

## **USING PERFORMANCE-BASED PEDAGOGY TO DEVELOP CRITICAL THINKING WITH SHAKESPEAREAN SONNETS IN PHILOLOGY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article examines the effectiveness of a performance-based approach in fostering critical thinking skills in philology students, using Shakespeare's sonnets as a case study. The focus is on the use of tableau vivant and character monologues as specific pedagogical techniques. The article analyzes how these methods contribute to the development of analytical and interpretive skills, empathy, and non-verbal communication. It argues that actively engaging students in the process of embodying sonnets through performance deepens their understanding of the text, stimulates creative thinking, and cultivates a more conscious approach to literary study. The article is addressed to educators in philology departments and researchers interested in innovative methods of teaching literature.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare's sonnets, critical thinking, performance-based approach, tableau vivant, character monologue, philology education, literary pedagogy.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In an era of information overload and rapid sociocultural transformations, the development of critical thinking has become a priority for higher education. This is particularly true in the context of philology, where deep textual analysis, the ability to interpret literary images, and the formulation of well-reasoned judgments are fundamental competencies. Shakespeare's sonnets, recognized as masterpieces of world literature, offer rich material for developing these skills. However, traditional teaching methods, based on passive information reception, do not always actively engage students in the process of comprehending the text. Consequently, there is a need for new pedagogical approaches that stimulate students' creative activity and critical thinking.

One promising direction is the performance-based approach, which involves studying literature through its embodiment in performance. Within this framework, students do not simply analyze the text but actively interact with it, interpreting it through various performative practices. This not only deepens the understanding of the literary work but also develops a range of crucial cognitive skills, including the ability to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and make reasoned arguments. The purpose of this article is to explore the potential of using a performance-based approach in teaching critical thinking to philology students through the lens of Shakespeare's sonnets, with a particular focus on the methods of tableau vivant and character monologues.

### **METHODS**

The proposed methodology is rooted in a performance-based approach to literary study, which views the literary text not as a static object but as a potential action that unfolds in the process of its embodiment in performance [1]. This approach draws upon the ideas of theatrical

pedagogy and the theory of embodied cognition, according to which cognitive processes are inextricably linked with bodily experience [2]. In this study, the performance-based approach is implemented through two main methods: the creation of tableaux vivants and the development and performance of character monologues.

**Tableau Vivant:** Students collaboratively create static "living pictures" using their bodies and props to visually represent key themes, images, or emotions within a chosen sonnet. This process involves textual analysis, group discussion, and creative interpretation, culminating in a visual metaphor for the sonnet.

**Character Monologues:** Students write and perform monologues from the perspective of a character connected to the sonnet. This requires deep textual analysis to develop a convincing character portrayal, considering their psychological motivations and emotional state. Students then work on performance elements like intonation, gesture, and expression to convey the character's inner world to the audience.

Both methods emphasize active student collaboration in small groups, fostering cooperation, communication, and creative problem-solving. The instructor facilitates the process, guiding analysis and encouraging creative exploration. Post-performance discussions allow students to share interpretations, justify creative choices, and consider diverse perspectives.

## RESULTS

### 1. Tableau Vivant: Visualization and Embodiment of the Text

The use of the tableau vivant method in the study of Shakespeare's sonnets contributes to the development of a range of skills necessary for the formation of critical thinking in philology students.

**Development of Visual Analysis Skills:** Creating tableaux vivants requires students to deeply understand the visual component of poetic text. They need to identify key images, symbols, metaphors, and allegories used by the author and find their adequate visual representation. For example, when working with Sonnet 18 ("Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?"), students might create a composition contrasting the transience of natural beauty with the eternal beauty captured in poetry:

Shall I compare thee<sup>1</sup> to a summer's day?  
Thou<sup>2</sup> art<sup>3</sup> more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath<sup>4</sup> all too short a date;  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
...  
But thy<sup>5</sup> eternal summer shall not fade,

<sup>1</sup> **Thee:** You (used as the object of a verb or preposition)

<sup>2</sup> **Thou:** You (used as the subject of a verb)

<sup>3</sup> **Art:** Are

<sup>4</sup> **Hath:** Has

<sup>5</sup> **Thy:** Your

...

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

They might depict wilting flowers and falling leaves to represent the fleeting nature of summer, juxtaposed with a representation of the poet writing, a quill in hand, beside an open book, symbolizing the enduring power of verse. This process teaches students to see and interpret not only the literal meaning of words but also their hidden meaning embedded in visual images. According to Even & Heilbronn (2016), tableau vivant provides "a unique opportunity to engage with text in a multi-sensory way," fostering a deeper understanding of its visual and symbolic dimensions [5].

**Development of Non-Verbal Communication Skills:** Tableau vivant allows students to experiment with body language, facial expressions, and gestures. Limited in verbal means, students are forced to seek other ways of conveying meaning and emotions, which contributes to the development of non-verbal communication skills. As Dickson (2010) argues, "the theatricality of the classroom" can be harnessed to enhance communication skills, and tableau vivant is a prime example of this [4]. For instance, in a "living picture" based on Sonnet 29 ("When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes..."), students can convey the feeling of despair and loneliness through poses, facial expressions, and the spatial arrangement of figures:

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,  
I all alone beweep<sup>6</sup> my outcast state,  
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless<sup>7</sup> cries,  
And look upon myself and curse my fate,  
One student might stand isolated, head bowed, while others turn away, embodying the speaker's isolation.

**Stimulating Creative Thinking and Imagination:** The process of creating tableau vivant requires students to creatively interpret the text. They do not simply reproduce the content of the sonnet but create their own visual interpretation based on their understanding of the author's intention. This stimulates imagination, teaches to see the multiplicity of meanings and create new images. This aligns with Kelner's (2015) assertion that "teaching Shakespeare through performance" encourages students to become active interpreters and co-creators of meaning [3].

## **2. Character Monologues: Exploring Character and Voice**

The application of the character monologue method in studying Shakespeare's sonnets significantly contributes to the development of critical thinking in philology students, especially in aspects related to interpretation, empathy, and understanding of the author's intention.

<sup>6</sup> **Beweep:** Weep over, lament, cry intensely about

<sup>7</sup> **Bootless:** Useless, futile, ineffective

**Development of Textual Interpretation and Empathy Skills:** Writing a monologue requires deep immersion in the text of the sonnet. Students need to carefully analyze the language, images, and emotional tone to understand the character's inner world, motivations, and feelings. For example, when working with Sonnet 130 ("My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun..."), a student can write a monologue from the perspective of the "dark lady," revealing her reaction to the unconventional description of her appearance and expressing her attitude towards the lyrical hero:

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<sup>8</sup>;  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
I have seen roses damask'd<sup>9</sup>, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks...

The monologue could explore her feelings about being compared unfavorably to conventional beauty standards, perhaps revealing a confident woman who values inner beauty or a woman hurt by the speaker's words but who masks her pain with wit. This kind of imaginative engagement fosters empathy and nuanced textual interpretation. O'Toole (2017) highlights the power of the monologue to "transform" our understanding of dramatic characters by giving them a voice and a unique perspective [6].

**Development of Argumentation and Persuasion Skills:** When creating a monologue, a student essentially constructs an argument from the character's perspective, justifying their actions, feelings, and views. They learn to formulate theses, support them with textual evidence, and build a logical chain of reasoning. For instance, a monologue from the lyrical hero of the sonnets dedicated to the "fair youth" might be constructed as a defense of his love and admiration, based on an analysis of the images and metaphors used in the sonnets. This process strengthens argumentation skills, crucial for critical thinking.

**Development of Oral Presentation and Acting Skills:** Performing a monologue is not just reading a text but embodying it on stage. Students learn to control their voice, intonation, facial expressions, and gestures to convey the character's emotional state to the audience and make their image convincing. This promotes the development of oral presentation and acting skills that are important for future philologists, educators, and communication specialists.

## DISCUSSION

The presented results demonstrate that the use of a performance-based approach, and in particular the methods of tableau vivant and character monologues, in teaching philology students critical thinking through Shakespeare's sonnets is highly effective. The inclusion of these methods in the educational process allows going beyond the traditional text analysis and creates conditions for a deeper and more conscious understanding of it.

<sup>8</sup> **Dun:** A dull grayish-brown color

<sup>9</sup> **Damask'd:** Having a variegated or patterned appearance, like that of damask fabric. It refers to a mix of red and white

It is important to note that the effectiveness of these methods is due not only to their specifics but also to the fact that they are based on the fundamental principles of modern pedagogy, such as the activity approach, student-centered learning, and the theory of embodied cognition (Shapiro, 2019) [2]. According to these principles, knowledge is not simply transmitted to students in a ready-made form but is actively constructed by them in the process of activity. In this case, the activity of students is aimed at the stage embodiment of sonnets, which requires not only intellectual but also emotional and creative efforts.

The performative approach, realized through tableau vivant and monologues, activates various channels of information perception – visual, auditory, kinesthetic, which contributes to a deeper and more multifaceted understanding of the text. Students do not just "consume" information but live it, passing it through themselves, which leads to a more solid assimilation of the material and the formation of a stable interest in the subject being studied. As Pine & Gilmore (2011) argue in their work on the "experience economy," creating engaging and memorable experiences is crucial for effective learning [1].

Moreover, this approach stimulates the development of students' emotional intelligence, since working on the stage embodiment of sonnets requires them to understand and interpret not only the intellectual but also the emotional content of the text. They learn to recognize and express subtle shades of feelings, empathize with the characters, which is an integral part of critical thinking and humanities education in general.

It should be emphasized that the application of the performative approach in philological education is not limited to Shakespeare's sonnets alone. These methods can be successfully adapted for the study of other literary genres and authors. Their use is especially relevant in the context of the modern educational landscape, characterized by clip thinking and the dominance of visual culture. Performative practices allow overcoming these trends, forming students' skills of thoughtful reading, deep analysis, and conscious perception of the artistic text. This is consistent with Dickson's (2010) argument that the performative can counteract the fragmentation of attention in the digital age [4].

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the performance-based approach, based on the use of tableau vivant and character monologues, is a powerful tool for developing critical thinking in philology students while studying Shakespeare's sonnets. It contributes to the formation of skills of analysis, interpretation, evaluation, argumentation, develops empathy, creative imagination, and communication competencies. The introduction of these methods into the educational process makes the study of literature more lively, engaging, and personally meaningful for students, which contributes not only to improving the quality of philological education but also to the formation of a comprehensively developed personality capable of deep understanding of culture and critical understanding of the world. Thus, the performance-based approach opens new perspectives for humanities education in the 21st century, allowing for an effective combination of tradition and innovation in the training of future philologists.

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