



SCIREA Journal of Education

<http://www.scirea.org/journal/Education>

October 29, 2023

Volume 8, Issue 5, October 2023

<https://doi.org/10.54647/education880492>

The Moral Education from Foreign Literature in the English Textbooks

Liang Yongyi ¹, Tian Xiangbin ^{1,*}

¹ School of Foreign Languages, Guangzhou Institute of Technology, Guangzhou 510540, China

*Corresponding author: Tian Xiangbin, professor of Guangzhou Institute of Science and Technology; research interests: world literature and higher education.

Abstract:

Comprehensive English is the core course for English majors, which integrates English language, literature and culture into one and highlights the humanistic features. College students not only can learn native English, but also improve their moral and humanistic qualities through the medium of textbooks, so as to develop a comprehensive worldview, life perspective, and value system. This paper adopts the methods of data statistics and text analysis to statistically sort out the foreign classic literature in the comprehensive English textbooks and comparatively analyze the elements of moral education.

Keywords: English textbooks, foreign literature, curriculum thinking

Now, in China, the Integrated English Course, edited by He Zhaoxiong and Gu Daxi, for the undergraduates majoring in English language and literature are used by most universities.

This research chooses the texts of foreign literature in the textbooks and classifies them to be the following table. The paper will explore the significance of the curriculum's ideology and moral education.

I. Foreign Literature in Comprehensive English Courses

The textbook series, the Integrated English Course (2nd edition) published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, consist of 6 books. In the series of textbooks, there are 23 selected texts of foreign literature (21 novels and 2 dramas), see the table below:

Name of work	Type of literature	Author	State	Source
<i>The Laughter</i>	Novel	Heinrich Böll	Germany	综合教程 1
<i>A Debt to Dickens</i>	Novel	Pearl Buck	America	综合教程 1
<i>Salvation</i>	Novel	Langston Hughes	America	综合教程 1
<i>The Capture of Kunta Kinte</i>	Novel	Alex Haley	America	综合教程 1
<i>The Wedding Story</i>	Play	Julianne Homokay	America	综合教程 2
<i>Gossip</i>	Play	D.M.Bocaz-Larson	America	综合教程 2
<i>Skylines and Skyscrapes</i>	Novel	Jonh Kouwenhoven	America	综合教程 3
<i>The Chaser</i>	Novel	John Collier	England	综合教程 3
<i>Knowledge and Wisdom</i>	Novel	Bertrand Russell	England	综合教程 3
<i>The Art of Acknowledgement</i>	Novel	Jean Houston	America	综合教程 3
<i>Stuck in the Middle</i>	Novel	Lisa See	America	综合教程 4
<i>The Discus Thrower</i>	Novel	Richard Selzer	America	综合教程 4
<i>That Word Black</i>	Novel	Langston Hughes	America	综合教程 4
<i>No Name Woman</i>	Novel	Maxine Hong Kingston	America	综合教程 5
<i>A Hanging</i>	Novel	George Orwell	England	综合教程 5

<i>Shooting an Elephant</i>	Novel	George Orwell	England	综合教程 5
<i>The Battle of the Ants</i>	Novel	Henry David Thoreau	America	综合教程 5
<i>The Alligators of East Florida</i>	Novel	William Bartram	America	综合教程 5
<i>The Struggle to Be an All-American Girl</i>	Novel	Elizabeth Wong	America	综合教程 5
<i>The Fortune-Teller</i>	Novel	J.B. Stamper	America	综合教程 6
<i>Intoxicated by My Illness</i>	Novel	Anatole Broyard	America	综合教程 6
<i>How to Grow Old</i>	Novel	Bertrand A. Russell	England	综合教程 6
<i>Sounds</i>	Novel	Henry David Thoreau	America	综合教程 6

In this paper, four articles, "The Laughter", "Salvation", "Sounds" and "The Discus Thrower," will be selected for study and analysed for their educational significance.

II. Analysis of the Elements of Moral Education in Literature

Excellent literature sums up the spiritual exploration of human beings for the ideals of truth, goodness and beauty, subtly influences people's own ideological education and moral cultivation, and is conducive to the construction of China's socialist spiritual civilisation. Studying and researching foreign literature can improve our art appreciation level and enhance our aesthetic taste. It can also help us to understand the way of thinking of people from other cultures and find references for our own thinking, so that we can learn what is global and what is national. To establish national consciousness in the age of globalisation and to cultivate one's own international vision.

1. Life Value Revelations in *The Laughter*

The Integrated English Course 1 selects the short story *The Laughter*. It is the work of the famous German writer Heinrich Boll (Heinrich Boll 1917-1985), who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1972. His early war experiences had a profound influence on his creative war themes and writing style. Boll had been wounded and taken prisoner during the war, and therefore deeply resented the fascist war of aggression. In his early works, Böll examines the reign of terror of Nazism and is deeply aware of the deep suffering that war brings to ordinary people. In his later works, he attacked the moral degradation under the economic prosperity,

criticised the arbitrariness and hypocrisy of social and religious institutions, and was called "the conscience of Germany".

The protagonist of the short stories makes a career out of "laughter", and he has the ability to make all kinds of laughs. But he does not make people laugh, he just performs the act of laughing. He is the one who laughs the most, but he has never heard his own laughter from the bottom of his heart. In the article, the author writes: "People who don't know me think I'm quiet and unsmiling. Perhaps this is myself. For I have opened my mouth to laugh too much. As far as my own laughter is concerned I have never heard it." [1] "Laughter" is the clue of the whole text, the main character to make laughter as a job but never heard his own laughter, the author to "laughter" as a carrier metaphor for personal values, revealing that people in the face of the realities of life under the compromise of the difficulty of finding their own inner values and the status quo of firm inner choice. The author uses "laughter" as a metaphor for personal values, revealing that people have difficulty in finding their own inner values and making firm choices in the face of real-life compromise.

The author talks about the importance of career choice and self-worth from the point of view of a particular practitioner. The article is told in the first person, introducing the main character "I" of the "special" work: "I" to "laugh" for a living, with outstanding "I laugh for a living and have an outstanding ability to work. In people's opinion, "I" should enjoy this profession, but in real life "I" never really laugh. At the end of the novel, it is mentioned that "I laughed in many different ways, but I never heard myself laugh." [1] Here we can see that for the main character "I" the job is numbing and depressing. The pressure of real life makes "I" have to continue to do this job even though I have no love for it. "I never heard myself laugh" is also the author's way of revealing to the readers that the protagonist is unable to find his own value in his profession. This is how the novel describes "my" journey outside of work:

When I'm off work or on holiday, I don't want to laugh at all: just as a shepherd's boy would be glad to forget the cows, a mason would be glad to forget the mortar, and a carpenter's house would always have an inflexible door or a hard-to-open drawer that hadn't been repaired. The confectioner likes sour pickles, the butcher likes marzipan, the baker prefers sausages to bread, the bullfighter loves to keep pigeons; the boxer goes pale at the sight of their child with a nosebleed:I find it all so natural, because I never laugh after work. I am a very serious man, and people think I am a pessimist, and probably they are right. [1]

The contrast of these impressions of occupations that the author cites in the essay reveals the main idea of the essay. By describing the contrasts of different occupations, the author exposes the common phenomenon of people's boredom with their own occupations and the contradiction of their inner choices, and warns people to make the right choices in the contradiction between the embodiment of their self-worth and the compromises they have to make for survival, and to make clear the goals they are striving for in life.

2. A Glimpse of Humanity in Langston Hughes' *Salvation*

Langston Hughes (1902-1967) was an American poet, novelist and playwright, one of the most outstanding black writers of the twentieth century, and a stalwart of the Harlem Renaissance. *Redemption in Comprehensive Tutorial 1* is an excerpt from his autobiography *The Big Sea*.

From a child's point of view, the article exposes the lie of Christianity's so-called God's salvation of human souls, and analyses the hypocrisy and cruelty of Christianity to the fullest extent. *Redemption* tells the story of Hughes' "salvation" at the age of thirteen: he participated in a baptism in a church, expecting to see Jesus, but after waiting for a long time for Jesus to show up, in order not to delay everyone, and not wanting to disappoint his aunt, and in order to save more trouble, he lied, saying that Jesus had already come, and then got up and walked to the altar like all the other children. But in the end, he never actually saw Jesus and was never "saved". Thus, for the first time, his faith in religion collapsed and he never believed in Jesus again.

The article is centred on "salvation" and warns the reader that God does not exist and that the protagonist is not saved, but rather compromised by various pressures. As the author states in the beginning, "When I was almost thirteen years old, my soul was saved, but not in the true sense of the word." [1] He is not a believer in Jesus, but a believer in God. [1] He had always believed in the existence of a God in the mouths of adults who could save mankind, and the deception of his peers who prayed to an imaginary "God" and his aunt who, along with others, pressured him at a young age, caused the author's beliefs to crumble. When the believers were rejoicing because "I" had succumbed to the lie that Jesus saves souls and went to the altar, "I" came to realise the magnitude of the deception, but I was also tossed and turned because of my own lies and my relatives' adherence to a false God.

But that night I cried. It was the penultimate time in my life that I cried, because I was a big boy of 12 years old. I was alone in my bed, crying. Worried that Auntie

Reed would hear me, I covered my head with the duvet. But Auntie heard anyway, and she woke up my uncle and told him that I was crying because the Holy One had come into my life, and because I had seen Jesus. But the real reason I was crying was because I was ashamed to tell her that I had lied, that I had lied to everyone in the church. I lied to everyone in the church. I didn't see Jesus and I don't believe in Jesus anymore because he didn't come to help me. [1]

Through this article, Hughes exposes the lie of Christianity that the soul does not need God to save it because God does not exist, and man can only rely on himself to save himself. Through his own childhood experiences, the author warns that people should hold fast to their hearts, not be shaken by external pressures or the self-deceiving behaviour of others, and maintain a pure heart in a turbid environment.

3. On Ecological Holism Value in Thoreau's *Walden, or Life in the Woods*

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) was a famous American essayist, poet and philosopher, and a representative of Transcendentalism. In 1845, Thoreau lived in seclusion for two years on the shores of Walden Lake, two miles from Concord, farming and eating his own food and experiencing the natural simplicity of life, and used this as the subject for his book-length essay *Walden*, which was published in 1854. Thoreau's writings, articles, essays, journals, and poems total more than 20 volumes. His literary style interweaves close observation of nature, personal experience, poignant rhetoric, symbolism, and historical knowledge with poetic sensibility, philosophical simplicity, and attention to detail.

Integrated English 6 selects the first three paragraphs of Chapter 4, "Voices," of *Walden* for the course. At the beginning of the essay, the author warns the readers not to confine themselves to books and words, but to acquire knowledge from natural realities, put it into practice and then seek the truth. The author spends a great deal of time describing his life at the lake and the natural scenery, celebrating the beauty of nature, and incorporating his personal thoughts and feelings about the meaning of life and the relationship between human beings and nature.

Thoreau's ecological holism is rich in meaning, and is of great significance to personal growth and value shaping. The title of the article "sound" is multilayered: from the surface meaning, it is the author's life in the lake heard a variety of sounds: church bells, carriage wheels rumbling, cows lowing, the sound of birds singing, owls hooting, and so on; from the deeper meaning, it is the author's inner voice of the quest. "Sound" is not only a metaphorical symbol

in the text, but also a clue, through which the author connects human beings, nature and society. Here's how he describes "voice" in the article:

I like to have more leeway in my life. Sometimes, on summer mornings, after my usual bath, I sit in the sunlight on my doorstep from sunrise to noon; surrounded by pines, hickories, and lacquered trees, there is silence, and only the birds sing, or pass silently over the house. It was not until the sun shone in the west window, or the scaly butterfly of some traveller's car came from the distant road, that I became aware of the passage of time. [4]

The author uses three kinds of sounds as metaphors for different objects: the singing of birds described in the text refers to the natural environment; the scaly butterfly sound of the car coming from the highway epitomises the modern industrial development; and the author's heartfelt voice is his spiritual needs. The author connects these three different voices to nature, society and the individual, focusing on exploring the relationship between them. In the text, the author tells the connection between the three from another perspective:

My days are not days of the week that bear the stamp of any pagan deity, nor are they days that are sliced to pieces hour by hour, with the irritating ticking of the clock. It is because I live like the Puri Indians, who "use the same word for yesterday, today, and tomorrow, pointing their fingers behind them for yesterday, in front of them for tomorrow, and over their heads for today." To my fellow-citizens in the city this is, no doubt, sheer wasted time, but if measured by the standard of birds and flowers, I should be blameless. It is dryly true that every man must be as he is already. Nature's day is calm, and will not be blamed for its lethargy. [4]

At the time of the rapid development of the American capitalist economy, the whole society is materialistic, people are wrapped up in money and desire, Thoreau was tired of this extravagant and corrupt atmosphere, and turned to Walden Lake to pursue his heart. The author through the description of the lake from the calm and leisurely life to obtain strength, through self-examination to achieve self-improvement, self-development, to find their own inner yearning for the rhythm of life and spiritual freedom, to convey to the readers to achieve the importance of spiritual abundance, man and nature intermingle and coexist, the natural environment can enrich the soul, enlightenment and wisdom. This fully demonstrates the connection between human beings, society and nature: the author is affected by the social atmosphere, and he devotes himself to nature to find the true meaning of life, from which he derives the revelation of the value of life and has a positive impact on society.

Scholars at home and abroad believe that Thoreau's work embodies the idea of ecological holism, which contributes to the progress and improvement of the concept of environmental protection in modern society. The core idea of his works is to regard the overall interests of the ecosystem as the highest value, rather than human-centred. Human behaviour interacts with the ecological environment. Scholars Zhang Xiong and Liu Junhong proposed: "Social ecology is rooted in ecological ethics and aims at social development to achieve a balanced development between human beings and nature. Thoreau felt the changes of nature and society at the shore of Walden Lake and thought about the interaction between human behaviour and social environment. He advocated the harmonious coexistence of man and nature and the construction of a community of destiny." [5] Thoreau's concept of ecologism coincides with Xi Jinping's idea of ecological civilisation. "Humankind is a community of destiny, and the protection of the ecological environment is a common challenge and a common responsibility faced globally." [6] The idea of ecological holism transcends narrow anthropocentrism, so we "First, we insist on the harmonious coexistence of human beings and nature. Man and nature are a community of life. There are no substitutes for the ecological environment, and it is difficult to use them without realising that they are lost. 'Heaven and earth are symbiotic with me, and all things are one with me'." [6] People are required to consciously and proactively limit material desires, economic growth, and life consumption that exceed the carrying capacity of the ecosystem, thereby maintaining ecological balance.

Thoreau's ecological holism has an important guiding significance for our personal self-improvement and development, and at the same time warns us that the natural environmental protection of modern society needs to follow the principle of harmonious coexistence of man and nature. Only by solving the ecological crisis can we satisfy the spiritual and material needs of human beings.

4. The Light of Humanity in *The Discus Thrower*

Richard Selzer (1928-) is a well-known contemporary American writer and surgeon. His career as a surgeon has provided a rich accumulation of material for his literary creation, and he reveals the meaning of life by depicting people who are physically and mentally tortured by illness. His novels reflect his trademark style: humane, observant, passionate and unusual, always connecting intimate people with the biggest questions of life and death.

The Discus Thrower tells the story of a dying patient who fights for his dignity in the face of both physical and mental torture. In the face of the threat of death, he does not choose to give up, and his resilience is worth learning from. *The Discus Thrower*, originally a bronze work

by the ancient Greek sculptor Myron, is a representation of strength and beauty. The author uses it as the title to depict a patient with a crippled limb, which forms a strong contrast, making the tension between the title and the content of the novel even more remarkable, and also letting the readers feel the charisma of the protagonist in the midst of this contrast. The protagonist fights against his illness and guards his dignity in the last light of his life. The author does not use a specific person's name in the article, but uses the ward number and "he" to refer to the protagonist. The protagonist can represent any one of us, and we will encounter many frustrations and challenges in our lives. The author conveys the meaning of life and thoughts to the readers through this article, hoping that the readers can dare to fight against adversity as the protagonist does. I hope that readers will dare to fight against adversity like the main character in the article, to the end, to maintain their dignity, never give up. Even though she is physically disabled and suffers from illness, the main character still insists on maintaining her dignity in her own way. The limited dialogue in the novel mainly takes place between the doctor and the patient, showing the indifference and numbness between people. The doctor asks the patient questions with the attitude of completing the task, and the protagonist faces the indifference of the doctor without being overbearing.

The tenacity of the protagonist is reflected in a number of details: amputating both legs but still asking the doctor to bring him shoes, ordering a scrambled egg every day and then throwing it against the wall, and presenting his claims like a normal person even though he is physically disabled. These seemingly incomprehensible actions are actually the embodiment of his struggle with fate and the defence of his dignity. Many scholars have analysed that the action of "throwing the plate" echoes the title of the article, and that the protagonist, by ordering a scrambled egg every day and throwing the plate against the wall, actually imitates the action of a discus thrower who throws a discus. This behaviour seems out of place in a disabled body, but it is a deliberate design by the author. Some scholars have speculated that the patient was an athlete in his lifetime, and therefore the act of throwing the disc is a way of reminiscing about what it would be like to have an able-bodied body. The strange behaviour of the patient is a reflection of his tenacity. In the face of old age, sickness and death, human power is small, but the power of the soul is infinite. This deep and great glory of human nature is the small human bursting into bloom. The protagonist uses his own actions to inspire those in the darkness of the people, this in the face of adversity, positive, tenacious and unyielding excellent quality, to the people in adversity bring hope and courage.

III: Conclusion

It is instructive for cultivating students' international perspective and improving humanistic literacy and value shaping to introduce excellent classic literature in the English textbook series. Through reading excellent classic literature, students can enhance their reading comprehension and critical thinking skills, improve their literary literacy, as well as improve their self-improvement and development in a subtle way. In addition to learning language knowledge, students can also learn sociology, anthropology and other aspects of knowledge, can understand the diversity of ethics, values and social norms through reading the literature of different countries, combined with their own critical assimilation, to take the essence and remove the dross, and to learn from the excellent culture to enrich the connotation of their own cultural values.

Funded by: Guangdong Province Project: English Major Teaching Team Construction (No. 2020SZL03).

Authors: Liang Yongyi, undergraduate majoring in English Language and Literature in the School of Foreign Languages, Guangzhou Institute of Science and Technology; research interest: English teaching materials and foreign literature; Corresponding author: Tian Xiangbin, professor of Guangzhou Institute of Science and Technology; research interests: world literature and higher education.

References

- [1] HE Zhaoxiong, GU Daxi. The Integrated English Course 1 (Second Edition) [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2018: 38-39, 212-213.
- [2] HE Zhaoxiong, GU Daxi. The Integrated English Course 4 (Second Edition) [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2018:134-136.
- [3] HE Zhaoxiong, GU Daxi. The Integrated English Course 5 (Second Edition) [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2018: 25-27.
- [4] HE Zhaoxiong, GU Daxi. The Integrated English Course 6 (Second Edition) [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2018: 324-32, 329.

[5] ZHANG Xiong, LIU Junhong. A three-dimensional perspective on the ecological aesthetics of

Walden [J]. *Masterpieces Review*. 2022 (35): 60-61.

[6] XI Jinping. *The Governance of China III* [M]. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press Co. Ltd, 2020: 360.