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Using Pedagogical Stylistics to Teach World Literature in English in Italian Upper Secondary Schools: Going Beyond Traditional English Literature Syllabi¹

Abstract

This paper aims to offer some examples of and reflections on how teachers can go beyond the traditional pedagogy of English literature used in Italian secondary schools (*licei*) in order to provide students with a wider view of World Literature in English (WLE). Since one of the main tasks of schooling is to teach students how to “go beyond” limits, it is essential in our globalised world to teach the young how to reach that ‘farther side’ of literature, language and culture represented by those writers who have hitherto been ignored by school syllabi. In Italy, English literature is essentially centred on British authors and such a frame provides a very partial overview of the reality of English-speaking countries and their literary production.

This redesigned syllabus and pedagogical approach should provide students with a cosmopolitan overview of the various English-speaking literatures, with the objective of educating teenagers to be open to expressions of pluralism. Insisting on pedagogical innovation is fundamental, as any real change should start from what is commonly considered one of the pillars of any society, that is to say education. What is learnt at school and the experience gained from the long years of attendance are surely crucial for each of us, therefore it should be of paramount importance to carefully think over the content that should be delivered to students and the methods used to deliver it.

As to the current situation regarding the pedagogy of English literature in Italian *licei*, what is usually dealt with in class is mainly British literature. Therefore, the parallel subliminal message which is transmitted is that only literature by British writers is worthy of the name “English literature” and that the only country which deserves to be represented and studied is the UK.

This paper will also show how using the stylistic approach as a method for analysing literary excerpts in class is a valid tool to provide students with a more solid linguistic awareness, which can enable them to use the English language in a wide range of registers and situations. Using pedagogical stylistics to approach a literary text in upper secondary schools in Italy can be considered innovative,² just as tackling WLE texts. The objective of this paper is

1 This article draws on Ph.D. research carried out at Sapienza, University of Rome (Italy). The complete text will be available for consultation on IRIS catalogue Sapienza, University of Rome, in Spring 2021, since the dissertation will be defended in April 2021.

2 There are several research projects regarding pedagogical stylistics in upper secondary schools conducted by, among others, Cushing (2018), Giovanelli (2017), and Zyngier, Viana (2017), but in Italy such an approach would be completely innovative.

to show how stylistics can be employed as a valid tool putting canonical passages of the secondary school English literature syllabus into dialogue with WLE excerpts.

Keywords: World Literature in English (WLE), Pedagogical Stylistics, Italian upper secondary schools/licei, English literature syllabi, W. Shakespeare, W. H. Auden, E. Shafak

Introduction

Although this article focuses on the pedagogy of English literature in the context of Italian upper secondary schools, the reflections and the proposals which it offers can be extended to the wider context of English literature teaching in schools in general.

In particular, this paper aims to provide some examples of, and reflections on, how teachers can go beyond the traditional pedagogy of English literature in Italian *licei*³ not only by offering students a wider view of World Literature in English (WLE) but also by adopting a stylistic approach. As better explained in section 4 of this paper, teachers will bring into dialogue ‘canonical’ passages of traditional English writers with excerpts written by contemporary WLE authors using a stylistic approach. One possible way to do this is by juxtaposing a traditional passage with a WLE excerpt on the basis of a topic that they both explore. Stylistics, thus, represents a very helpful tool to analyse how language is employed to present the topic and to examine the effects of the linguistic choices made by writers with diverse backgrounds.

Since one of the main tasks of school is to teach students how to ‘go beyond’ limits, it is essential in our globalised world to teach young generations how to reach that ‘farther side’ of literature, language and culture represented by writers who have never been introduced at school. This objective can be achieved without interfering with providing a historical overview of English literature, which, at least in Italian schools, seems essential for basic knowledge of a literary development.

As a matter of fact, current English literature syllabi in Italian upper secondary schools still offer a predominantly ‘British’ canon as regards the selection of writers and excerpts as if they were the only authoritative representatives of the English-speaking reality worldwide. This frame is actually in contrast with what scholars have been discussing since the eighties of the last century, namely English linguistic “pluricentrism” (Kachru 1985; Kachru, Bolton 2006). This term suggests that what was once defined by Kachru “inner circle” (Kachru, 1985, 2006), that is to say UK, USA, Australia, etc., is no longer the only model for the English language, since the high number of the countries in the “outer circle” (where English is spoken as a second language) and, even more, those in the “expanding circle” (where English is spoken as a foreign language) represent new models of the English language and, consequently, of literary expression. What is more, demographic trends worldwide clearly reveal the rapid expansion of some large countries, such as India and Nigeria to the detriment of the countries in the inner circle. Thus, English is prospectively developing by following models of language that are no longer those of the countries belonging to the inner circle, which have been hitherto considered as the only standard-setters (Jenkins, 2006).

3 *Liceo* (pl. *Licei*) is the Italian term employed to define the three-year course of upper secondary schools where Latin is studied as a compulsory subject. There are six types of *liceo*, specializing in Classical lyceum, Fine Arts, Human Sciences/Economic & Social Studies; Languages; Music & Dance; Science/Applied Science Studies.

Despite this rapidly changing context, it seems that in countries such as Italy the pedagogy of English literature is fixed, as if there were a literary ‘canon’ to follow which exclusively refers to the UK. Not only is this situation anachronistic, but it is also unethical because it presents a socially unbalanced vision of English expansion and literary creativity in the world. In other words, what does school actually communicate to young generations concerning the situation of literatures in English? Why is it not possible to go beyond this particular framing and enrich the syllabus with contributions from the other “circles”? Why do we still insist on a strictly British English canon without speaking of World Literature in English (WLE)? Moreover, how can we enrich the syllabi while still following the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education and still providing young students with a historical overview of English literature, a frame which seems essential, as the practice of the pedagogy of English literature in Italian *licei* actually still reveals? What are the possible means of enlarging the scope of the syllabi, taking into account the pedagogical materials already in use in schools?

To answer these questions, this article will provide some brief reflections regarding:

- The value of a pedagogy of literature at school;
- The current practice of the pedagogy of English literature in Italian upper secondary schools;
- Opinions of Italian teachers of English literature on the pedagogy of English literature in upper secondary schools in the light of the Italian Ministry of Education guidelines;
- How to employ a stylistic approach in order to put different texts into dialogue with one another.

Secondly, the aim of this paper is also to introduce a case study on how to enrich the traditional English literature syllabus in a *liceo* classroom by comparing and contrasting one excerpt by a writer of World Literature in English and a passage offered by an English literature textbook currently in use in Italian schools thanks to the help of stylistic analysis. The case study also presents some suggestions for follow-up activities in the class.

1. The value of a pedagogy of literature at school

The debate concerning the role of literature education in schools, with special regard to Italian upper secondary schools, revolves around the fundamental question “*What is the use of literature?*”. An Italian academic, Mario Barenghi, recently provided a possible answer. Barenghi states that literature itself is “teaching readers to open themselves up to imagination” (“*istruzione dell’immaginazione*”), that is to say it enables people to imaginatively live simulated experiences (Barenghi, 2017). It is clear that, in this light, a pedagogy of literature in schools should help teenagers be better equipped to interpret the complexity of the world. The task is not easy and, above all, not guaranteed, since complex pedagogical action is required to stimulate students’ involvement in reading and appreciation of a literary text. In short, literature in the classroom is useful for both promoting an aesthetic experience and engaging students in the linguistic analysis of a language, which is never transparent. Apart from providing *liceo* students with the necessary historical and biographical background of a text, good pedagogy of literature, strives, above all, to avoid any simplistic interpretation of a text, thus its objective is mainly to ‘guide students’ imagination’, despite the complexity of the text. Once students start appreciating literature, they feel enriched by the experience, and they are satisfied that they have improved their linguistic skills, especially when tackling a text written

in a foreign language. However, the pedagogy of literature has to come to terms with the current cultural crisis, which is particularly serious in Italy at the present time, as the data show.⁴ Also for this reason, teaching literature at school cannot be taken for granted. Nevertheless, this research sides with those who believe that not only should teaching literature be enabled, but it should also be reinforced by any means possible, so that students are encouraged to develop critical thinking, improve their interactive skills and practise viewing reality from different perspectives so as to raise their level of open-mindedness. As a matter of fact, an effective pedagogy of literature is also a good tool to fight functional illiteracy, and look beyond the current mainstream of social communication, which is too often based just on contributions posted on social media.

2. Current practice of the pedagogy of English literature in Italian upper secondary schools

To get a preliminary overview of the practice of the pedagogy of English literature in Italian upper secondary schools, seven of the most widely used English literature textbooks currently in use in Italian *licei* were analysed.⁵ They all give a chronological outline of the historical development of mainly British literature, in order to provide students with the rudiments of a ‘history of British literature’. All the textbooks currently in use in Italian *licei* contain a rich set of activities and exercises aimed at involving

4 In Italy so-called ‘functional illiteracy’ is very strong. UNESCO’s definition of a ‘functional illiterate’ is a “*person who cannot engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective function of his or her group and community and also for enabling him or her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his or her own and the community’s development*” (UNESCO, 1984). In an article from *Il Corriere della Sera* (23rd June 2017), according to the OECD in 2016, the rate of functional illiteracy of the Italian population aged between 16 and 65 is 27.8%: the highest in Europe. *Investire Oggi* (26th March 2018) specifies that the Italian rate of functional illiteracy is the fourth in the world, after Indonesia, Chile, and Turkey. No matter that, according to Eurispes (<https://eurispes.eu/>), 93.1% of Italians over 18 years old owns a mobile, and that in 2011 92.7% of teenagers aged between 11–17 use the mobile every day. The World Bank asserts that 80% of Italians rely only on TV programmes to be informed about news. According to experts, this phenomenon is mainly due to the poor quality of their schooling and, more precisely, to the low level of funding allowed for education: while the average of European countries’ GDP set aside for instruction is around 5%, Italy devoted only 3.9 in 2018, according to Eurostat (*La Repubblica*, 12th March 2018). On 13th January 2016, the ISTAT Report (ISTAT: <https://www.istat.it/>) claimed schooling alone is not enough to involve the young in reading, and that their parents’ example is fundamental. In fact, in 2015 in Italy, 66.8% of children between 6 and 14 years old could read when both their parents were readers. 9.1% of Italian families have no book at all at home; 64.4% have not more than 100. The Report concludes by saying that reading and participation in cultural activities go hand in hand, and that readers feel themselves generally more “satisfied” than non-readers.

5 The titles of the textbooks examined are: (a) *Amazing Minds - Compact*, by Spicci, Shaw & Montanari; Pearson / Longman, Milano—Torino, 2018. (b) *Heading Out*, (1) *From the Middle Ages to the Romantics* (2) *From the Victorians to the Present*, by Cattaneo, De Flaviis, Muzzarelli & Quinn; C. Signorelli Scuola, Bologna, 2014. (c) *L & L - (1) From the Origins to the Romantics; (2) From the Victorians to the Present*, by Cattaneo, De Flaviis, Muzzarelli & Knipe; C. Signorelli Scuola—Mondadori Education, Milano 2017. (d) *Making Space for Culture—White Spaces Compact Edition*, by Ellis & De Luca; Loescher Ed., Torino 2017. (e) *Performer Heritage*, (1) *From the Origins to the Romantic Age; (2) From the Victorian Age to the Present Age*; by Spiazzi, Tavella & Layton; Zanichelli, Bologna 2016. (f) *Time Machines—Concise Plus—Literatures and Cultures in Motion*, by Maglioni, Thomson, Elliot & Monticelli P De Agostini Scuola / Black Cat, Novara 2018. (g) *White Spaces—Culture, Literature and Languages*, by Ellis & De Luca; Loescher Ed., Torino 2017 (Edizione Rossa—Liceo Classico; Edizione Verde—Liceo Linguistico).

students actively, which are often focused on so-called “written comprehension skills”. Contemporary authors, especially those coming from outside the UK, are not represented much. What is more, they are quite exclusively tackled on at the end of textbooks, which is a natural consequence of the chronological pattern of organisation used in the textbooks analysed. For this reason and due to the shortage of time, most teachers never get round into introducing their students to these authors. What is more, privileging British writers contributes to conveying the idea that British literature is the best representative of English language, ‘superior’ to other literatures in English. This view is not realistic because English has undergone continuous change and has spread worldwide, which is often transposed into many literary expressions. The present syllabi of English literature should be modified so as to leave space to a more realistic view of English as a language and as literatures. Therefore, also English literature textbooks should offer “decentred” syllabi of English literature so that they become literatures of English, or, better World Literature in English (WLE).

3. Opinions of Italian teachers of English literature on the pedagogy of English literature in upper secondary schools in the light of the Italian Ministry of Education guidelines

The next stage was to carry out a survey of the opinions of a group of Italian teachers of English literature in *licei*.⁶ This paragraph also briefly reports on the latest guidelines issued by the Italian Ministry of Education regarding the pedagogy of English language and literature in *licei*.

The English literature teachers interviewed were usually dissatisfied with the little time granted to their subject, particularly because so much time must be dedicated to bringing the students’ level of language up to the demands of literature, but also due to the large amount of materials and activities to be dealt with every single day. Most of the teachers also expressed their dissatisfaction with not being able to cover contemporary writers, especially authors from outside the UK. A lack of personal preparation is often the cause for their surrender to delivering the syllabus as it is. Another factor is their fear of not having enough time to prepare students for one section of the final State exam, where literature is not involved, which makes teachers avoid including such writers.

To sum up, teaching language, rather than literature, seems to be the teachers’ main concern: vocabulary, usage, grammar rules, syntax, competence, awareness of the language. All that has to be tackled and achieved through literature—which remains actually compulsory—even though it is proposed as a result of following the chronological pattern of organisation of the textbooks.

According to the English teachers interviewed, going beyond English literature and enriching it with World Literature in English should be a great way to broaden students’ view of our contemporary times. As a way of enhancing their linguistic skills and widening their cultural point of view, it is an

6 The data were collected between May and September 2019. The sample was constituted by a group of 48 English teachers in *licei*, from North to South Italy. This is their distribution in the various specialisations: Fine Arts: 4 (of which, in one case, the teacher also works in a Classics *liceo*); Classics: 12 (of which, in one case, the teacher also works in a Fine Arts *liceo*); Languages: 11 (of which, in one case, the teacher also works in a Human Sciences *liceo*); Music & Dance: 1 (the teacher also works in a Science Studies *liceo*); Science Studies: 21 (of which, in one case, the teacher also works in a Music & Dance *liceo*); Human Sciences: 2 (of which in one case the teacher also works in a Languages *liceo*).

opportunity that should not be missed. Probably no other language, apart from English, offers such possibilities. Although the teachers would like to update the literary writers, themes and works focused on, all that collides with the limited number of English lessons per week, students' low entry competences. What is more, some Italian *liceo* students tend to have poor reading habits.

Moreover, the laws and rules issued by the Italian Ministry of Education regulating the pedagogy of English language and literature in *licei* are not at all opposed to enriching the traditional pedagogy of English literature including WLE. In the Ministry's latest documents we can find statements that illustrate the function of English language and literature seen as a subject which has to provide students with the necessary solid "basis of knowledge and competences for further higher learning",⁷ and, in particular, with "the communicative competences (...) to facilitate the mediation and the comprehension of other cultures in multicultural contexts,"⁸—as well as the "knowledge of the culture and basic facts on the countries whose language is studied."⁹ Therefore, according to Italian legislation, English as a school subject in Italian *licei* can cope with "the challenges of contemporaneity,"¹⁰ "the cultural universe of the foreign language,"¹¹ "the cultures of the countries speaking that language"¹², in other words, with the modern and contemporary age. It therefore seems that the way is paved to introduce new writers in English from all over the world.

Nevertheless, we still need to find out *how* to do it while still providing a diachronic overview of the succession of British writers, which seems to be essential for basic knowledge of English literature, as the practice of the pedagogy of English literature and the content of English literature textbooks in use in Italy confirm. In other words, what is still lacking is a possible methodology for dealing with new writers.

4. How to employ a stylistic approach to put texts into dialogue with one another

One of the possible ways to introduce new WLE writers in the classroom could be by bringing into dialogue, whenever it is possible, 'canonical' passages of traditional English writers with excerpts written by contemporary WLE authors using a stylistic approach. It is often possible to do this by juxtaposing a traditional passage with a WLE excerpt on the basis of a topic that they both explore. In the next step, stylistics is a very helpful tool to analyse how language is employed to present the topic and to examine the effects of the linguistic choices made by the writers. The introduction of stylistics to upper secondary school students is particularly important since this discipline engages students in the appreciation of texts by showing them how language works and how linguistic choices convey ideological choices. Stylistic interpretation limits personal subjective impressions, since a stylistic process is always strongly textually grounded. Practical stylistic analysis of a text also teaches students how to analyse any kind of text, both

7 Italian Ministry of Education, Guidelines for *licei*, 2010, article 2.2.

8 Italian Ministry of Education, Ministry Decree n. 139/2007: "Cultural Axes".

9 Italian Ministry of Education, Ministry Decree n. 139/2007: "Cultural Axes".

10 Italian Ministry of Education, Guidelines for *licei*, 2010: "Objectives", point 1.

11 Italian Ministry of Education, Guidelines for linguistic *liceo*.

12 Italian Ministry of Education, Ministry Decree n. 139/2007: "Cultural Axes".

written and oral, therefore it is a good exercise for teenagers to help them decode our complex reality and use of language. Perhaps no other approach to a text, apart from stylistic analysis, can contribute to providing students with a solid awareness of language while also refining their critical skills.

Stylistics teaches people to put the text and its formal aspects at the centre of attention in order to establish its function and meaning, and arrive at an interpretation. Moreover, this discipline is particularly suitable for students because it also teaches them a method of analysis based on rigour, replicability and falsifiability. The analysis and its results formulate the starting point for class discussion which is useful for learning how to share, verify, contradict ideas and grow intellectually.

Since stylistics is versatile, it can be easily applied as a method for bringing ‘canonical’ texts into conversation with WLE texts. Stylistics enables students to see the literary text not as something ‘static’ but as being capable of generating new meanings, especially when it is in dialogue with modern, contemporary texts, such as examples of WLE. Both stylistics and WLE share the characteristic of hybridity and ‘in-betweenness’: stylistics for its interdisciplinary flexibility which allows us to use it with any kind of text, WLE for its wide variety of expressions, geographical and cultural origins, registers, and topics.

To put it simply, the synergy between WLE and stylistics enables the teacher to go beyond the restrictions of English literature syllabi: stylistics contributes to revealing the functional aspects and ideology of a text, while WLE introduces new cultural messages. Placing different and culturally distant texts side-by-side, as we will do in the following case study, allows us to carry out a stylistic analysis of the language employed in these texts and analyse how differently they each tackle the same topic. We believe that, in the classroom, it is engaging to see what linguistic strategies are used by different writers to express their views. Moreover, it is also interesting to notice what kind of English is employed and why, and to achieve all that without undermining the diachronic outline of English literature which is believed to be the essential basic knowledge to be conveyed in upper secondary schools.

5. Case study: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, WYSTAN H. AUDEN AND ELIF SHAFAK: OR, TELLING THE TRUTH ABOUT LOVE

Love is probably the most celebrated feeling in literature and the risk of repeating typical clichés when speaking of it is very high. It is a feeling which transcends cultures, languages, ages, and differences. Given its peculiarity, literature either narrates new things, or tells us about old things in new ways. For this reason, in literature, love is always new. Being such a complex feeling, this section introduces a dialogue between three literary texts, two of which are available in English literature textbooks, while the third one brings in the point of view of a contemporary WLE writer. The first two texts belong to two very distinct authors and ages, that is to say William Shakespeare and Wystan H. Auden, thus also the genres of drama and poetry. The third excerpt is by a Turkish female novelist, Elif Shafak. What the three passages have in common is that each describes love and makes us reflect on its definition, qualities, greatness and limits, whenever this is possible. That each does this from a different perspective helps bring out more acutely how each does this in its own way. Undoubtedly, love is also one of the most attractive ways of exploring the essence of being human and it is one that thoroughly fascinates teenagers. Therefore, what this section aims to propose is a complex ‘journey through love’ made by means of the stylistic exploration.

To begin with, the very first obstacle to face is to deal with texts which represent very different genres, i.e., drama, poetry, and the novel. They are also texts written by very different authors with very

diverse backgrounds. Nevertheless, we cannot forget the principal aim of this research which is to explore new paths to enrich the English upper secondary school syllabi through texts by WLE writers and the use of a stylistic approach as a method of text analysis.

There could be no English literature textbook which would not contain the so-called “Balcony Scene” of *Romeo and Juliet*, and there is no Italian teenage student who is not curious to read and explore this widely acclaimed passage. It would be far less frequent, instead, to find Auden’s *O Tell Me the Truth About Love*, because it is hard for teachers to cover all the authors of “The Age of Anxiety”. However, this poem by Auden presents attractive aspects for students to help them reflect on a possible definition of love, moreover in an amusing way, given the content and the form of the poem. One possible way to start the journey through love and, consequently, to tackle the topic, could be to start with Shakespeare’s passage, which seems to be a compulsory step, and, once dealt with, the teacher could move onto Auden’s and Shafak’s texts.

As a warm-up activity, the teacher could ask a general question, such as ‘*Can you think of a definition of love?*’ After a short free discussion, which is useful to prepare the class both for the topic and to introduce the vocabulary needed for the activities, students can focus on the first two excerpts and do the reading and comprehension tasks. Then, the students’ attention will be drawn to what these two texts have in common, notwithstanding the fact that they belong to different genres and time periods.

Let us start with *Romeo and Juliet*. As we did in the previous sections, we will use the excerpt published in one of the English literature textbooks currently in use in Italian *licei*.

Cattaneo, A., De Flaviis, D., Muzzarelli, M., Knipe, S. (2014) *L&L Literature and Language, Vol. 1*. Milano: C. Signorelli Scuola. (170–171). William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Sc. 2.

- 1 **JULIET** O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?
- 2 Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
- 3 Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
- 4 And I’ll no longer be a Capulet.
- 5 **ROMEO** [*Aside*] Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?
- 6 **JULIET** ‘Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
- 7 Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
- 8 What’s Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,
- 9 Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
- 10 Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
- 11 What’s in a name? that which we call a rose
- 12 By any other name would smell as sweet;
- 13 So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call’d,
- 14 Retain that dear perfection which he owes
- 15 Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
- 16 And for that name which is no part of thee
- 17 Take all myself.
- 18 **ROMEO** I take thee at thy word:
- 19 Call me but love, and I’ll be new baptized;
- 20 Henceforth I never will be Romeo.

21 **JULIET** What man art thou that thus bescreen'd in night
 22 So stumblest on my counsel?
 23 **ROMEO** By a name
 24 I know not how to tell thee who I am:
 25 My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself,
 26 Because it is an enemy to thee;
 27 Had I it written, I would tear the word.
 28 **JULIET** My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words
 29 Of that tongue's utterance, yet I know the sound:
 30 Art thou not Romeo and a Montague?
 31 **ROMEO** Neither, fair saint, if either thee dislike.
 32 **JULIET** How camest thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?
 33 The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,
 34 And the place death, considering who thou art,
 35 If any of my kinsmen find thee here.
 36 **ROMEO** With love's light wings did I o'er-perch these walls;
 37 For stony limits cannot hold love out,
 38 And what love can do that dares love attempt;
 39 Therefore thy kinsmen are no let to me.
 40 **JULIET** If they do see thee, they will murder thee.
 41 **ROMEO** Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye
 42 Than twenty of their swords: look thou but sweet,
 43 And I am proof against their enmity.
 44 **JULIET** I would not for the world they saw thee here.
 45 **ROMEO** I have night's cloak to hide me from their sight;
 46 And but thou love me, let them find me here:
 47 My life were better ended by their hate,
 48 Than death prorogued, wanting of thy love.

The second text can be found in Spiazzi, M., Tavella, M., Layton, M. (2016) *Performer Heritage*, Vol. 2. Bologna: Zanichelli. (From the Textbank, TB 87)

1 **O Tell Me the Truth About Love**

2 Some say love's a little boy,
 3 And some say it's a bird,
 4 Some say it makes the world go round,
 5 Some say that's absurd,
 6 And when I asked the man next door,
 7 Who looked as if he knew,
 8 His wife got very cross indeed,
 9 And said it wouldn't do.

10	Does it look like a pair of pyjamas,	34	I looked inside the summer-house;
11	Or the ham in a temperance hotel?	35	It wasn't even there;
12	Does its odour remind one of llamas,	36	I tried the Thames at Maidenhead,
13	Or has it a comforting smell?	37	And Brighton's bracing air.
14	Is it prickly to touch as a hedge is,	38	I don't know what the blackbird sang,
15	Or soft as eiderdown fluff?	39	Or what the tulip said;
16	Is it sharp or quite smooth at the edges?	40	But it wasn't in the chicken-run,
17	O tell me the truth about love.	41	Or underneath the bed.
18	Our history books refer to it	42	Can it pull extraordinary faces?
19	In cryptic little notes,	43	Is it usually sick on a swing?
20	It's quite a common topic on	44	Does it spend all its time at the races,
21	The Transatlantic boats;	45	or fiddling with pieces of string?
22	I've found the subject mentioned in	46	Has it views of its own about money?
23	Accounts of suicides,	47	Does it think Patriotism enough?
24	And even seen it scribbled on	48	Are its stories vulgar but funny?
25	The backs of railway guides.	49	O tell me the truth about love.
26	Does it howl like a hungry Alsatian,	50	When it comes, will it come without warning
27	Or boom like a military band?	51	Just as I'm picking my nose?
28	Could one give a first-rate imitation	52	Will it knock on my door in the morning,
29	On a saw or a Steinway Grand?	53	Or tread in the bus on my toes?
30	Is its singing at parties a riot?	54	Will it come like a change in the weather?
31	Does it only like Classical stuff?	55	Will its greeting be courteous or rough?
32	Will it stop when one wants to be quiet?	56	Will it alter my life altogether?
33	O tell me the truth about love.	57	O tell me the truth about love.

The first passage is probably the most famous declaration of love of all times. We could, therefore, begin by asking students for reasons why, in their opinion, this scene is so famous, as well as what are the possible elements of novelty, and why this scene is so touching and timeless. After a short warming-up discussion, which is also useful to introduce the vocabulary needed for the further activities, we can proceed with a second more focused question, such as: *Do these two texts provide a definition of love?*

Undoubtedly, in the first text what mostly emerges is Juliet's freshness and directness. As a matter of fact, despite the Renaissance setting with its patriarchal culture, for Shakespeare Juliet seems to be equal to a man in her capacity to express her love and longing for Romeo. Clearly, given the historical and cultural context, love and desire, especially if reciprocated, has to end with marriage.

We all know the concrete reasons why Juliet needs a 'new' name for Romeo. This is particularly evident in the first 31 lines where the two teenagers try to 'rename' Romeo. Despite the objective danger of being a Montague for a Capulet, and vice versa, students can notice that the attempt to change the name—thus to give a new appearance, hopefully a new substance, to Romeo—foregrounds in the repetition of the word 'name', almost obsessively repeated by Juliet. The word 'name' is actually used 7 times (ls. 2, 6, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16) by Juliet and twice by Romeo (ls. 23 and 25) in his answer to her. As the function Wordlist of AntConc¹³ shows in Table 1, in the probably most famous literary declaration of love of all time the word 'name'—implying 'a new name'—is more frequent than the word 'love'. Students will soon notice that what Juliet wants to say is that love goes beyond a name, beyond a sound, and that she cares for substance. As a matter of fact, Romeo would "*retain that dear perfection which he owes*" even

13 AntConc is a free text analysis application which can be used for the analysis of single or multiple text files, especially concerning a data-driven analysis of text and keywords (<https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antcon/>).

Rank	Freq	Word
1	15	i
2	15	romeo
3	11	and
4	11	x
5	9	name
6	9	thee
7	9	thou
8	8	a
9	8	love
10	8	that
11	7	juliet
12	7	my
13	7	not

Table 1. Number of occurrences of the words *name* and *love* in the “Balcony Scene”.

without that dangerous name (and above all surname). Juliet is pointing the finger against appearance to give emphasis to the essence of a feeling, as if she were saying that even though everything in our reality is formed by signifier and signified, sometimes, it would be better if these two properties were independent of each other. In the name of her love, Juliet would simply like to split the ‘essence’ of Romeo from the ‘name’, which, since it is only a signifier, is arbitrary. For Juliet, it is only a name that divides her from the object of her love. In exchange for that scission, she offers herself. Nevertheless, unfortunately for the young girl, a signifier, although arbitrary, is not interchangeable as she would like: Romeo Montague ‘means’ something more than a name, as the rest of the play will show. It means a family, it means a precise location in Verona, it means a notorious feud.

However, by looking for a better name for her beloved, what Juliet is also trying to do is to define, therefore, ‘determine, give a limit, fix the boundaries’¹⁴ of love. It is such a new experience for her that she needs to ‘define’ its overwhelming power. While Romeo’s main concern is how to answer Juliet’s questions and also how to react in case Juliet’s family find him there, Juliet seems more focused on the very nature of her love. This quest for a definition is conveyed by the high occurrence of questions which Juliet poses in connection with the essence of a name:

Wherefore art thou Romeo? (line 1)

What’s a Montague? (line 8)

What’s in a name? (line 11)

Art thou not Romeo and a Montague? (line 30).

14 “define”: late 14c., *deffinen*, *difffinen*, “to specify, to fix or establish authoritatively”, of words, phrases, etc., “state the signification of, explain what is meant by, describe in detail,” from Old French *defenir*, *definir* “to finish, conclude, come to an end; bring to an end; define, determine with precision” and directly from Medieval Latin *difffinire*, *definire*, from Latin *definire* “to limit, determine, explain,” from *de* “completely” + *finire* “to bound, limit”, from *finis* “boundary, end”. From c 1400 as “determine, declare, or mark the limit of.”; <https://www.etymonline.com/word/define>.

What is worth enabling students to notice is the nature of Juliet's questions. They are questions which cannot always be answered, or do not have a definite answer. These questions actually seem to assert rather than ask, as though the answers were implicit in the question. Juliet's questions are real rhetorical questions. They state something which is already known to the addresser and, in literary discourse in particular, they are often employed in soliloquies, as also this excerpt proves. As is well-known, the passage shows the girl will not be able to 'change' that name, in spite of the fact that for her 'Romeo' is the name for love. Although for her 'love' is more than a word, more than a name, the tragedy will occur precisely because, metaphorically, she cannot change that name. Her questions remain unanswered.

There is more to it. As a matter of fact, the repetition of the word 'name' implies what Lynette Hunter defines an "echolocation", that is to say

"(...) the way the patterns of repetition of identical or similar sounds and words within different figures can convey argument."¹⁵

The repetition of the word 'name', in particular, indicates to Shakespeare's readers audience the centrality of the problem for the young lovers. It helps foretell the tragic ending of the love story. It is important to enlighten students as to the effect of rhetorical devices on the English Renaissance audience since rhetorical devices, such as the repetition of the word 'name', added further meanings to the text (Hunter 2005: 260). Hunter's study, in particular, aims at signalling the force of devices such as *ploces* (one word repeated in a number of different contexts), *synoeciosis* (a form of oxymoron), as well as elaborate puns such as *diaphora* and *antanaclasis*, in the play that operate as a means to focus the audience's attention on specific words which will reveal themselves as key-words for the development of the action, in particular to predict pivotal events. This can be already noticed in the short extract chosen for this section: Juliet's focus on the 'name' Romeo and the impossibility of changing that name basically predicts the final tragedy.

Going back to the specific features of rhetorical questions, both in the direct and in the indirect form, we may see that this rhetorical device also characterises Auden's poem, and, also in this text, the figure is employed with the intention of describing the nature of love. Truth be told, this text, abounds with questions more than the Shakespeare's extract, as there are 21 direct questions and 5 indirect ones, title included. Neither does Auden succeed in finding a definition, maybe because it is impossible to reduce love to a definition, or maybe, the essence of love is hidden in the small seemingly meaningless details of everyday life.

Auden's quest, surely longer and more disenchanting than that of Juliet, is articulated into seven stanzas where the indirect rhetorical question 'O tell me the truth about love' is at the end of stanzas 2, 4, 6, and 7. The poet repeats the most typical commonplaces about love, in particular in the first stanza where this word is, the only time in the poem, written with capital L. Thus, it is 'a little boy' (l. 2), 'a bird' (l. 3), and, above all, 'it makes the world go round' (l. 4). The tentative hyperbole is immediately broken by the angry look of his neighbour's wife while the man tries to offer a definition. Two further rhetorical images of love are also provided at lines 38 ('the blackbird') and at line 47 ('Patriotism'). However, the most recurrent images are undoubtedly images of everyday life, sometimes with disparate, surrealistic,

15 See Lynette Hunter, (2005), "Echolocation, figuration and tellings: rhetorical strategies in *Romeo and Juliet*", in *Language and Literature*, SAGE Publications, Vol 14(3); page 260; DOI: 10.1177/0963947005054481; <http://lal.sagepub.com>; (last access: 5th May 2020).

and desecrating examples, such as its possible resemblance to ham (l. 11), or its odour similar to the one of llamas (l. 12), or somehow written on the backs of some railway guides (ls. 24–25), or its sounding like a hungry dog (l. 26) or a saw (l. 29), or its proper place in a chicken-run (l. 40), or under a bed (l. 41), or its capability of making strange faces (l. 42), etc. The poet wonders on the nature of this powerful feeling, trying to define its material aspect ('prickly', l. 14; 'soft', l. 15; 'sharp', l. 16). He even tries to personify it by wondering if it suffers on a swing (l. 43), if it spends time at the races (l. 44), if it has any opinion on finance (l. 46), if it tells vulgar but funny stories (l. 48), etc., ending by imagining it as a person who 'comes without warning' (l. 50) and maybe knocking at the poet's door (l. 52), or, more ironically, if it may appear to him by treading on his feet on a bus (l. 53). It is clear that, despite all these questions, Auden cannot define love. The impossibility of 'grasping' love is also confirmed by the fact that, despite the opportunities offered by the quite irregular rhyme pattern of this poem, 'love' is a word which never rhymes. Its repetition, instead, foregrounds its pivotal importance for the quest. No influential person, therefore no one who is worth being quoted, can define it, or can simply provide any kind of description: the repetition of the partitive 'some' in the initial stanza (ls. 2, 3, 4, 5) expresses this indefiniteness.

The poem contains several rhetorical devices, such as rhymes, repetitions, assonances, alliterations, onomatopoeia, run-on-lines, all in seven stanzas. This is particularly interesting because it underlines how a love poem 'must' abound with high degree of rhetoric. Let us analyse each of them.

- (a) Rhyme: the rhyme scheme is not completely regular,¹⁶ and in a 'love poem' this detail conveys the irregularity of the quest.
- (b) Repetition:
 - "some" (four times, ls. 2, 3, 4, 5—first stanza);
 - "does" in even stanzas to introduce rhetorical questions (ls. 10, 12—second stanza; ls. 26, 31—fourth stanza; ls. 44, 47—sixth stanza);
 - "will" (ls. 32—fourth stanza; ls. 50, 52, 54, 55, 56—seventh stanza) to introduce rhetorical questions in the (uncertain or far) future; particularly strong in the last stanza in order to conclude the quest, introduced by the alliteration of the first word of the stanza "when" (l. 50);
 - "or", to foreground the various possibilities, or options: ls. 11, 15—second stanza; ls. 27, 29—fourth stanza; ls. 39, 41—fifth stanza; ls. 45—sixth stanza; ls. 53—seven stanza;
 - "I" ls. 34, 36, 38—fifth stanza, to focus on the poet himself in his quest.
- (c) Assonance:
 - "or" (ls. 11, 13, 15, 27, 39, 41, 45, 53) expressing possibility / on (ls. 20, 24, 29) to reinforce the 'sound' of possibility, which reinforces the invocation of the title "o", repeated at the end of stanzas 2, 4, 6, 7, the same invocation of the title concludes the poem, to indicate a circularity of the quest which revolves around itself without providing any answer.
- (d) Alliteration:
 - "some say" (first stanza, first 4 lines) nothing is specified, so no certainties;
 - "look like" l. 10, second stanza, the verb conveys the idea of no certainty;
 - "howl / hungry" l. 26 (fourth stanza), a comical comparison;

16 ABCBDEFE / ABACDEDE / ABCBDEFE / ABABCDCD / ABCBDEFE / ABABCDCD / ABABCDCD: the 1st, 3rd, and 5th stanza have the same rhyme scheme; the 4th, 6th, and 7th have the same rhyme scheme; the 2nd stanza does not rhyme with any other stanza.

- “sang / said” ls. 38–39 (fifth stanza), introduced by a negation, no certainties, further reinforced by the following lines “it wasn’t in the chicken-run / or underneath the bed” ls. 40–41; “sick / swing” l. 43 with comical effect in the sixth stanza, the ‘s’ recurs in the word “string”, “fiddling with pieces of string”, emphasising the comical effect of romanticised love; “views” / “own”, l. 46 (sixth stanza), comical effect of imagining love having “its view about money”;
- “pyjamas” / “llamas” ls 10, 12: to foreground the absurdity of the resemblance of love;
- (e) Run-on-lines, to foreground the monotony of a quest which revolves around itself:
 ls. 18–19; 20–21; 22–23; 24–25 (third stanza);
 ls. 28–29 (fourth stanza);
 ls 50–51 (sixth stanza).

The structure of the poem evokes the form of the ballad, and thus a traditional form of poetry, easy to learn by heart, and characterised by simple language, a circular structure, and a formulaic repetition, in this case of the refrain “O tell me the truth about love”. The choice of a ballad-like structure helps underline the common, everyday aspect of love.

Auden’s continually accumulating rhetorical questions and the frequent allusions to everyday life contribute to the effect of putting the poet and his readers on the same level in an attempt to define love. The meandering quest for love creates a kind of tacit cooperation between the poet and the reader who ends up involved in the same search for ‘truth’ about love. This kind of agreement is very similar to the so-called “cooperative principle” theorized by H. P. Grice and more typical of narrative (Leech, Short 2007 [1981]: 236).

This poem can be also seen as a kind of monologue, since the poet speaks in the first person singular, in this way narrating his personal quest:

- l. 6 “I”, first stanza;
- l. 17 “me”, second stanza;
- l. 22 “I”, third stanza ;
- l. 33 “me”, fourth stanza;
- ls. 34, 36, 38 “I”, fifth stanza;
- l. 49 “me”, sixth stanza;
- l. 51 “I” / “me” l. 57, seventh stanza.

All in all, the analysis of Auden’s poem produces evidence that, according to this poem, there is no way of defining love and the circular structure of the poem only reconfirms it. In point of fact, the initial command returns at the end of the text, notwithstanding all the questions asked throughout the poem. The outcome of the quest seems to suggest that there is no single kind of love, that it can have many aspects, and maybe that each facet of love has a small ‘ring of truth’ about it. Therefore, love is limitless and rather confusing for human imagery or rationality. However, the more rational is the quest, the farther away it leads us from the answer, as love is actually deeply irrational, impenetrable and impossible to pin down. Each definition of love discloses a part of the truth but not ‘the’ truth. The only truth conveyed by Auden is that love is “a mystery that no philosophy, no amount of dialectic has been able to clear up so far.”¹⁷

17 See Rawlinson, Z., (2008), “‘If equal affection can be / Let the more loving one be me’: Auden on Love”, in *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring 2008); page 70. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41274409> (last access: 9th May 2020).

At this point, once it is ascertained that love is mysterious, and, above all, that it may have limitless aspects, and it can arrive at any moment in human life, we can introduce the third excerpt to students, an extract of WLE by the Turkish writer Elif Shafak.

From Elif Shafak, (2015 [2010]), *The Forty Rules of Love*, London: Penguin Books; pages 109–110.

Shams

1 **KONYA, OCTOBER 17, 1244**

2 Beholden to the peasant who dropped me off at the town center, I found myself and my horse a
3 place to stay. The Inn of Sugar Vendors seemed just what I needed. Of the four rooms I was shown, I chose
4 the one with the fewest possessions, which consisted of a sleeping mat with a moldy blanket, an oil lamp
5 that was sputtering its last, a sun-dried brick that I could use as a pillow, and a good view of the whole town
6 up to the base of the surrounding hills.

7 Having thus settled down, I roamed the streets, amazed at the mixture of religions, customs, and
8 languages permeating the air. I ran into Gypsy musicians, Arab travelers, Christian pilgrims, Jewish
9 merchants, Buddhist priests, Frankish troubadours, Persian artists, Chinese acrobats, Indian snake charmers,
10 Zoroastrian magicians, and Greek philosophers. In the slave market, I saw concubines with skin white as milk
11 and hefty, dark eunuchs who had seen such atrocities that they had lost their ability to speak. In the bazaar
12 I came across traveling barbers with bloodletting devices, fortune-tellers with crystal balls, and magicians
13 who swallowed fire. There were pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem and vagrants who I suspected were
14 runaway soldiers from the last Crusades. I heard people speak Venetian, Frankish, Saxon, Greek, Persian,
15 Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian, Hebrew, and several other dialects I couldn't even distinguish. Despite their
16 seemingly endless differences, all of these people gave off a similar air of incompleteness, of the works in
17 progress that they were, each an unfinished masterpiece.

18 The whole city was a Tower of Babel. Everything was constantly shifting, splitting, coming to light,
19 transpiring, thriving, dissolving, decomposing, and dying. Amid this chaos I stood in a place of unperturbed
20 silence and serenity, utterly indifferent to the world and yet at the same time feeling a burning love for all
21 the people struggling and suffering in it. As I watched the people around me, I recalled another golden rule:
22 *It's easy to love a perfect God, unblemished and infallible that He is. What is far more difficult is to love fellow*
23 *human beings with all their imperfections and defects. Remember, one can only know what one is capable of*
24 *loving. There is no wisdom without love. Unless we learn to love God's creation, we can neither truly love nor*
25 *truly know God.*

A few lines are needed to introduce the writer and novel. Elif Shafak is one of the most acclaimed Turkish writers. She writes both in Turkish and in English and her novels have been translated into 47 languages. In her fiction, she blends Western and Near Eastern topics, cultures and traditions to create original products which are expressions of glocalised literature, also due to her life experience of being a “stranger in a strangeland”, or “derritorialization” (Shafak 2003: 58). Her fiction reveals her interest in history, philosophy, oral cultures, Sufism as well as feminism and Ottoman culture. In particular, her experience of living in Istanbul, a city strongly marked by the border between Europe and Asia, is reflected in the ‘in-betweenness’ and ‘non-belongingness’ of the life experience of the main characters and the general atmosphere of her novels. When her second novel, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, (2006, written in English), was published, she was strongly attacked in her homeland for having defined the slaughter of the Armenians during WW1 as a “genocide”.

The Forty Rules of Love contains two intertwined narrations, one is an account of Ella Rubenstein's life, set in the USA in 2008, and the other one tells the story of the fraternal friendship between Shams of Tabriz and Rumi, two XIII century Persian mystical poets and theologians.

The novel opens with a description of Ella, about forty years old, who is living in an unhappy marriage. With the aim of giving some meaning to her empty days, she accepts a job as a reader for a local literary agent and she is asked to review a novel titled *Sweet Blasphemy*, written by a certain Aziz Zahara, narrating the story of Shams' encounter with Rumi and of Shams' gradual discovery of the 'rules' of real love. Shafak's novel displays Ella's narrations interposed with Aziz Zahara's stories and recounts how the American woman sees herself mirrored in Shams' experience.

While reading Zahara's novel, Ella becomes aware of the lack of love in all her life, especially comparing her dissatisfaction with the gradual happiness experienced by Zahara's characters. Shams and Rumi practise Islamic Sufi teachings despite the aversion of some Islamic scholars who consider these behaviours Satanic. Involved in the events of the narration, Ella decides to send an email to the author of the novel. Ella and Aziz Zahara slowly become such intimate friends that the woman gradually opens herself to the idea of love expressed in the novel and that Zahara shares and practises. In the novel, Ella comes across characters who, despite knowing unhappiness and abuse, start a new life thanks to the Sufi faith and its idea of love which is more substantial than the simple rules imposed by religion. Ella tells her husband of her friendship with Zahara and announces that she is going to meet the writer. During their meeting in a Boston hotel, they learn more and more about each other through deep conversations and realise that their attraction is pure love. Ella knows that they only have a few days before Zahara's departure for Europe and she tells him that she wants to follow him. The writer reveals to Ella that he is suffering from terminal cancer and that he only has a few months left to live. He leaves and Ella returns home. Some days later, she decides to leave her meaningless life with her family to follow Zahara and to live the rest of her life with him and like him.

The speaking voice in the passage above is that of Shams of Tabriz, in 1244, who has just arrived in the Turkish town of Konya where he will meet Rumi, after attending one of his sermons.

What we learn from the novel, and what is also reported in the excerpt, is an idea of love which is different from the ideas expressed in the previous passages. Elif Shafak introduces us to a Sufi idea of love, which is probably higher and more universal, than its Western representation. In some way, this extract gives an answer to the all-Western quest expressed in the passages by Shakespeare and Auden: according to the Turkish writer, in the quest for love, and to really understand and experience it, a pre-step is essential, namely to love God's creation, therefore real love is an absolute feeling. There is more to it: love is present, it is omnipresent, it appears as the only human experience which grants people access to the feeling of absolute. This feature of Eastern absoluteness resembles the sensation of powerfulness, of limitlessness, felt by Romeo, who is ready to challenge Juliet's family, and by Juliet, who is open to overriding Romeo's belonging to his family, even though Romeo and Juliet's love is more down-to-earth than Shafak's idea, which is strongly rooted in a Sufi dimension. Thanks to dealing with this author and her interests, students are introduced to 'another' idea of love, in this case, tackling the example of Sufi philosophy, a vision related to Near Eastern culture.

What the excerpt shows is that there are some preliminary conditions to being able to properly experience love, which are simplicity and openness to diversity, at least according to the Sufi frame of mind. The passage, which is the beginning of a chapter, opens with a description of an inn in Konya,

a Turkish town of the 13th century where Shams decides to stay, hoping to meet Rumi by attending one of his sermons. The room, which he chooses among the four he is shown, is described as “*just what I needed*” (l. 3), that is to say “*the one with the fewest possessions*” (l. 4): only a sleeping mat with a “*moldy*” (l. 4) blanket, a decrepit oil lamp and a “*sun-dried brick*” as a pillow (l. 5). Since the purpose of Shams’ visit is a mystic experience, he does not need to be surrounded by any other material objects.

The following paragraph, from line 7 to line 17, is Shams’ interesting description of the ambience outside the inn, in the very centre of Konya where he is staying. There is a very long list of categories of people circulating around, a blend of religions, customs and languages “*permeating the air*” (line 8). People are subdivided into:

- (a) religions and activities related to them: Christian pilgrims, Jewish merchants, Buddhist priests, Zoroastrian magicians (ls. 8–9, 10);
- (b) ethnicities and activities related to them: Gypsy musicians, Arab travellers, Frankish troubadours, Persian artists, Chinese acrobats, Indian snake charmers, Greek philosophers (ls. 8–10);
- (c) contrasting skin colours and life experiences: concubines with skin white as milk and hefty (ls 10–11), dark eunuchs who had seen such atrocities that they had lost their ability to speak (l. 11);
- (d) jobs and curious tools: travelling barbers with bloodletting devices, (l. 12), fortune-tellers with crystal balls (l. 12), fire-swallowers;
- (e) travellers and searchers of any kind: pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem (l. 13), vagrants who Shams suspects were runaway soldiers from the last Crusades (ls. 13–14);
- (f) languages: Venetian, Frankish, Saxon, Greek, Persian, Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian, Hebrew, other dialects he couldn’t even distinguish (ls. 14–15).

Such a complex and polyhedral humanity is in the end defined as an “*unfinished masterwork*” (l. 17), a kind of oxymoron which underlines the incompleteness of each facet and operates as a climax towards the end of the reflection, namely the verbalisation of one of the forty rules of love. Moreover, the word “*masterwork*” conveys the idea of the beauty of human variety in its complexity, as if there were no privileged human category more suitable than others to attend Rumi’s sermons, and thus to experience love.

Shams defines the place as “*a Tower of Babel*” (l. 18), full of noise and actions, where everything around him is “*constantly shifting, splitting, coming to light, transpiring, thriving, dissolving, decomposing, and dying*” (ls. 18–19). All the verbs employed by Shafak to depict the atmosphere in Konya waiting for Rumi’s revelations about the meaning of love evoke dynamic imagery but their final ending is nothing but death. When he is observing the human whirlwind into which he is plunged, Shams’ state of mind, illustrated through the words of “*unperturbed silence and serenity, utterly indifferent to the world*” (ls. 19–20), is in striking contrast with all the chaos that surrounds him. This state of concentration allows him to remember the forty “*golden*” (l. 21) rules of love which are in accordance with that chaos. Those “*seemingly endless differences*” (l. 16) to which he is assisting, induces in him “*a burning love for all the people struggling and suffering*” (ls. 20–21) in the world. As a matter of fact, it is this diversity which reminds him of the rule which essentially states that by learning to love imperfection humans can finally experience real love, which is love for God and his creation. The language Shafak uses to describe the rule is typical of a directive style, that is to say short and clear sentences which assume the aspect of guidelines. In particular, we can observe the use of:

simple present, to state absoluteness: “*it’s easy*” (l. 22), “*what is far more difficult*” (l. 22), “*there is no wisdom*” (l. 24), “*we learn*” (l. 24), “*we can neither truly love nor truly know God*” (ls. 24–25); imperative, to express a command: “*remember*”, l. 23;

repetition, “*truly love / truly know*” which links the word ‘truth’ with ‘love’ to state ‘the truth about true love’, which is the one felt towards God’s creation, even in its human imperfection.

In this apparent chaos Shams remembers a rule which is apparently simple, at least in its practice: it is easy to love what is perfect, it is difficult to love imperfection, and love is the necessary premise to acquiring wisdom and knowledge, as we can learn only through love. What seems even more essential in the expression of this rule is that humans should love all that is around them in order to be able to say that they love God, which is the purest form of love.

According to Shafak’s Sufi view, that is a Near Eastern philosophical view, it is, thus, possible to define love, and it is possible because the definition can only be arrived at via a religious and mystical vision.

6. Follow-up activities in the class

The journey through the limitless facets of love and the language to speak about it leaves a broad space for students to express themselves on this topic. Therefore, once the actual variety of expressions and experiences of love have been apprehended by the students, the activities should aim at leaving students free to express ‘their truth’, that is to say, their vision and / or experience linked to this feeling. For reasons of space, we can provide only a few examples, such as: the teacher could invite students to share their truth about love with their classmates, thus to express their vision. Students are free to choose the form that they prefer: a letter, a poem, a song, a video-clip commentary, a drawing with captions, a dedication to somebody on a social platform, or a Whatsapp audio-video message.

To play with love, like Auden did, students could be invited to imagine to be working for a chocolate factory and to create at least three original short love messages, specifically targeted at young people, to write on chocolate bonbon wrapping paper.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to show how it is possible to go beyond traditional Italian secondary school English literature syllabi by including contribution from writers of World Literature in English (WLE). A case study has been offered to show how traditional writers can be compared with WLE authors through a stylistic approach, as well as making suggestions for follow-up activities in the classroom. The article makes a specific reference to Italian *licei*, but the reflections can be extended to other contexts where the pedagogy of English literature is particularly centred around British authors. The reason why it is necessary to go beyond traditional syllabi of English literature is that in our contemporary age, the age of globalisation, it is not possible, and not ethical either, to continue offering a monocentric vision of English literature at school when the reality of English is actually “pluricentric”. Therefore, also, literary expression in this language needs to reflect polycentrism. It is possible to achieve this without interfering with the historical outline of English writers which is considered indispensable in Italian schools. This objective can be accomplished by comparing passages written by traditional English writers with meaningfully

related excerpts by WLE authors with the help of stylistics. As regards the specific case of Italy, the latest Ministry of Education guidelines concerning the pedagogy of English language and literature seem to have opened up to the study of writers who do not simply *write English*, but rather write *in English*, rather than just stipulating the literary expressions of English-speaking countries. Moreover, Italian teachers of English literature in *licei* also show their interest in finding a possible way to enrich the ‘canon’ of English literature with contributions of WLE writers, as the outcomes of the survey prove, to help students go beyond the traditional outline of English literature. This article has also emphasized the importance of the study of literature in upper secondary schools as a means of providing simulated lived experiences so that teenagers are better prepared to interpret the complexity of the world, since there is no setting or experience that literature has not dealt with. In order to accomplish the task through an aesthetic experience, complex pedagogical action is required to stimulate students’ involvement in reading and appreciation of a literary text, an objective which can be very well attained, I hope it has been shown, with the help of a stylistic analysis of excerpts presented in class.

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