

Implementing the Principle Of “Ta’lim-Tarbiya” In the Discussion of Ethical Dilemmas in Shakespeare’s Sonnet 94

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Abstract: The article examines how Shakespeare’s Sonnet 94 can be used for the practical implementation of the ta’lim-tarbiya principle in the university EFL context of Uzbekistan. The aim of this article is to show that a close reading of this text makes it possible to combine intellectual engagement with poetry and a discussion of responsibility, self-control, honor, and inner honesty. The material comprised the text of the sonnet in scholarly editions and commentaries, studies on the ethical reading of poetry, and works on spiritual and moral education in Uzbek higher education. The methods of close reading and of hermeneutic and comparative-axiological analysis were employed, along with pedagogical modeling. The sonnet is shown to amount neither to an apology for cold restraint nor to a ready-made moral maxim; rather, it puts strength to the test of moral maturity. A model of seminar discussion is proposed in which analytical work with the text becomes the basis for substantive educational reflection.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Sonnet 94, ta’lim-tarbiya, English poetry, ethical dilemma, close reading, mas’uliyat, or-nomus, halollik.

Introduction: In the teaching of foreign-language literature at Uzbek universities, a shift is increasingly evident from narrowly linguistic objectives toward shaping the student’s worldview and values. This logic accords with educational policy documents in which teaching and upbringing are treated as interconnected processes [13-16]. English poetry is therefore significant not only as material for linguistic analysis but also as a space for engaging with moral choice, cultural distance, and reasoned interpretation [9; 12; 17].

Shakespeare’s Sonnet 94 is especially productive in this respect. Its very first line – “They that have power to hurt and will do none” – raises the question of a power that is not the same as violence [1; 2]. The text goes on to link self-possession with temptation, and self-mastery with control over the outward impression one makes, and then sharply shifts perspective through the image of a flower infected from within and therefore smelling worse than a weed [1-5]. It is precisely this composition that makes the sonnet pedagogically

valuable: it is aphoristic, yet does not reduce to a ready-made moral lesson.

In an Uzbek university classroom working with English poetry in an EFL mode, the words “unmoved,” “cold,” and “lords and owners of their faces” may at first arouse wariness in some students, since they are associated with kibr, hudbinlik, and emotional inaccessibility. Yet such a reading is not the only one possible. On the contrary, it opens up the productive question of the boundary between mature self-possession and moral estrangement [5; 10; 11].

The pedagogical difficulty lies in choosing between two equally weak strategies: either to confine oneself to historical-literary commentary, or to replace analysis with general moralizing. In the first case the educational potential of the text is weakened; in the second, its philological complexity disappears. The ta’lim-tarbiya principle requires not the separation of these tasks but their integration within a single instructional procedure [6-9; 17-19].

The aim of the article is to show how an analysis of Shakespeare's Sonnet 94 can serve as a practical implementation of the ta'lim-tarbiya principle in discussing ethical dilemmas in a university classroom. To this end, three tasks are addressed: to identify the moral architecture of the sonnet, to correlate its key images with concepts significant for the Uzbek cultural and pedagogical tradition, and to propose a model lesson in a "round-table" format. The novelty of the study lies in combining Shakespearean scholarship with the Uzbek educational context and in translating this combination into a concrete methodological scheme.

METHODS

The study is theoretical and methodological in nature and stands at the intersection of literary studies, pedagogy, and axiology. The material consists of Shakespeare's Sonnet 94 in scholarly editions and commentaries [1-5; 10-11], as well as works on the ethical reading of poetry and on moral education in higher education [6-9; 12; 17-19]. The normative context is provided by documents of the Republic of Uzbekistan that affirm the connection between teaching, upbringing, and the spiritual and moral development of the individual [13-16].

The primary method is close reading, which allows analysis of the vocabulary, imagery, syntax, and composition of the sonnet [7]. This is essential, since the text's ethical concerns are not stated as a direct maxim; they arise from the tension between outwardly attractive characteristics and the disquieting closing image of "lilies that fester from within" [1; 2]. Moral discussion must therefore rest not on predetermined judgments but on a close, step-by-step reading of the textual markers.

This approach is complemented by hermeneutic and comparative-axiological analysis. The former allows the sonnet to be regarded as a text admitting several permissible interpretations, yet not as a text open to any meaning whatever. The latter is used for a cautious juxtaposition of its key motifs with the concepts of mas'uliyat, nafsni tiyish, or-nomus, and halollik, which are significant for Uzbek educational discourse [15-17]. In this work such a juxtaposition is heuristic: it does not presuppose a direct transfer of national categories onto the Shakespearean text but helps to reveal where productive pedagogical dialogue becomes possible.

Finally, the method of pedagogical modeling makes it possible to translate the results of the reading into a format for seminar discussion in which analytical work with the text leads to educational reflection.

RESULTS

1. The ethical architecture of Sonnet 94: from power to self-control. The first quatrain presents the image of people who "have the power to hurt and yet do none" [1; 2]. Power is not in itself presented as a virtue: moral meaning arises at the point of choice, when the possibility of action is deliberately not turned into action. This matters for a pedagogical reading, since the text links power above all with responsibility rather than with domination.

This is probably where one of the first interpretive difficulties arises. The words "unmoved" and "cold" are easily read as an apology for emotional insensitivity if they are torn from the overall logic of the sonnet [3; 5]. In the context of the text, however, they denote resistance to impulse rather than an absence of humanity. The figure's worth is defined not by indifference but by the capacity to keep affect from turning into destructive action.

In the second quatrain the image becomes more complex: these people are called those who "inherit heaven's graces," who "do not squander" their countenance, and who stand as "lords and owners of their faces" [1; 2]. The formula "lords and owners of their faces" unites the social and the inner semantics of power: a person governs not only the impression he produces but also his own expression, without surrendering his behavior to an external stimulus. This opens up a productive discussion of self-discipline, inner order, and moral autonomy.

Yet the sonnet does not allow one to stop at praise of self-possession. The concluding couplet introduces the image of "lilies that fester from within": they smell worse than weeds [1-3]. The close establishes a criterion of authenticity: outward restraint does not in itself prove moral perfection. If hypocrisy, inner corruption, or a sense of one's own superiority is concealed behind it, the fall proves especially repellent. In this way the sonnet distinguishes self-possession from a mask.

This reading accords with C. T. Neely's observation that in Shakespeare's sonnets detachment and engagement

stand in tense interaction, and that it is precisely this tension that produces the ethical effect [5]. For pedagogical interpretation an important conclusion follows: the text teaches not admiration for power as such, but an understanding of the heightened responsibility of the one who possesses an advantage – intellectual, social, rhetorical, or institutional.

2. Relating the sonnet to the Uzbek system of values. In the Uzbek moral lexicon, mas’uliyat denotes not only formal responsibility for an act but also an awareness of the extent of one’s own influence on others. From this perspective, the first line of the sonnet takes on added force: to have the power to do harm and not to use it means to be aware of the weight of one’s own word, status, and authority. For the student this is especially significant in the academic environment, where influence manifests itself in assessment, public criticism, and the use of intellectual advantage [15-17].

The category of nafsni tiyish comes into play where the

sonnet speaks of slowness before temptation and control over affect. Restraint appears not as passive weakness but as an active form of freedom. The concepts of or-nomus and halollik, in turn, help to reveal the logic of the close: the moral lapse of one from whom dignity is expected destroys trust more severely than a mistake by someone without authority. Outward propriety without inner honesty readily becomes a strategy of self-presentation [10-12; 15-17].

At the same time, such a juxtaposition should not erase the historical and cultural distance between an English Renaissance text and contemporary Uzbek educational discourse. It is precisely this distance that makes the exercise productive: students encounter a different language of values yet gain the opportunity to translate it into familiar moral categories without simplifying the text. Cultural difference in this case becomes not an obstacle but a resource for interpretation.

Table 1. Mapping the key motifs of Sonnet 94 onto educational emphases

Key motif of the sonnet	Textual marker	Axiological focus	Educational outcome
Power without violence	have power to hurt and will do none	mas’uliyat; refusal to abuse influence	The responsibility of the strong
Self-possession	unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow	nafsni tiyish; discipline of affect	Restraint as mature freedom
Mastery of oneself	lords and owners of their faces	self-control; personal dignity	Distinguishing power over oneself from power over others
The risk of moral corruption	summer’s flower ... base infection	halollik; inner purity	Awareness of the danger of hypocrisy
The heightened responsibility of superiority	Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds	or-nomus; honor and reputation	Understanding the destructiveness of moral failure

3. Implementing the ta’lim-tarbiya principle in a “round-table” format. This format is especially appropriate because Sonnet 94 admits no single answer and demands argumentation. Unlike a traditional oral examination, the “round table” requires students to make responsible, well-grounded claims: a position must not merely be stated but also supported with lines from the text and connected to broader moral concepts. Here, then, ta’lim takes the form of a culture of evidence-based reading, and tarbiya a culture of respectful, disciplined discussion [6-9; 12].

The order of the activities also matters. First, the instructor frames the problem: what power is, why the possibility of influence does not equal the right to act, and how outward coldness differs from inner maturity. Then students carry out a close reading of the key lines and identify the principal oppositions: power / restraint, beauty / infection, dignity / hypocrisy, authority / responsibility. Only after this does discussion take place, in which each position must be confirmed by the text.

A special role is played by the closing aphorism – “Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds” [1; 2]. While the

first part of the sonnet is being discussed, the impression may arise that Shakespeare is simply praising strong and restrained people. The couplet, however, introduces a corrective perspective: the higher the moral expectation, the graver the consequences of inner corruption. This makes it possible to extend the conversation to the authority of an instructor, a group leader, an honors student, or a public activist – figures whose fall destroys trust more severely than an ordinary mistake.

From a methodological standpoint, it is useful to offer students three lenses for reading: lexical-imagistic, interpretive, and axiological. The first helps to see which words mark power, slowness, coldness, beauty, and infection; the second, to clarify whom exactly the speaker praises and of whom he warns; the third, to determine which qualities in the text are authentic and which merely appear worthy. Working through these three stages gives the discussion rigor and guards against superficial moralizing [6; 7; 18; 19].

It is advisable to relate the “round-table” questions directly to the categories of the national educational discourse: what, according to Shakespeare, constitutes the or-nomus of a person in power; how halollik relates to the absence of “inner corruption”; whether nafsni tiyish is a restriction of freedom or its mature form; and whether mas’uliyat can be regarded as a criterion of true dignity. Framed in this way, the text is not turned into ideology but becomes an occasion to set universal ethical problems alongside concrete cultural formulations.

The proposed model also contributes to the formation of academic culture. Respectful debate, reliance on the text, and a readiness to listen to one’s opponent and to respond to the substance of the matter cultivate disciplined thinking, responsibility for what one says, and respect for one’s interlocutor. Work with Sonnet 94 is therefore productive not only for interpreting Shakespeare but also for developing the ethics of academic communication.

Table 2. A lesson model for Sonnet 94 in the logic of ta’lim-tarbiya

Stage of the lesson	Activity of the instructor	Activity of the students	ta’lim-tarbiya outcome
Pre-reading stage	Activates the concepts of power, authority, and responsibility	Formulate initial expectations and possible stereotypes	Awareness of the problem before reading
Analytical reading	Organizes a close reading of key lines and images	Identify oppositions and comment on metaphors	Skill of precise textual analysis
Round table	Moderates the discussion and returns it to textual arguments	Discuss power, honor, self-control, and inner purity	Transition from analysis to moral reflection
Reflection	Assigns a concluding short written essay	Formulate a personal position grounded in the sonnet	Internalization of value meaning

DISCUSSION

The analysis carried out makes it possible to define more precisely the place of Sonnet 94 in the teaching of English literature. In a traditional course it is often treated as a highly complex text to interpret, requiring commentary on its metaphors, syntax, and historical-literary background. Yet it is precisely this complexity that makes the sonnet productive for implementing the ta’lim-tarbiya principle: the less obvious the moral of the text, the greater the potential of an organized discussion in which the student does not reproduce a ready-made thesis but builds his own position on the

basis of arguments [5-8; 10; 11].

Relating English poetry to the Uzbek system of values is possible only if two extremes are avoided: the straightforward “fitting” of the text to a predetermined moral conclusion, and the complete isolation of the text in its historical foreignness. The first strategy impoverishes Shakespeare; the second deprives the lesson of its educational effect. A more productive approach is cultural mediation, in which the categories of mas’uliyat, nafsni tiyish, or-nomus, and halollik function not as templates but as tools of meaningful dialogue [15-19].

At the same time, the proposed model has its limits. The present article is theoretical and methodological in nature and contains no empirical testing in the form of a pedagogical experiment. For now, therefore, the model can be described as pedagogically promising rather than as demonstrably effective. The next stage should be its classroom trial in EFL seminars on English literature – with an analysis of students' responses, written reflections, and the character of their argumentation in the discussion of Sonnet 94.

Risks must also be taken into account. Students may read the sonnet as a justification of emotional detachment or social elitism; the moral discussion may likewise turn into an exchange of stereotypes about “strong” and “weak” people. The instructor must therefore continually return the discussion to the closing couplet and emphasize that Shakespeare does not sanction arrogance but tests power for inner honesty. The only reliable anchor here is the text, not free association.

CONCLUSION

Thus, Shakespeare's Sonnet 94 possesses considerable potential for implementing the ta'lim-tarbiya principle in the teaching of English literature. Its poetic structure combines interpretive complexity with moral difficulty, so that analysis of the text can develop both students' philological competence and their reflection on values.

The analysis shows that the central meaning of the sonnet is bound up with an understanding of power as responsibility and of self-possession as a form of mature freedom. The closing metaphor of the “festering lily” warns that outward dignity without inner purity is especially dangerous where influence and authority have been entrusted to a person. The “round-table” model makes it possible to unite ta'lim and tarbiya in practice: analytical reading becomes the basis of a respectful moral dialogue, and the discussion of ethical dilemmas becomes a continuation of precise textual work.

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