte IV · Shakespeare · versione 1.0
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Everybody knows his name, yet William Shakespeare left no letters, no diary and no manuscript of a single play. What we know about his life comes from church registers, legal documents and a few remarks by other writers — not from the works, because a poet who says "I" is not necessarily speaking about himself.

Before the plays, Part IV begins with the man and the poet: the glover's son from Stratford who became a shareholder in London's leading theatre company, and the author of two best-selling narrative poems and 154 sonnets. You will read three sonnets complete: Sonnet 18, which you began in English 2; Sonnet 130, which makes fun of the perfect Petrarchan lady; and Sonnet 116, a famous definition of love. The grammar of the chapter is comparison — and these sonnets compare all the time.

11.1 History and Society: Shakespeare's Life

11.1.1 Stratford: a glover's son

In English 2 (Unit 10) you learnt the essential dates: Shakespeare was baptised in Stratford-upon-Avon on 26 April 1564 and died there on 23 April 1616; in 1599 his company built the Globe. This section fills the space between them (Figura 11.1). Stratford was a market town on the River Avon, in Warwickshire. William's father, John, was a glover (a maker of gloves) who became an alderman, one of the leaders of the town council; his mother, Mary Arden, came from a family of landowners. William was the third of eight children and the eldest surviving son.

Stratford had a free school for the sons of its citizens, the King's New School, which had received a royal charter in 1553. It was a **grammar school**, where boys studied Latin grammar and Latin authors for long days, six days a week. No list of its pupils survives, so we cannot prove that Shakespeare went there; but it is very probable, and his works show a solid knowledge of the Latin poets, above all Ovid. He did not go to university — which makes him different from Marlowe and the University Wits (chapter 10).

DA RICORDARE

Documents, probabilities, legends. Separate three kinds of information. **Documented**: baptism (26 April 1564), marriage licence (1582), the baptisms of his children, property, lawsuits, his will (1616), his burial. **Probable**: that he studied at the Stratford grammar school; that he had begun working in the London theatre some years before 1592. **Legends**, written down long after his death: that he was born on 23 April, that he left Stratford after poaching deer, that he began by holding horses outside a theatre. A good answer always says which kind of information it is using.

11.1.2 Marriage and children

In November 1582, at eighteen, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, who was twenty-six; the marriage licence was issued on 27 November by the bishop's court at Worcester. Their first daughter, Susanna, was baptised on 26 May 1583, about six months later. Twins followed, a son and a daughter named Hamnet and Judith, baptised on 2 February 1585. Hamnet died at the age of eleven and was buried on 11 August 1596; we do not know the cause. Anne and the children stayed in Stratford for the whole of Shakespeare's career.

11.1.3 The "lost years" and the "upstart crow"

After the baptism of the twins the documents almost disappear. Scholars call the period from 1585 to 1592 the **lost years**: apart from his name in a family lawsuit of 1588–89, there is no record of where he was or what he did. Later centuries filled the gap with stories, none supported by evidence.

When Shakespeare reappears, in 1592, he is already a successful writer in London, successful enough to be attacked. In a pamphlet printed after his death in September 1592, *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit*, the dramatist Robert Greene warned his university-educated friends against the actors who performed their plays:

> *"... there is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tiger's heart wrapt in a player's hide supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; and being an absolute Johannes fac totum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country."*

(Text as printed, in modernised spelling, in C. F. Tucker Brooke, *Shakespeare of Stratford*, 1926.) The crow is a bird from an old fable that dresses itself in the feathers of other birds: an actor who dares to write plays, and to steal the style of his betters. "Tiger's heart wrapt in a player's hide" parodies a line of Shakespeare's own *Henry VI, Part 3* ("O tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hide!"), and "Shake-scene" is a pun on his name. *Johannes fac totum*, "Jack of all trades", is not a compliment: it means a man who does a little of everything. By 1592, then, Shakespeare was known in London as both actor and writer — and the educated playwrights resented it.

11.1.4 A sharer in the company

In 1592–94 plague closed the London playhouses, and Shakespeare turned to poetry (section 2). When they reopened, in 1594, he joined the new Lord Chamberlain's Men (chapter 10) as actor, writer and **sharer**, one of the senior members who owned a share of the company: they paid for costumes and plays, and divided the profits. In 1599 several of the sharers, Shakespeare among them, also became part-owners of their new playhouse, the Globe. This is why Shakespeare, unlike most writers of his time, became rich. In 1597 he bought New Place, the second-largest house in Stratford. In 1603 the new king, James I, took the company under his protection and it became the King's Men (chapter 14); in 1608 it also took over the Blackfriars, an indoor theatre lit by candles.

For about twenty years he lived between two towns, about 130 km apart in a straight line (Figura 11.2): he rented rooms in London, while his family and his property were in Stratford.

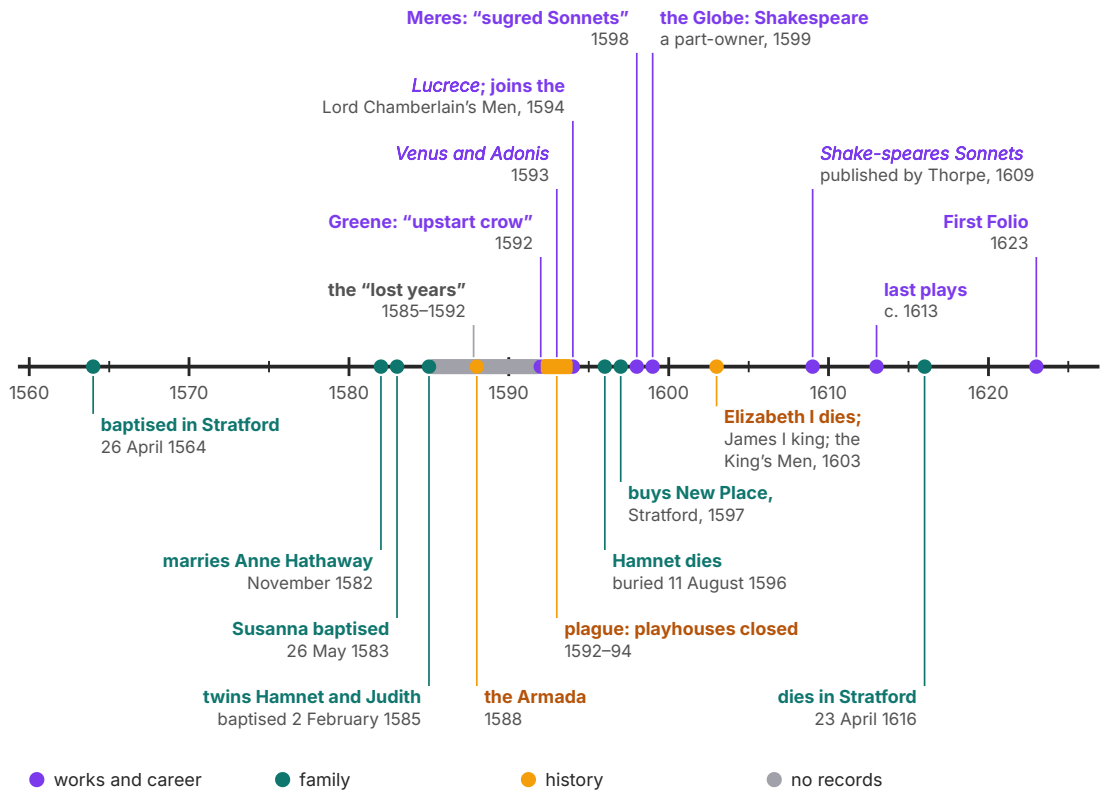


Figura 11.1 Shakespeare's life, 1560–1625: a proportional timeline (ticks every 5 years). Violet: works and career; teal: family; amber: history. Dates of baptism and burial are documented; the dates of birth and of the earliest London years are not.

11.1.5 The last years

No play is attributed to Shakespeare after 1613, and his last plays were written together with a younger dramatist, John Fletcher. He signed his will on 25 March 1616 and died on 23 April, aged 52; we do not know the cause. He was buried two days later in the chancel of Holy Trinity Church in Stratford. The will left almost everything to his elder daughter, Susanna, and to his wife only "my second best bed", a line that scholars still interpret in opposite ways. In 1623 two of his fellow actors published thirty-six of his plays in the First Folio (chapter 14).

One more point. Since the 19th century some people have claimed that the works were written by someone else, an aristocrat such as the Earl of Oxford; scholars of the period consider this "authorship question" a fringe theory, without evidence.

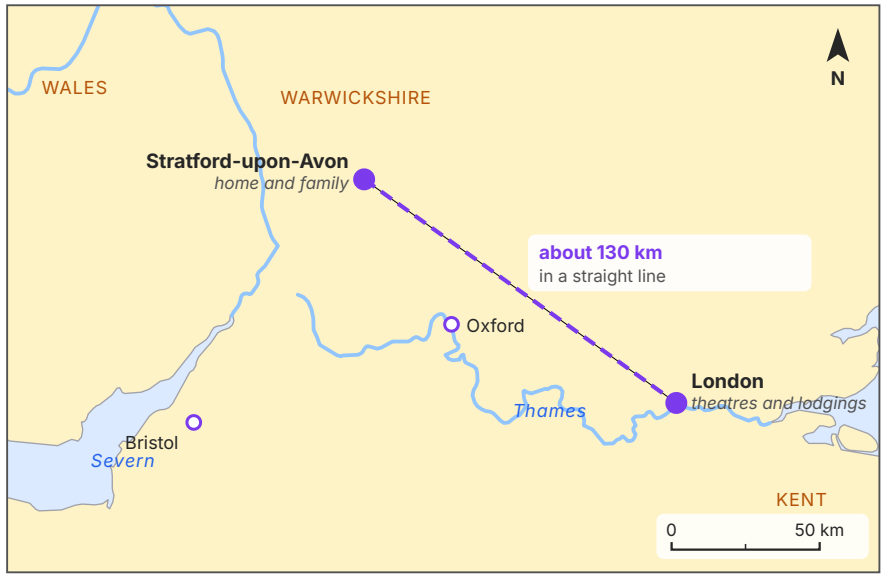


Figura 11.2 Stratford-upon-Avon and London: Shakespeare's two homes, about 130 km apart in a straight line (calculated from today's coordinates). Bristol, the home of the Link's English students, and Oxford are shown for reference. Coastline and rivers: Natural Earth.

ERRORE FREQUENTE

✗ «Shakespeare è nato il 23 aprile 1564.» → ✓ Conosciamo solo la data del **battesimo**, 26 aprile 1564. Il 23 aprile è una tradizione, comoda perché è anche il giorno della sua morte (1616) e di San Giorgio, patrono d'Inghilterra.

✗ «Shakespeare scriveva in *Old English*.» → ✓ Scriveva in **Early Modern English** (inglese moderno delle origini): *thou art*, *hath*, *-eth* sono forme arcaiche, ma la lingua è già la nostra. L'*Old English* è quello di *Beowulf* (capitolo 3).

✗ «I sonetti sono il diario della vita di Shakespeare.» → ✓ L'«io» dei sonetti è una **persona** (capitolo 6), una voce poetica. Il giovane, la donna «scura» e il poeta rivale potrebbero essere persone reali o inventate: non lo sappiamo.

11.2 Literature: Shakespeare the Poet

11.2.1 Two poems for a patron

With the playhouses closed by plague, a writer could look for a patron (chapter 9). Shakespeare chose a young and rich nobleman, Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, and dedicated to him two **narrative poems**, long poems that tell a story. In his lifetime they were his best-known books.

Venus and Adonis (1593) retells a story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: the goddess of love falls for a beautiful young hunter, who refuses her and is killed by a boar. It is written in six-line stanzas rhyming *ababcc*, full of sensual comparisons: Venus greets Adonis as "Thrice-fairer than myself". In the dedication Shakespeare calls it "the first heir of my invention". The printer, Richard Field, was also from Stratford. *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), in rhyme royal (chapter 6), is its dark twin: the Roman legend of Lucretia, a virtuous wife assaulted by the king's son, whose suicide leads to the end of the monarchy in Rome.

11.2.2 The Sonnets: a book of 1609

Shakespeare also wrote sonnets, and for years they circulated only in manuscript, as the poems of the courtier-poets had done (chapter 9). In 1598 the writer Francis Meres praised his narrative poems and "his sugred Sonnets among his priuate friends" — "sugared", sweet, and read by a private circle. In 1599 two of them were printed without permission in a collection called *The Passionate Pilgrim*.

Then, in 1609, a publisher called Thomas Thorpe printed *Shake-speares Sonnets*: 154 sonnets followed by a narrative poem, *A Lover's Complaint*. It was a **quarto**, a small book made of large sheets of paper folded twice, so that each sheet gave four leaves (eight pages); it was the usual cheap format for poems and single plays, while the large, expensive *folio*, folded only once, was

kept for important books. Thorpe added a dedication, signed "T. T.", "To the onlie begetter of these insuing sonnets Mr. W. H." Nobody knows who "Mr. W. H." was. The favourite candidates are two young lords, Henry Wriothesley (his initials reversed) and William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, but there are many others, and we do not even know whether Shakespeare approved of the publication.

11.2.3 A sequence without a story

The Sonnets are a sonnet sequence (chapter 9), but a strange one: they suggest a story without telling it. Readers usually divide them into two groups, a convention that the 1609 book does not mark. Sonnets 1–126 are addressed to, or speak about, a young man of great beauty, the **fair youth**. The first seventeen, the **procreation sonnets**, urge him to marry and have children, so that his beauty will survive in them. Then a new idea appears: the poems themselves will keep him alive (T1). Sonnets 127–152 are about a woman, the **dark lady**, called "dark" because of her black hair and eyes — and because the speaker's desire for her is full of guilt and jealousy. Between the two groups move other figures, among them a **rival poet** who competes for the young man's favour. The last two sonnets are short poems about Cupid.

Is this Shakespeare's life? We cannot know. The order may not be his, the people may be invented, and the speaker is a poetic voice. What is certain is the range of themes: beauty and decay, the destructive power of time, love and friendship, desire and disgust, and poetry that defeats time.

11.2.4 Shakespeare's sonnet and anti-Petrarchism

Shakespeare used the English form created by Surrey (chapter 9): three quatrains and a couplet in iambic pentameter, rhyming *abab cdcd efef gg* (Figura 11.3). Each quatrain usually develops one stage of an idea. The volta often comes at line 9, but the decisive turn is in the couplet, which sums up, answers or reverses the twelve lines before it, like the last line of a joke or of a legal argument.

Within this form Shakespeare challenged the Petrarchan tradition. The Petrarchan poets described their lady from head to foot in a **blazon**, a catalogue of her beauties, each compared to something precious: hair of gold, eyes like stars or suns, lips of coral, skin of snow. Every comparison was a **hyperbole**, a deliberate exaggeration. Shakespeare's sonnets break the rules: most of the love poems are addressed to a man, the woman is not fair, and Sonnet 130 refuses every hyperbole. This attitude, which takes Petrarchan conventions and turns them upside down, is called **anti-Petrarchism**. It is not a rejection of love poetry: it is a way of saying that the old comparisons have become false.

IN SINTESI

Shakespeare's Sonnets at a glance. *Published*: 1609, in quarto, by Thomas Thorpe; dedicated to "Mr. W. H." (identity unknown). *Number*: 154. *Groups* (conventional): 1–17 procreation sonnets · 1–126 the fair youth · 127–152 the dark lady · 153–154 Cupid. *Form*: three quatrains + couplet, *abab cdcd efef gg*, iambic pentameter; turn at line 9 and/or in the couplet. *Themes*: time and decay, beauty, love and desire, poetry against time. *Attitude*: anti-Petrarchan.

11.3 Texts: Three Sonnets

The sonnets are printed complete, in the modern spelling of the MIT Shakespeare (the public-domain Moby edition of the Globe text). Remember that *thou / thee / thy* is the old informal "you" (English 2, Unit 10), and read each poem aloud first.

11.3.1 T1 · William Shakespeare, Sonnet 18

Context. Just after the procreation sonnets, Sonnet 18 promises the young man a different survival: not through children, but through poetry.

Tabella 11.1 T1 — William Shakespeare, Sonnet 18 (1609), complete (text of the MIT Shakespeare (the public-domain Moby edition of the Globe text); modern spelling).

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?	
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:	
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,	
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:	
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,	5
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;	
And every fair from fair sometime declines,	
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;	
But thy eternal summer shall not fade	
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;	10
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,	
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:	
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,	
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.	

Glosses. *temperate*: mild, balanced, never extreme · *darling buds*: dear, delicate flower buds · *lease*: a contract for a limited time · *date*: duration · *the eye of heaven*: the sun · *his gold complexion*: the sun's golden face · *every fair from fair sometime declines*: every beautiful thing at some time loses its beauty · *untrimm'd*: stripped of its ornaments · *that fair thou owest*: the beauty you own · *brag*: boast · *to time thou growest*: you become part of time (you grow with it, like a graft on a tree).

Analysis

Form. The first two quatrains reject the comparison of line 1: a summer's day is too windy, too short, too hot or too cloudy, and every beautiful thing fades (Figura 11.3). The volta comes with "But" at line 9; the couplet gives the reason for the promise: the poem itself.

Language. The sonnet is built on comparison: "more lovely and more temperate", "too hot", "all too short". Summer is described as a legal contract (*lease*, *date*, *possession*, *owest*): beauty is only rented, never owned. Death is a person who could "brag", an example of **personification**, which gives human qualities to an idea or to a thing.

Theme. Time destroys natural beauty, but art preserves it: "eternal lines" are the lines of the poem and also a line of descent. As long as people read, the poem lives and gives life to the young man — who, notice, is never described. What survives is not his face, but the poem.

1. Find two reasons why the young man is "more lovely" than a summer's day (lines 1–4).
2. Which images show the sun in lines 5–6? Is the sun always perfect?
3. Which word announces the volta? What does the speaker promise from that point on?
4. Find the words from the language of law and property. What do they suggest about beauty?
5. In the couplet, what does "this" refer to? Do you agree that the speaker has kept his promise?

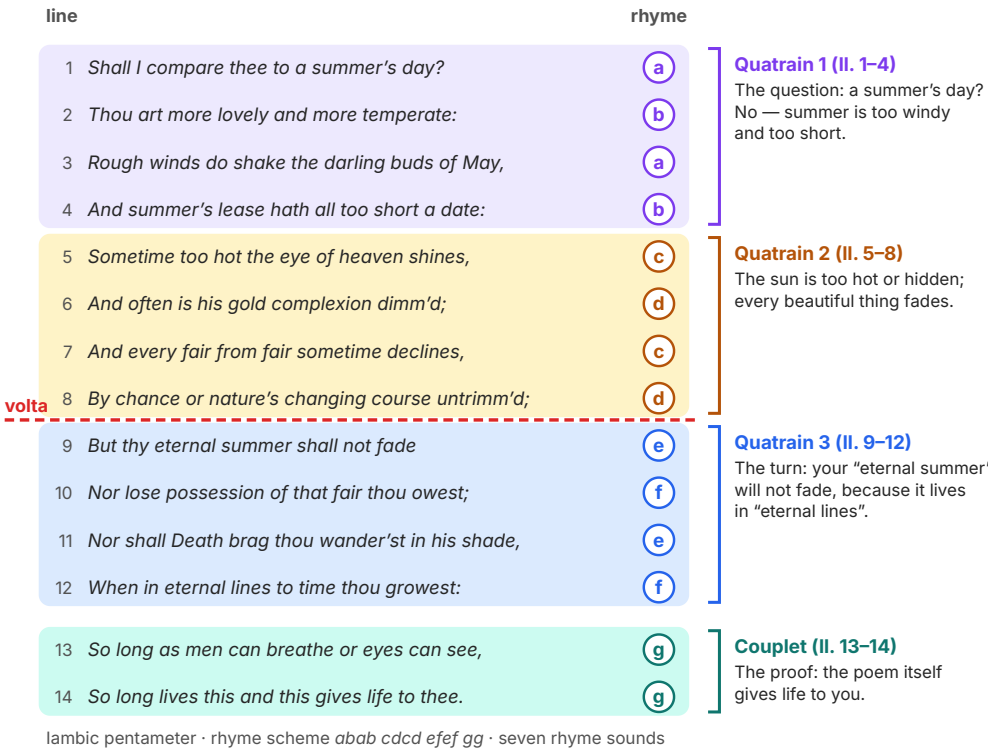


Figura 11.3 Sonnet 18 (T1): the structure. Three quatrains and a couplet, with the rhyme letters; the volta at line 9 ("But"). In today's pronunciation *temperate / date* is only a weak rhyme.

ESEMPIO SVOLTO

Reading a sonnet line by line: Sonnet 18, lines 1–4.

1. **Scan.** Mark the stresses in CAPITALS: *shall I com-PARE thee TO a SUM-mer's DAY*. Ten syllables, stresses on the even ones: a regular iambic pentameter (chapter 6), although the beat on *to* is light.
2. **Find the grammar of the sentence.** Line 1 is a question; line 2 is the answer, with two comparatives: *more lovely and more temperate*. Lines 3–4 give two reasons, linked by *And*.
3. **Paraphrase.** "Should I compare you to a summer day? You are more beautiful and more even-tempered: strong winds shake the precious flowers of May, and summer's contract is far too short."
4. **Ask what the comparison does.** The speaker compares in order to prove that comparison fails — an idea that Sonnet 130 (T2) pushes further.

11.3.2 T2 · William Shakespeare, Sonnet 130

Context. A dark lady sonnet: it takes the Petrarchan blazon and answers each item with the truth.

Tabella 11.2 T2 — William Shakespeare, Sonnet 130 (1609), complete (text of the MIT Shakespeare (the public-domain Moby edition of the Globe text); modern spelling).

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;	
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;	
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;	
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.	
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,	5
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;	
And in some perfumes is there more delight	
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.	
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know	
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;	10
I grant I never saw a goddess go;	
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:	
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare	
As any she belied with false compare.	

Glosses. *mistress*: the woman I love (not the modern "lover outside marriage") · *dun*: greyish brown · *wires*: threads of gold wire were a common image for a lady's hair · *damask'd*: mixed red and white, like the damask rose · *reeks*: rises, is breathed out — in Shakespeare's time the word did not necessarily mean "stinks", as it does today · *go*: walk · *treads on the ground*: walks on the earth, like a human being · *rare*: precious, exceptional · *any she*: any woman · *belied*: misrepresented, described falsely · *false compare*: false comparisons.

Analysis

Form. For twelve lines every sentence is a negative comparison, organised as a blazon from the eyes down to the walk. The couplet, introduced by "And yet", is the turn: all the negatives become the proof of a true love.

Language. A lesson in comparatives: "nothing like the sun", "far more red than", "a far more pleasing sound", "as rare / As". The *if*-clauses of lines 3–4 imitate logic: if snow is the standard of

white, her skin is not white. The tone is ironic but never cruel: “I love to hear her speak”.

Theme. The target is not the woman but the poets, whose comparisons “belie” women: no real person has golden hair and eyes like the sun. The speaker praises his love by refusing to lie. It is the most famous example of anti-Petrarchism in English.

1. List the parts of the woman’s body and person that the speaker mentions, in order. What is the order of a blazon?
2. For each item, what would a Petrarchan poet have said? (Look at the History and the Literature sections.)
3. Which words in the poem are not negative? What do they tell us about the speaker’s feelings?
4. Explain the couplet in your own words. What has changed from the first twelve lines?
5. Is the poem an insult or a compliment? Give two reasons.

11.3.3 T3 · William Shakespeare, Sonnet 116

Context. A fair youth sonnet that mentions no person: a definition of true love, often read at weddings.

Tabella 11.3 T3 — William Shakespeare, Sonnet 116 (1609), complete (text of the MIT Shakespeare (the public-domain Moby edition of the Globe text); modern spelling).

Let me not to the marriage of true minds	
Admit impediments. Love is not love	
Which alters when it alteration finds,	
Or bends with the remover to remove:	
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark	5
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;	
It is the star to every wandering bark,	
Whose worth’s unknown, although his height be taken.	
Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks	
Within his bending sickle’s compass come:	10
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,	
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.	
If this be error and upon me proved,	
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.	

Glosses. *impediments*: obstacles (to a marriage) · *alteration*: change · *bends with the remover to remove*: changes direction when the other person moves away · *an ever-fixed mark*: a sea-mark, a tower or beacon that guides ships and never moves · *bark*: ship · *his height be taken*: its height above the horizon is measured · *Time's fool*: Time's plaything, his victim · *his bending sickle's compass*: the curved reach of Time's sickle · *bears it out*: endures · *the edge of doom*: the Day of Judgement, the end of the world · *writ*: wrote.

Analysis

Form. The first quatrain says what love is *not*; the second says what it *is*, with two images from the sea; the third returns to the negative, against Time. The couplet is a wager: if I am wrong, I never wrote and no man ever loved — and since the poem exists, I am not wrong.

Language. Look at the repetitions with small changes: *love / love*, *alters / alteration*, *remover / remove*. They make change itself visible, while love stays the same. The second quatrain uses navigation, the science of the age: sailors measured the height of the Pole Star above the horizon to find their latitude (chapter 8), but the star's true value, its "worth", remains unknown. Time is personified as a reaper with a curved sickle, who cuts down "rosy lips and cheeks" — beauty — but not love.

Theme. Sonnet 18 promised that poetry would defeat time; Sonnet 116 says that true love does — a love of "minds", fixed while everything changes. Some readers hear anxiety behind the certainty: why insist so strongly, unless something is changing?

1. In the first quatrain, which two things does true love *not* do?
2. What are the two images of the second quatrain? Why are they suitable for love?
3. How is Time presented in lines 9–10? What can Time destroy, and what not?
4. Explain the logic of the couplet.
5. Sonnet 18 and Sonnet 116 both fight against time. What is the weapon in each poem?

APPROFONDIMENTO

Sonnet 116 and the wedding service. The opening words echo the marriage service of the Book of Common Prayer, the official prayer book of the Church of England, which Shakespeare heard at every wedding. In the 1559 edition the priest asks the couple "if either of you doe knowe any impedyment, why ye may not be lawfully joyned together in Matrimony" (spelling as printed). The sonnet borrows the solemn language of the ceremony for a "marriage of true minds" that needs no priest — one reason why it is read at weddings, although it may well be about a friendship between two men.

11.4 Language: Comparison, B2

You can make comparatives and superlatives (English 1, Unit 10), modify them with *much, far, a bit*, and use *(not) as … as* and, as an extra, *the more…, the more…* (English 2, Unit 9). At B2 you say exactly **how big** a difference is, and choose between pairs that Italians often confuse: *like / as*, *so / such*.

11.4.1 How big is the difference?

As … as can be modified to show equality, a small difference or a large one (Figura 11.4). Venus tells Adonis that he is "Thrice-fairer than myself", three times as beautiful as she is; Greene says that Shakespeare thinks he is "as well able … as the best of you".

Tabella 11.4 Modifying *as … as* and comparatives

Meaning	Structure	Example
the same, emphatic	*just as / every bit as / quite as* (neg.) *… as*	*Sonnet 130 is* ***just as*** *famous* ***as*** *Sonnet 18.*
a small difference	*almost / nearly as … as*; *not quite as … as*; *slightly / a little* + comparative	*My essay is* ***not quite as*** *good* ***as*** *yours.*
a large difference	*nowhere near as / not nearly as … as*; *far / much / considerably* + comparative	*The Sonnets were* ***nowhere near as*** *popular* ***as*** *Venus and Adonis.*
multiples	*half / twice / three times as* + adjective + *as*; *as many / as much* + noun + *as*	*A sonnet has* ***twice as many*** *lines* ***as*** *a stanza of rhyme royal.*
adding emphasis	*even / still* + comparative	*Sonnet 130 is funny, but Sam's sonnet is* ***even*** *funnier.*

Superlatives have their own modifiers: *by far the*, *easily the* (a clear winner), *much the* (formal), *the second / third* + superlative, *one of the* + superlative + plural noun, *the least*: *Sonnet 18 is* ***by far the*** *most quoted of the sonnets. New Place was* ***the second largest*** *house in Stratford. Sonnet 116 is* ***one of the*** *most popular poems* ***at*** *weddings.* To describe a change that continues, repeat the comparative: *The days are getting* ***shorter and shorter****. Shakespeare became* ***more and more*** *successful.*

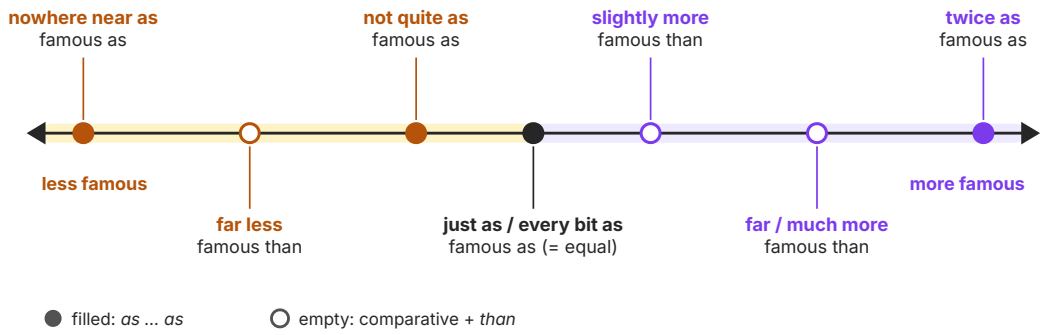


Figura 11.4 How big is the difference? From a large difference (left) through equality (centre) to a multiple (right). Example adjective: *famous*.

GRAMMAR IN ITALIANO

Quanto è grande la differenza. *just as ... as* = «proprio come, altrettanto»; *not quite as ... as* = «non proprio così... come»; *nowhere near as ... as* = «neanche lontanamente così... come»; *twice as big as* = «due volte più grande di, grande il doppio di»; *by far the best* = «di gran lunga il migliore»; *the second largest* = «il secondo per grandezza».

Confronto con l'italiano. L'italiano dice «tre volte **più** grande di», l'inglese preferisce *three times **as** big **as***. «Sempre più» + aggettivo diventa comparativo + *and* + comparativo: «sempre più corto» = *shorter and shorter*; «sempre più famoso» = *more and more famous*.

11.4.2 The more..., the more...

To say that two things change together, English uses two comparatives, each introduced by *the*: this is the **comparative correlative**. The comparative comes first in each half, followed by its subject and verb; a comma separates the halves.

- ***The more** you read the Sonnets, **the more** you notice.* (more + verb)
- ***The older** the young man grows, **the more** urgent the poet's advice becomes.* (adjective)
- ***The more** sonnets you learn by heart, **the fewer** mistakes you make in the test.* (noun)
- Short fixed forms without a verb: ***The sooner, the better. The more, the merrier.***

GRAMMAR IN ITALIANO

The more..., the more...* = «più..., più...».** L'italiano non ha l'articolo: «più leggi, più capisci» = ***the *more you read,* ***the*** *more you understand*. In inglese *the* è obbligatorio in tutte e due le parti, e il comparativo va **all'inizio**, prima del soggetto: ✗ *The more you read, you understand more* → ✓ *the more you understand.*

Con i nomi il nome segue subito il comparativo: «più tempo hai, più errori fai» = *the more time you have, the more mistakes you make*.

11.4.3 Like or as? So or such?

Like* and *as*.** *Like* is a preposition: it is followed by a noun or a pronoun and means "similar to": *Her eyes are nothing* ***like *the sun. He writes* ***like*** *a lawyer* (he is not a lawyer). *As* + noun means "in the role of": *Shakespeare worked* ***as*** *an actor* (he was an actor). *As* also introduces a clause: *Shakespeare wrote sonnets,* ***as*** *Sidney had done*; ***as*** *I said*; ***as*** *you know*. Informal *like* + clause (*like I said*) is best avoided in essays. *As if / as though* + clause describe an appearance: *The poet speaks* ***as if*** *he were giving evidence in court.*

So* and *such*.** Use *so* before an adjective or adverb alone, and *such (a / an)* before a noun, with or without an adjective. Both can introduce a result with *that*: *Summer is* ***so *short* ***that*** *nobody can keep it. Summer has* ***such a*** *short lease* ***that*** *nobody can keep it. It was* ***such*** *beautiful weather* ***that*** *we read outside.* With quantities: ***so many*** *sonnets,* ***so much*** *time, but* ***such a lot of*** *sonnets.*

GRAMMAR IN ITALIANO

***Like* o *as*?** «Come» si traduce con *like* quando significa «simile a» (*like a goddess* = «come una dea», ma non lo è); con *as* quando indica un ruolo reale (*as a teacher* = «in qualità di insegnante») o quando introduce una frase (*as I said* = «come dicevo»). *As if* + congiuntivo passato inglese = «come se»: *as if he were* = «come se fosse».

***So* o *such*?** Tutti e due = «così, tanto»: *so* + aggettivo (*so short* = «così breve»), *such* + nome (*such a short lease* = «un contratto così breve»; *such beautiful weather* = «un tempo così bello»). La consecutiva «così... che» = *so / such ... that*.

11.4.4 Comparing in writing

Essays that compare two texts need linkers. For **differences**: *whereas* and *while* join two clauses in one sentence (*Petrarch idealises Laura,* ***whereas*** *Shakespeare describes a real woman*); *in contrast / by contrast* and *on the other hand* start a new sentence; *unlike* + noun (***Unlike*** *Laura, the dark lady walks on the ground*). For **similarities**: *similarly* and *likewise* start a new sentence; *in the same way*; *both ... and* (English 2, Unit 12); *just as ... , so ...* (***Just as*** *Spenser promised his beloved fame in* Amoretti *75,* ***so*** *Shakespeare promises the young man eternal life*).

ERRORE FREQUENTE

✗ *Giulia's school is three times more big than mine.* → ✓ *…three times **as big as** mine* (oppure *three times bigger than*).

✗ *Sonnet 130 is very more ironic than Sonnet 18.* → ✓ ***much / far** more ironic*.

✗ *More you read, more you understand.* → ✓ ***The** more you read, **the** more you understand.*

✗ *He worked like an actor at the Globe.* (= sembrava un attore) → ✓ *He worked **as** an actor.*

✗ *It was so a short life.* → ✓ *It was **such a** short life. / His life was **so** short.*

✗ *He is the most famous poet of England.* → ✓ *…the most famous poet **in** England* (con i luoghi, *in*).

11.5 Skills: Comparing and Contrasting

11.5.1 Vocabulary: beauty, time and change

Tabella 11.5 Beauty, time and change: key words

Word	Meaning	Example
fair (adj., old)	beautiful; also light in colour	Every fair from fair sometime declines.
complexion (n.)	the natural colour and look of the skin of the face	a pale / clear / dark complexion
wrinkle (n., v.)	a line on the skin caused by age	Time writes wrinkles on the young man's face.
fade (v.)	to lose colour, brightness or strength slowly	Summer fades; the photo has faded.
decay (n., v.)	the slow process of being destroyed or rotting	the decay of beauty; the old house decayed.
fleeting (adj.)	lasting only a very short time	a fleeting moment of happiness
eternal (adj.)	lasting for ever	eternal lines, eternal summer
timeless (adj.)	not changed by time; always relevant	a timeless love story
outlast (v.)	to last longer than	The poem has outlasted the young man.

Fleeting, the opposite of *eternal*, goes with nouns of time and experience: *a fleeting glance / moment*. *Fair* today means "just" or "light-coloured", but in poetry it still means "beautiful".

Collocations with *time*, and similes with *as … as*

English treats time like money: you **spend** time (on something), **waste** time, **save** time and **run out of** time. You **kill** time when you are waiting and have nothing to do, you **pass** the time pleasantly (*We played cards to pass the time*), you **take** your time when you do not hurry, and you **make** time for something important. Notice: ✗ *pass time with friends* in the sense of Italian «passare del tempo con» → ✓ *spend time with friends*.

Many fixed similes use *as … as*: *as white as snow, as cold as ice, as light as a feather, as old as the hills* (very old), *as good as gold* (very well-behaved, of children), *as busy as a bee, as quiet as a mouse*. They are clichés — exactly what Sonnet 130 refuses — so avoid them in creative writing.

11.5.2 Reading: Two Sonnets, Two Cities

Before you read. Is your town as beautiful as the photos that tourists post? What would you write in an honest poem about it?

For the Literature Trail, Prof.ssa Rossi and Mrs Hill gave both classes the same challenge: write a Sonnet 130 for the 21st century, about something you love, without a single false compliment. Sam, the Trail's peer guide, and Giulia chose their own cities.

The Link Blog · Literature Trail · Post 11: Two Sonnets, Two Cities

Giulia, Turin. I wanted to write about a person, but the more I tried, the more embarrassing it became. So I wrote about Turin, which can't complain. The rules were Shakespeare's: fourteen lines, *abab cdcd efef gg*, ten syllables a line, only honest comparisons. I even borrowed his couplet, with one change.

My city's sky is nothing like the screen
where tourists post the Alps in golden light;
for weeks on end no mountain can be seen,
and fog along the Po wipes out the night.
Her trams are late; her porticoes are grey
with posters, pigeons, winter rain and smoke;
her bicerin costs more than yesterday,
and every joke she tells is the same joke.
I grant that Venice is more fair than she,
that Rome is older, Florence more admired,
that Naples has a sea she'll never see,
and Milan works far harder, never tired.
And yet, by heaven, I think my town as rare
as any city sold with false compare.

Sam, Bristol. Mrs Hill says my sonnet is "not quite as serious as Giulia's", which is a polite way of saying it's about seagulls. Bristol is nowhere near as famous as Turin, but it has twice as many hills as any city should have. I kept the structure — twelve lines of complaints and a turn

in the couplet — but I didn't keep Shakespeare's words in the couplet. I wanted it to sound like me.

My Bristol's hills are nothing like the maps:
they climb where any sane road would go round;
the sun comes out on Tuesday, then it naps;
at low tide half the river can't be found.
Balloon Fiesta? Fog. The bus? It's full.
(Dad drives it, so I'm not allowed to moan.)
The concrete's grey, the winter months are dull,
and every seagull wants your chips — and phone.
I grant that London's twice as big and grand,
that Bath is prettier, Oxford more wise;
that no one drives through Bristol as they planned,
that our best weather comes as a surprise.
But it's my home, and I would not exchange
its rain for any sunshine. Is that strange?

Giulia. Marta read both and said that Sam's is funnier, whereas mine is more "literary". I'm not sure that's a compliment. Sam noticed that we both wrote "more fair" and "more wise", like Shakespeare's "far more red", although modern English would say *fairer* and *wiser*. Poets can do that. Students, Prof.ssa Rossi says, cannot. **Your turn:** post your own sonnet about a place, and tell us which line was the hardest to write.

Language in context. Find in the post: a comparative correlative; two modified *as … as* structures; a comparative with *far*; a superlative. Why does Giulia write "more fair than she" instead of "fairer than her"?

11.5.3 Speaking: comparing and contrasting

In a speaking test or a literature oral you often talk about two texts or images together. Don't describe one and then the other: compare them point by point — similarities, differences — and end with a personal reaction.

Tabella 11.6 Useful language — comparing and contrasting

Function	Phrases
Similarities	Both texts / pictures… · They have one thing in common: … · In the same way, … · Similarly, … · Neither of them…
Differences	The main difference is that… · Whereas the first…, the second… · Unlike the first one, … · On the other hand, … · They couldn't be more different: …
Degree	It's far more / much less… than… · It's nowhere near as… as… · It's just as… as… · It isn't quite as…

Speculating	It looks as if… · The second one seems to be… · I'd say that… · Perhaps the poet wanted to…
Reacting	If I had to choose, I'd prefer… because… · What strikes me most is… · The one that speaks to me more is…

1. **Pair work: two portraits of beauty.** Search a museum website for two images: an idealised portrait of a woman from the Italian Renaissance (for example Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, Uffizi, Florence) and a realistic portrait or photograph. Student A compares them for one minute, using at least four phrases from the table; Student B asks one question and says which image is closer to Sonnet 130. Then swap with a different pair of images. (Check your source: use the museum's own website and write down the title, date and artist.)
2. **Two texts, one theme.** Compare Sonnet 18 and Sonnet 116 for about two minutes: what both poems fight against, the images they use, the tone of the couplets. End with your personal choice.

LEARNING TO LEARN

Build a quotation bank. A short exact quotation is worth more than a long paraphrase. Keep a **quotation bank**: a file of short quotations (two to eight words) that you know by heart, each tagged with the work, the line and one or two themes. For example: "Thou art more lovely and more temperate" (Sonnet 18, l. 2 — *beauty, comparison*); "Love's not Time's fool" (Sonnet 116, l. 9 — *time, love*); "false compare" (Sonnet 130, l. 14 — *anti-Petrarchism*). Choose quotations useful for more than one question and review them with flashcards. The method transfers to Italian and Latin: Petrarca, Dante and Virgil can go in the same bank, tagged with the same themes.

11.5.4 Writing: a comparative essay

A **comparative essay** discusses two texts (or works of art) together in order to show what they share and how they differ, and to reach a judgement. Writing about text A and then text B is easy, but the comparison disappears. Use the **point-by-point structure**: each body paragraph takes one aspect (an image, a theme, the form) and discusses both texts, quoting each. Here is Giulia's model, written for Prof.ssa Rossi.

Tabella 11.7 Model text — a comparative essay (235 words)

Two ladies, two truths: Petrarch's *Rvf* 90 and Shakespeare's Sonnet 130
Petrarch's sonnet 90 (*Canzoniere*, 14th century) and Shakespeare's Sonnet 130 (1609) both describe the woman the poet loves, but they could not be more different. Whereas Petrarch builds a perfect, almost divine Laura, Shakespeare refuses to idealise his mistress.
The first difference is physical beauty. Petrarch remembers Laura's hair «d'oro» and the light that burned «oltra misura» in her eyes. Shakespeare, by contrast, begins by denying the most famous comparison of all: "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun", and her hair is made of "black wires", not gold.

Secondly, the two women belong to different worlds. Laura's walk is «non... cosa mortale, / ma d'angelica forma»: she seems to come from heaven. Shakespeare's mistress, on the other hand, "treads on the ground". She is a real woman, nowhere near as perfect as Laura, and the poet does not mind.

However, the two poems are more similar than they seem. Both poets insist on the power of their love. Petrarch says that even if Laura's beauty has faded, his wound will not heal; similarly, Shakespeare ends by claiming that his love is "as rare / As any she belied with false compare".

In conclusion, Sonnet 130 is not an attack on love but on a way of writing about it. The more I read the two poems, the more I see that Shakespeare needed Petrarch: without the golden hair, the "black wires" would not be funny.

ESEMPIO SVOLTO

Analyse the model.

- **Introduction**: the two texts with authors and dates, what they have in common (the subject), and a thesis that announces the main difference (*Whereas…*).
- **Body, point by point**: paragraph 2 = physical beauty; paragraph 3 = earth and heaven; paragraph 4 = a similarity (the power of love). Each paragraph opens with a topic sentence (chapter 2) and quotes **both** texts.
- **Linkers of comparison**: *whereas, by contrast, on the other hand, similarly, however, both*; degree: *nowhere near as… as, could not be more different*.
- **Quotations**: short and embedded in the sentence; the Italian is quoted in Italian.
- **Conclusion**: a judgement, not a summary — here, a new idea (Shakespeare needs Petrarch) expressed with *the more…, the more…*.

Checklist. ✓ a title naming both texts · ✓ a thesis · ✓ paragraphs by aspect, not by text · ✓ a quotation from each text in each body paragraph · ✓ four linkers of comparison · ✓ present simple · ✓ a judgement at the end · ✓ 200–250 words.

Task. Write the comparative essay set in the exercises (Writing and Speaking).

11.6 Connections: Laura and the Dark Lady

Sonnet 130 is a reply, and the voice it answers is Italian. Two centuries before Shakespeare, Petrarch had fixed in the *Canzoniere* the image of the lady that every European poet imitated (chapter 9). Here are the first quatrain and two later lines of one of his most famous sonnets, *Rvf* 90, in which he remembers Laura as he first saw her.

Tabella 11.8 Petrarca, *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* 90, ll. 1–4 and 9–10 (text from it.wikisource) and a translation by the editors

Italian	English (translation by the editors)
Erano i capei d'oro a l'aura sparsi *che 'n mille dolci nodi gli avolgea,* *e 'l vago lume oltra misura ardea* *di quei begli occhi, ch'or ne son sì scarsi;*	Her golden hair was loosened to the breeze, which twisted it into a thousand sweet knots, and the lovely light burned beyond all measure in those fair eyes, which now have so little of it;
Non era l'andar suo cosa mortale, *ma d'angelica forma;*	Her way of walking was not a mortal thing, but of an angel's form;

The comparison is almost point by point (Figura 11.5). Petrarch's Laura has golden hair («capei d'oro», with a pun: *l'aura*, the breeze, sounds like Laura); Shakespeare's mistress has "black wires". Laura's eyes burn with a light beyond measure; the mistress's eyes are "nothing like the sun". Laura walks like an angel; the mistress "treads on the ground". But notice one surprising detail: Petrarch himself admits that Laura's eyes are now «sì scarsi» of light, because she has grown older. Even the great idealiser knew that time changes beauty; his answer, in the last lines of the poem, is that his love has not changed. Shakespeare's answer in Sonnet 116 is the same.

	Petrarch, Rvf 90 *Laura*	The Petrarchan blazon *the convention*		Shakespeare, Sonnet 130 *the mistress*
eyes	*«'l vago lume … ardea / di quei begli occhi»*	like the sun, like stars	→	"nothing like the sun"
lips	—	coral	→	"Coral is far more red"
skin	—	snow, ivory	→	"her breasts are dun"
hair	*«capei d'oro»*	golden threads, wires of gold	→	"black wires grow on her head"
cheeks	—	roses, red and white	→	"no such roses see I in her cheeks"
breath	—	perfume	→	"more delight" in perfumes
voice	not a merely human voice	music	→	"music hath a far more pleasing sound"
walk	*«Non era l'andar suo cosa mortale»*	a goddess	→	"treads on the ground"

— : the feature is not mentioned in *Rvf* 90. Arrows: Shakespeare's reply to the convention.

Figura 11.5 The Petrarchan lady and Shakespeare's mistress: the conventions of the blazon (centre), what Petrarch says of Laura in *Rvf* 90 (left, where it applies) and Shakespeare's reply in Sonnet 130 (right).

11.6.1 The sonnet in Italy and in England

The sonnet was born in Italy, at the Sicilian court of the emperor Frederick II, in the first half of the 13th century; Giacomo da Lentini is traditionally considered its inventor. Dante and Petrarch made it the great form of Italian lyric poetry, and Petrarch's fame carried it across Europe. In England it arrived late, with Wyatt and Surrey, and it changed shape: from octave and sestet to three quatrains and a couplet, from a slow meditation to an argument with a sharp ending. When Shakespeare's Sonnets appeared in 1609, the fashion for sonnet sequences was over; the book was not printed again until 1640, and its great fame came later, above all with the Romantics, who read it as a secret autobiography.

COLLEGAMENTI

Science: why summer's lease is short. Sonnet 18 complains that summer does not last. The seasons exist because the Earth's axis is tilted by about 23.4° to the plane of its orbit, so that for half of the year each hemisphere leans towards the Sun and receives more direct sunlight for more hours a day; they are not caused by the Earth's distance from the Sun, which is actually smallest in early January. In England, at a latitude of about 52°, the difference between the longest and the shortest day is much greater than in Turin, at 45°: in Stratford the longest day has about sixteen and three quarter hours of daylight and the shortest less than eight; in Turin about fifteen and a half and almost nine.

1. Which image in *Rvf* 90 would you choose for a modern song or advertisement? Which one in Sonnet 130? Why?
2. Petrarch wrote in the vernacular (Italian), Shakespeare in English: what had the two languages in common at the time of each poet? (Think of chapter 9 and of Latin.)
3. Find an Italian sonnet you have studied (by Dante, Petrarca, Foscolo…). Is it closer to Petrarch's ideal or to Shakespeare's realism?

SINTESI

- Shakespeare was baptised in Stratford-upon-Avon on 26 April 1564, the son of a glover and alderman; he probably studied at the local grammar school and did not go to university.
- He married Anne Hathaway in 1582; their children were Susanna (1583) and the twins Hamnet and Judith (1585); Hamnet died in 1596.
- After the "lost years" (1585–1592) Shakespeare appears in London as actor and writer, attacked by Robert Greene as an "upstart crow" (1592).
- From 1594 he was a sharer in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (from 1603 the King's Men) and from 1599 a part-owner of the Globe; he bought New Place in Stratford (1597), died on 23 April 1616 and was buried in Holy Trinity Church.
- During the plague closures he published two narrative poems dedicated to the Earl of Southampton: *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594).
- The 154 Sonnets circulated in manuscript and were published in quarto by Thomas Thorpe in 1609, with a dedication to an unidentified "Mr. W. H.".
- Conventional groups: 1–126 the fair youth (1–17 procreation sonnets), 127–152 the dark lady; the speaker is a poetic voice, and the story is not certainly autobiographical.
- The Shakespearean sonnet has three quatrains and a couplet (*abab cdcd efef gg*); the couplet sums up or reverses the argument.
- Sonnet 18 promises the young man eternal life in poetry; Sonnet 130 rejects the hyperboles of the Petrarchan blazon; Sonnet 116 defines love as constant against time.
- Comparison at B2: *just as / nowhere near as / twice as … as*, *far / much / even* + comparative, *by far the* + superlative, *the more…, the more…*, *like* vs *as*, *so* vs *such*; linkers *whereas, by contrast, similarly, likewise*.
- A comparative essay is best organised point by point, with quotations from both texts in every body paragraph.
- Petrarch's Laura in *Rvf* 90 (golden hair, eyes of light, an angel's walk) is the model that Sonnet 130 turns upside down.

ESERCIZI

History and Literature

1. • What do we know for certain about the beginning of Shakespeare's life?
   - **A.** He was born on 23 April 1564.
   - **B.** He was baptised on 26 April 1564.
   - **C.** He was born in London and moved to Stratford.
   - **D.** He studied at Oxford.

2. ● Who published Shakespeare's Sonnets in 1609?
   - **A.** Richard Field
   - **B.** Francis Meres
   - **C.** Thomas Thorpe
   - **D.** Henry Wriothesley

3. ● Which work did Shakespeare dedicate to the Earl of Southampton?
   - **A.** Sonnet 18
   - **B.** *A Lover's Complaint*
   - **C.** *The Passionate Pilgrim*
   - **D.** *Venus and Adonis*

4. ●● True or false? Correct the false statements. a Shakespeare's father was a glover and a member of the town council. b There is a document that proves Shakespeare attended the King's New School. c Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway when he was twenty-six. d Hamnet and Judith were twins. e Greene's "upstart crow" was a compliment to a young actor. f Shakespeare owned part of the Globe.

5. ●● Complete the timeline with the dates in the box: 1582 · 1585 · 1592 · 1594 · 1597 · 1609. a Shakespeare buys New Place. b The Sonnets are published. c Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway. d Greene attacks the "upstart crow". e The twins are baptised. f Shakespeare joins the Lord Chamberlain's Men.

6. ●● Documented, probable or legend? Classify the statements. a Shakespeare left Stratford after stealing deer. b Shakespeare studied Latin at the Stratford grammar school. c Shakespeare was buried in Holy Trinity Church. d Shakespeare's first job in London was holding the horses of theatregoers. e Shakespeare left his wife his "second best bed". f Shakespeare was in London as a writer by 1592.

7. ●●● Answer in 40–60 words. Why did Shakespeare publish two narrative poems in 1593–94, and why were they important for his reputation?

8. ●● Explain these terms in your own words, with an example from the chapter: a sharer · b quarto · c procreation sonnets · d blazon · e anti-Petrarchism.

Text Analysis

9. ● In Sonnet 116 (T3), the "wandering bark" is…
   - **A.** a ship
   - **B.** a dog lost at sea
   - **C.** a tree in a storm
   - **D.** a falling star

10. ● T1. Answer the questions. a What two things are wrong with summer in lines 3–4? b What is "the eye of heaven"? c Which word in line 9 announces the turn? d What does "Death" want to do in line 11? e According to the couplet, how long will the young man live?

11. ●● Find an example of each device in T1–T3 and give the line: a personification · b hyperbole that the speaker rejects · c a metaphor from navigation · d a metaphor from law or property · e repetition of a word with a small change · f alliteration.

12. ●●● Scansion. Mark the stresses in CAPITALS in T2, line 1, and in T3, line 9. Which line is a regular iambic pentameter? What is unusual in the other, and what is the effect?

13. ●● T3. Paraphrase lines 5–8 in modern English.

14. ●● Compare the couplets of T1 and T3. What does each couplet claim? Which one is more confident? Answer in 50–70 words.

15. ●●● Write a PEE paragraph (chapter 6) answering this question: "How does Shakespeare make fun of Petrarchan conventions in Sonnet 130?"

Language

16. ● In Shakespeare's lifetime, *Venus and Adonis* was _____ more popular than the Sonnets.
    A. very
    B. so
    C. far
    D. too

17. ● (In an essay) _____ I argued in the introduction, Sonnet 130 is a parody.
    A. Like
    B. As
    C. Such
    D. So

18. ● Complete with the words in the box: *just · nowhere near · twice · nearly · every bit · half*. a A sestet has six lines, a sonnet fourteen: the sestet is not even _____ as long as the sonnet. b London had dozens of times more people than Stratford: Stratford was _____ as big as London. c The twins were baptised _____ two years after Susanna: twenty months later. d In my opinion Sonnet 116 is _____ as beautiful as Sonnet 18 — not one bit less. e Sam's sonnet is _____ as long as Giulia's: both have fourteen lines. f A sonnet has fourteen lines and a stanza of rhyme royal seven: the sonnet is _____ as long.

19. ●● Rewrite the sentences with *the… the…*. a If you read Sonnet 130 more carefully, you will find it funnier. b As the young man gets older, the poet becomes more worried. c If a comparison is extravagant, it is less true. d When the playhouses were more successful, the sharers became richer. e If you learn more quotations, your essays will be better. f If we leave soon, it will be better.

20. ● Complete with *so* or *such* (+ *a / an* if necessary). a Shakespeare's life is _____ poorly documented that some people invent stories. b The Sonnets were _____ strange book that readers still argue about it. c Greene was _____ angry that he called Shakespeare a crow. d There were _____ many sonnet sequences in the 1590s that the fashion soon ended. e It was _____ beautiful weather that the class read the sonnets in the park. f Hamnet died at _____ young age.

21. ● Complete with *like*, *as* or *as if*. a Shakespeare worked _____ an actor and a writer. b Her eyes are nothing _____ the sun. c The speaker of Sonnet 116 talks _____ he were swearing in court. d _____ you know, the Globe was built in 1599. e Sam's sonnet sounds _____ a stand-up comedy routine. f Thorpe used the dedication _____ a kind of advertisement.

22. ●● Find and correct the mistake in each sentence (✗). a ✗ Sonnet 18 is very more famous than Sonnet 130. b ✗ Giulia's school is three times more big than mine. c ✗ More you study, more you remember. d ✗ It is the most famous sonnet of the world. e ✗ He described her like a goddess, but she was a real woman. f ✗ It was so a long poem that I didn't finish it.

23. ●● Write one sentence for each prompt, using the structure in brackets. a Sonnet 18 / quoted / sonnet (by far + superlative) b New Place / large / house in Stratford (the second + superlative) c the days / short / in November (comparative and comparative) d the dark lady / perfect / Laura (nowhere near as … as) e Petrarch / Shakespeare / describe the lady (whereas)

24. ●●● Translate into English. a Il sonetto 18 è di gran lunga il più citato dei sonetti, ma il 116 è altrettanto bello. b Più leggo i sonetti di Shakespeare, meno mi sembrano facili. c Era una giornata così bella che abbiamo letto il sonetto all'aperto, come aveva suggerito la professoressa.

Vocabulary

25. ● Complete with the words in the box: *complexion · decay · eternal · fade · fleeting · outlast · timeless · wrinkles*. a Fame is often _____ : a few weeks on social media, then nothing. b The poet promises the young man an _____ summer. c Too much sun can give you _____ on your face. d The colours of old photos _____ in the light. e Romeo and Juliet is a _____ story: every generation recognises itself in it. f The ruins showed the slow _____ of the old abbey. g The poem will _____ the marble statues of kings. h In Sonnet 18 the sun has a "gold _____ ".

26. ● Choose the correct verb. a Giulia and Marta (spent / passed) the whole afternoon on the essay. b Don't (kill / waste) time on your phone during the test. c We had an hour before the train, so we (killed / made) time in a bookshop. d Take the bus: it will (save / make) you time. e Don't hurry: (take / make) your time. f You must (make / take) time for your friends. g We were in the middle of the test when we (ran out of / wasted) time.

27. ●● Complete the similes, then use two of them in sentences of your own. a as white as _____ b as cold as _____ c as light as a _____ d as old as the _____ e as busy as a _____ f as quiet as a _____

Writing and Speaking

28. ●●● Write a comparative essay (200–250 words) on Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 (T1) and Spenser's *Amoretti* 75 (chapter 9): "Two poets promise eternal life. Compare how they do it." Use the point-by-point structure, quotations from both poems and the checklist in the Writing section.

29. ●● Speaking. Compare Sonnet 18 and Sonnet 116 for about two minutes (Speaking, task 2): what both poems fight against, their images, the tone of their couplets, and your personal choice.

Towards B2

30. ●● Multiple-choice cloze. Choose the best answer (A, B, C or D) for each gap.
Shakespeare's Sonnets were published in 1609, but they were (1) _____ written years earlier. (2) _____ his narrative poems, which had been best-sellers, the Sonnets were not reprinted for more than thirty years. Today, however, they are (3) _____ the most widely read poems in English. Readers (4) _____ identify the young man and the dark lady for centuries, but the (5) _____ they search, the less certain the answers seem. Perhaps that is (6) _____ the poems are still alive.
1 A probable B probably C possibility D perhaps that · 2 A Unlike B Despite C Whereas D Such as · 3 A by B very C far D among · 4 A have tried B have been trying to C try to D are trying to · 5 A much B more C most D many · 6 A why B what C so D for

31. ●● Open cloze. Write one word in each gap.
Sonnet 130 is (1) _____ of the funniest poems Shakespeare wrote. The woman's eyes are nothing (2) _____ the sun, and coral is far (3) _____ red than her lips. Yet the poet loves her just (4) _____ much as any Petrarchan lover loves his lady. In fact, he thinks she is (5) _____ rare as any woman described with false comparisons. The poem is (6) _____ a clever reply to Petrarch that it is still read in schools.

32. ●● Word formation. Use the word in brackets to form a word that fits the gap.
Shakespeare's (1) _____ (CHILD) in Stratford is poorly documented. His (2) _____ (MARRY) to Anne Hathaway took place in 1582. In London he became one of the most (3) _____ (SUCCESS) writers of his time, and his (4) _____ (POPULAR) as a poet grew after 1593. The Sonnets explore the (5) _____ (BRIEF) of beauty and the (6) _____ (DESTROY) power of time.

33. ●●● Key-word transformation. Complete the second sentence so that it means the same as the first, using the word in capitals and two to five words. a Sonnet 18 and Sonnet 116 are equally famous. JUST — Sonnet 116 is _____ Sonnet 18. b Stratford was much smaller than London. NEAR — Stratford was _____ London. c If you practise more, you will improve more. THE — _____ , the more you will improve. d The lease of summer was so short that nobody could keep it. SUCH — Summer had _____ that nobody could keep it. e No other sonnet is quoted as often as Sonnet 18. FAR — Sonnet 18 is _____ quoted sonnet.

PER APPROFONDIRE

- [OXS] S. Wells, G. Taylor (eds), *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*: the general introduction on Shakespeare's life, and the introduction to the Sonnets and the narrative poems.
- [NOR] S. Greenblatt (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, vol. B: the pages on Shakespeare's poems, with a selection of the Sonnets.
- [SAN] A. Sanders, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*: the chapter on the Elizabethan and Jacobean age, on Shakespeare as a poet.
- [ABR] M. H. Abrams, G. G. Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*: the entries "sonnet", "blazon", "hyperbole" and "personification".
- [SWA] M. Swan, *Practical English Usage*: the entries on comparison (*as … as*, comparatives and superlatives), *like* and *as*, *so* and *such*.

Glossario del capitolo

Anti-Petrarchism
antipetrarchismo — the attitude that turns the conventions of Petrarchan love poetry upside down

Blazon
blasone, catalogo delle bellezze — a description of a woman's beauty part by part, from head to foot, each part compared to something precious

Comparative correlative
correlativa comparativa (più…, più…) — two comparatives introduced by *the*: *the more you read, the more you learn*

Comparative essay
saggio comparativo — an essay that discusses two texts together to show similarities and differences and reach a judgement

Dark lady
la dama scura — the dark-haired woman of Sonnets 127–152 (a conventional name)

Fair youth
il bel giovane — the young man addressed in Sonnets 1–126 (a conventional name)

Fleeting
fugace, effimero — lasting only a very short time

Grammar school
scuola di grammatica (latina) — in Tudor England, a school where boys studied Latin grammar and Latin authors

Hyperbole
iperbole — a deliberate exaggeration: *eyes like the sun*

Lost years
«anni perduti» — the period 1585–1592, for which there is almost no record of Shakespeare's life

Narrative poem
poemetto narrativo — a long poem that tells a story (*Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece*)

Personification
personificazione — a figure that gives human qualities to an idea or a thing: *Death brags*, *Time's sickle*

Point-by-point structure
struttura punto per punto — a way of organising a comparison in which each paragraph discusses one aspect of both texts

Procreation sonnets
sonetti della procreazione — Sonnets 1–17, which urge the young man to marry and have children

Quarto
in-quarto — a small book made of sheets folded twice, four leaves to a sheet; the usual format for single poems and plays

Quotation bank
archivio di citazioni — a personal collection of short quotations, learnt by heart and tagged by theme

Rival poet
il poeta rivale — a poet in some of the Sonnets who competes with the speaker for the young man's favour

Sharer
socio, azionista (di una compagnia teatrale) — a senior member of a playing company who owned a share and divided the profits

Soluzioni

1. B — he was baptised on 26 April 1564; the birth date is unknown (23 April is a tradition). He was born in Stratford and did not go to university.

2. C — Thomas Thorpe. Richard Field printed *Venus and Adonis*; Meres praised the "sugred Sonnets" in 1598; Wriothesley was the dedicatee of the narrative poems.

3. D — *Venus and Adonis* (1593), and also *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594).

4. a T. b F — no list of pupils survives: his attendance is probable, not proved. c F — he was eighteen; Anne was twenty-six. d T (baptised 2 February 1585). e F — it was an attack: an actor dressed in other writers' feathers, a "Jack of all trades". f T — from 1599 he was one of the part-owners of the Globe.

5. a 1597 · b 1609 · c 1582 · d 1592 · e 1585 · f 1594.

6. a legend · b probable · c documented · d legend · e documented (his will) · f documented (Greene's attack shows he was known in London).

7. Model answer: In 1592–94 the London playhouses were closed because of plague, so Shakespeare could not earn from the stage. He wrote two narrative poems based on Ovid and Roman legend and dedicated them to a rich patron, the Earl of Southampton. They were printed, often reprinted and admired, and made him known as a serious poet, not only an actor-playwright.

8. Model answers: a a senior member of a playing company who owned a share and divided the profits (Shakespeare in the Lord Chamberlain's Men). b a small book made of sheets folded twice, four leaves per sheet (the Sonnets, 1609). c Sonnets 1–17, which urge the young man to marry and have children. d a catalogue of the lady's beauties from head to foot, each compared to something precious (golden hair, coral lips). e the attitude that reverses Petrarchan conventions (Sonnet 130).

9. A — a ship (*bark*), guided by the star.

10. a Rough winds shake the buds of May, and it is too short ("summer's lease hath all too short a date"). b the sun. c "But". d Death wants to boast that the young man walks in his shadow, that he is dead. e As long as people breathe and can see, that is, as long as the poem is read.

11. Possible answers: a Death that "brag[s]" (T1, l. 11), or Time with his sickle (T3, ll. 9–10). b "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun" (T2, l. 1): the hyperbole "eyes like the sun" is rejected. c "the star to every wandering bark" (T3, l. 7). d "summer's lease … date" (T1, l. 4), "possession … owest" (l. 10). e "alters … alteration", "remover to remove" (T3, ll. 3–4). f "bending … brief … bears" or "sickle's compass come" (T3, ll. 10–12); "summer … shall" (T1, l. 9).

12. T2, l. 1: *my MIS-tress' EYES are NOTH-ing LIKE the SUN* — regular: ten syllables, stresses on the even syllables. T3, l. 9: *LOVE'S not TIME'S FOOL, though RO-sy LIPS and CHEEKS* — the first foot is inverted (stressed + unstressed) and *Time's fool* puts two stresses together: the heavy, slow rhythm insists on the key words *Love* and *Time*. (Readings of the first half may vary; accept a reasoned scansion.)

13. Model answer: No — love is a fixed beacon that faces storms and is never shaken. It is the star that guides every ship that has lost its way: sailors can measure how high it is, but they cannot know how much it is worth.

14. Model answer: The couplet of Sonnet 18 claims that the poem will last as long as there are readers, and so will keep the young man alive. The couplet of Sonnet 116 is a wager: if my definition of love is wrong, I never wrote and no man ever loved. Sonnet 18 is more openly confident; Sonnet 116 sounds certain, but it needs to prove its certainty.

15. Model answer: **Point**: Shakespeare makes fun of Petrarchan conventions by taking the comparisons of the blazon literally and showing that they are false. **Evidence**: the poem opens with "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun" and adds that "Coral is far more red than her lips' red". **Explanation**: the comparatives turn the usual praise into a comic measurement, in which the lady always loses; yet the couplet reveals that the target is not the woman but the poets who "belied" women "with false compare", so the joke becomes a declaration of honest love.

16. C — far (✗ very / so / too + comparative).

17. B — As (+ clause). *Like* + clause is informal and is avoided in essays.

18. a half · b nowhere near · c nearly · d every bit · e just (d and e can be swapped: both mean "the same") · f twice.

19. a The more carefully you read Sonnet 130, the funnier you will find it. b The older the young man gets, the more worried the poet becomes. c The more extravagant a comparison is, the less true it is. d The more successful the playhouses were, the richer the sharers became. e The more quotations you learn, the better your essays will be. f The sooner we leave, the better.

20. a so · b such a · c so · d so · e such · f such a.

21. a as · b like · c as if · d As · e like · f as.

22. a much / far more famous · b three times as big as mine (or three times bigger than mine) · c The more you study, the more you remember. · d ...the most famous sonnet in the world · e He described her as if she were a goddess (or: as a goddess). · f It was such a long poem that I didn't finish it.

23. Model answers: a Sonnet 18 is by far the most quoted sonnet. b New Place was the second largest house in Stratford. c The days get shorter and shorter in November. d The dark lady is nowhere near as perfect as Laura. e Petrarch idealises the lady, whereas Shakespeare describes her as she is.

24. a Sonnet 18 is by far the most quoted of the sonnets, but Sonnet 116 is just as beautiful (every bit as beautiful). b The more I read Shakespeare's sonnets, the less easy they seem (to me). c It was such a beautiful day that we read the sonnet outside, as the teacher had suggested.

25. a fleeting · b eternal · c wrinkles · d fade · e timeless · f decay · g outlast · h complexion.

26. a spent · b waste · c killed · d save · e take · f make · g ran out of.

27. a snow · b ice · c feather · d hills · e bee · f mouse. Sentences: free answers.

28. Traccia: introduction — two Renaissance sonnets (Shakespeare 1609, Spenser 1595) that promise to make a person immortal through poetry; thesis: same promise, different situations. Point 1 — the enemy: in Sonnet 18 time and death ("summer's lease", "Death brag"), in *Amoretti* 75 the sea that washes the name away ("came the tyde"). Point 2 — the dialogue: Spenser's lady objects ("Vayne man"), whereas Shakespeare's young man is silent. Point 3 — the promise: "eternal lines to time thou growest" vs "My verse your vertues rare shall eternize"; Spenser also promises heaven and a love that renews life, Shakespeare only the life of the poem. Conclusion — a judgement (e.g. Shakespeare's couplet is more modest but more convincing: it came true). Assess: point-by-point structure, quotations from both texts, linkers of comparison, 200–250 words.

29. Model answer: "Both sonnets fight against time, but in different ways. In Sonnet 18 the weapon is poetry: the young man will live 'in eternal lines'. In Sonnet 116, on the other hand, the weapon is love itself, which 'alters not'. The images are different too: Sonnet 18 uses summer and the sun, whereas Sonnet 116 uses the sea, a star and Time with his sickle. The couplet of Sonnet 18 is calm and confident; the couplet of 116 is a challenge. If I had to choose, I'd prefer Sonnet 116, because it is about something we can all do — love — not only about poets."

30. 1 B · 2 A · 3 D · 4 B · 5 B · 6 A.

31. 1 one · 2 like · 3 more · 4 as · 5 as · 6 such.

32. 1 childhood · 2 marriage · 3 successful · 4 popularity · 5 brevity · 6 destructive.

33. a just as famous as · b nowhere near as big as (or nowhere near the size of) · c The more you practise · d such a short lease · e by far the most