

Ecological education in Literature lessons at university

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Abstract. Literature as an academic subject is characterized by rather wide possibilities of forming the right attitude to ecological issues. The purpose of the paper is to examine the ways of developing ecological culture in Literature lessons at university in the framework of online course “Ecological issues in Russian Literature”. The following tasks are set: to select the authors who actively develop environmental issues in their works, to introduce terminological vocabulary, to expand the range of ideas and create interdisciplinary research projects aimed at improving the environmental situation on the planet. The methodology of the study was based on a set of methods such as a research method, the comparative typological method, and the heuristic method. The course presents the nature in the following forms for the students to understand: a revengeful God (I. Bunin), a human-being himself (V. Astafyev’s, V. Rasputin), spiritual values (A. Solzhenitsyn), mythological creature (Ch. Aitmatov), the wildlife (V. Soloukhin, Y. Yevtushenko), freedom (Y. Yevtushenko). The description of real natural catastrophes presented by the authors (V. Rasputin, V. Astafyev, Ch. Aitmatov) plants the idea in the students’ minds that it is not allowed to destruct of nature for the sake of rapid scientific and technological progress.

1 Introduction

Environmental issues in the era of geopolitical crises and catastrophes are becoming particularly relevant as globalization still takes place. That’s why, ecological culture, as well as necessary skills and abilities, should be formed at school and university, in other words, as early as possible. A special role in this process should be played by the interaction of the main social institutions that are responsibly for forming the individual - the family, preschool institutions and other educational organizations. Environmental education, of course, should become an integral part of the educational process on every stage of educational process [1]. A number of academic disciplines (sciences as well as humanities), makes it possible to include environmental issues in the range of topics to study. It is obvious that such an academic subject as Literature which is compulsory for school curricular, university curricular as well, is characterized by rather wide possibilities of forming the right attitude to ecological issues [2]. Despite the fact that in the period of postmodern relativism the educational function of literature was questioned, at present this situation is being corrected,

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the realistic tradition is taking an increasingly confident position in the historical and literary process. In this regard, the educational potential of this discipline should be directed to the problems of the formation of ecological culture and ecologically-minded citizens of the society.

2 Purpose

The paper is focused on ecological education through classes of literature at school and university. The problem of the relationships between man and nature has a long history - from almost reverent worshipping of nature to the situation when the mankind gradually started realizing their domination over the world and nature. The slogan famous in the thirties, the essence of which is that people should not wait for mercy from nature, but take everything they need, eventually led to the barbaric, poaching destruction of natural resources. Since the middle of the XX century, when it became obvious that nature has a latent ability to resist, concerned voices of sane, responsible people began to be heard. They are trying to stop humanity, maddened in its desire for power over nature. Today, when humanity is irresistibly moving towards an ecological catastrophe, it is important to convey the threat that hangs over the planet as a result of negligent, predatory, and sometimes criminal experiments on nature, to young generation. It is the reason for including works of Russian literature that contain environmental issues in the curriculum of secondary and higher education.

The purpose of the paper is to examine the ways of developing ecological culture in literature lessons at university in the framework of online course "Ecological issues in Russian Literature". The course was worked out for future environmental engineers, but the was introduced unto the curriculum of other majors as it became one of most popular optional subjects [3]. The following tasks are set to achieve the goal abovementioned: to select the authors who are actively developing environmental issues in fiction, to select works of fiction that reflect environmental issues, to organize the process of their commented reading, keeping a special "ecological" diary, where terminological vocabulary is introduced, to expand the range of ideas about environmental issues and the ways to cope with them. Besides, it is important to try to create interdisciplinary research projects aimed at improving the environmental situation on the planet [4].

3 Approach and methods

The methodology of the study was based on a set of methods used in the process of teaching literature at school and university. Firstly, it is a research method aimed at developing analytical and creative skills. Secondly, the comparative typological method that reveals the specifics of the interpretation of environmental problems by different authors. And finally, a heuristic method directed at finding and creating special technologies aimed at eliminating environmental problems that threaten the life of the planet.

Material of the study includes the lyrics of F. Tyutchev, E. Boratynsky, N. Zabolotsky, S. Yesenin, V. Soloukhin, E. Yevtushenko, as well as the prose of I. Bunin, M. Bulgakov, V. Astafyev, V. Rasputin, Ch. Aitmatova. To develop ecological way of thinking of students a series of practical exercises based on the study of the works of these authors was developed. The works of fiction contain the description to the current environmental problems, that can be summarized as the following - the destruction of nature for the sake of rapid scientific and technological progress. The authors present in the works two opposing ideas that should find common grounds. The first one is that the construction of industrial strategic facilities, changing the riverbed, thoughtless and uninterrupted extraction of minerals from the bowels of the earth, the development of Antarctic deserts and space expanses, the growth of

megacities, the development of industrial production are essential conditions for the existence of modern human civilization. The second one is that a strict control over compliance with safety standards is necessary as well as reasonable regulation of the processes of consumption and natural restoration of natural resources. In addition, predatory replacement of living life with mechanical life is unacceptable.

4 Results

When working with literary works, it is possible for students to see how acutely poets and writers react to environmental issues, to find out ecological issues which are the most important for the authors, to trace the specifics of the expression of the author's position. For example, the natural philosophical artistic picture of the world of such poets as F. Tyutchev, E. Boratynsky, N. Zabolotsky is based on the idea of animating and spiritualizing nature, on understanding its absolutely reasonable functioning as well as awareness of its cyclicity and infinity. The pantheistic way of thinking of these authors actualizes the acute conflict between a person, who imagines himself to be the "king of the earth", and nature.

In the XXth century, in the era of rapid growth of scientific and technological progress, literature becomes an alarm, constantly reminding readers of the danger caused by an unceremonious invasion of the natural world. However, humanity is unable to hear the voice of sense, and therefore the conflict mentioned above develops into an ongoing clash. Such authors as I. Bunin, A. Solzhenitsyn write about it with concern. These writers consider environmental problems in religious and philosophical aspects. They are sure that the destiny of the civilization that has forgotten about the eternal laws of nature, which they associate with God, replacing faith and respect to nature with the worship of the golden god, is destruction. This idea is vividly embodied in the work of I. Bunin "The Gentleman from San Francisco", that is offered for students to plant into their heads the idea of respect to nature. In the book, a rich man with his colleagues called by the author "money bags" thinks himself the master of life, goes on a trip around the world on an ocean liner with the speaking name "Atlantis". The brilliance of dazzling outfits, fake attention to each other, masks instead of real feelings – this is the essence of the masquerade world, where a human machine took the place of the living [5]. This is a type of life a lot of modern teenagers are dreaming about. They don't see the beauty of the nature as well as the main character of the book. He is not able to appreciate either the amazing beauty of the surrounding nature, or the boundless ocean, which is powerful enough to create chaos. He doesn't hear the warning howl of sirens – messengers of death. "Atlantis" is a model of the modern world, which has separated itself from nature, from the infinite universe, and has forgotten about death which can be caused by nature. This liner in the story becomes an ominous symbol of the triumph of technical thought over nature, but its power is imaginary, which is confirmed by the development of the plot, and the appearance in the finale of a symbolic image of the Devil threatening a mechanistic, sin-mired civilization. The liner sank that makes a strong impression on students and make them think about the revenge from the nature. It seems cruel to focus on the terrible consequences of the human activity but fear is one of the stimuli of a person to change his/her life and world-vision, from destructing the nature to saving it.

No less eloquent warnings about the shameless invasion of the "iron", threatening the death of the living, natural can be found in the works of S. Yesenin and A. Solzhenitsyn which are introduced in the curriculum of the senior students. If I. Bunin depicted the advance of a mechanistic civilization in the form of an ocean liner, these authors turned to the image of a train. In "Sorokoust", according to the principle of antithesis, it is contrasted with the image of a small red-maned foal unsuccessfully trying to catch up with a steel wheezing monster that crawls, snoring with an iron paw, on cast-iron paws. Nature is presented here as a symbol of soul, spirit and moral. The image of a ruinous civilization in the story "Matrenin's

Yard” is even more terrible. These are the terrible gray barracks, where drunkenness and poverty reign; and the aggressive world of village grabbers, for whom property is equivalent to the good; and, of course, the train mercilessly crushed the main character, who transported the logs of her room. It is understandable for students that if we continue destroying nature, we will destroy our soul and values as the train killed the main character.

In the second half of the XX century, when the active conquest of rivers, seas, lakes, the development of deserts, boundless ice began, literature began to react even more acutely to the processes taking place and this is used for the purpose of ecological education. Real ecological disasters are referred to in the books that make students not to image some situations but observe the results of human activity. Such writers as V. Rasputin, V. Astafyev, Ch. Aitmatov, who put forward environmental issues, are introduced into the university curriculum. A famous story by V. Rasputin "Farewell to Mater" is based on a historical fact when the island and the village were flooded because of the construction of a new hydroelectric power station on the Angara. Here the problem of ecology is highlighted on two levels – the first one is that the life of villagers was ruined by the violent actions of people who wanted to change natural way of things [6]. The second one is that the author generalizes the place that was flooded. The students understand that this small island testifies to humanity about the alarming state of the modern world. The author of the story persistently opposes the categories of the eternal, connected with nature, and the transitory, temporary; human life is inscribed in the endless cycle of nature. The spring that came to the Angara in the book does not mean that there will be an update in the world of people. On the contrary, every detail is literally permeated with a sense of impending catastrophe. For example, the village is described in such a way that clearly shows students the author's idea of life that has strayed from the beaten track, lost touch with its roots, origins because of the constant struggle with nature. V. Rasputin, in his works, insistently convinces the reader that a person is like a tree which is a part of a nature, his life as an integral link is included in the process of eternal natural movement. In this regard, the writer's favorite characters are especially indicative – wise and old women, who embody the very idea of Mother nature, the native land. For example, the main character of "Farewell to Matera" Daria Pinigina even correlates with the symbolic image of the Royal larch tree, the roots of which, according to legend, connected the island with Angara, sprouted into its bottom. Studying this character, the students clearly understand that trying to destroy what was originally created by nature, humanity condemns themselves to death. Moreover, religious students are sure that that the plot of the destruction of the island and the village located on it, in order to achieve “great” goals, correlates with the idea of a universal flood sent to punish the human race for sins. The destruction of the old cemetery, where the residents of Matera buried their relatives and friends, resurrects the concept of "mankurtism" which was created by famous writer Ch. Aitmatov in the novel "And a day lasts longer than a century". The term “Mankurts” with definitely negative connotation has become popular, it labels people who have forgotten about their origin and roots [7]. The idea that is imposed in the framework of ecological education is that those who forget about the fact that we are the children of the nature are also “mankurts”.

To make the understanding of the ecological problems better, the students are offered the books where nature is associated with mythological aspects. The works of Ch. Aitmatov are especially significant in this sense where the writer uses the mythology of the Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, Nivkhs connected with worshipping of nature and refers to the Gospel. For example, the novel "The Scaffold" is not only about the issues of thoughtless, arrogant, consumer attitude to the surrounding world, but also about the destruction of man's own nature. The plot intertwines three almost unrelated lines – the story of Avdiy Kallistratov's; the plan of eternity and, finally, the story of predatory, thoughtless and ruthless destruction of nature for profit. It is the last layer that is especially interesting for us, since the author tells a surprisingly touching story of a pair of wolves – a blue-eyed wolf Akbara and her

faithful husband Tashchaynar. Due to the constant barbaric invasion into the world of the inhabitants of the desert by a human-being, who proclaimed himself the king of animals, the wolf family lost three broods of cubs. Exhausted and helpless in her loneliness, Akbara turns to the wolf Goddess in despair. The Goddess here is a symbolic image designed to convey the idea for students that the punishment for the destruction of nature will be terrible, for example, the death of children means that humanity has no future if they try to confront or suppress the nature.

A similar way of representing ecological issues can be found in V. Astafyev's work "The Tsar-fish". The main idea that unites all characters and plots is "coming home, where you spent your childhood". The theme of childhood sounds as a time of feeling unity with nature and childishness as a way to preserve this feeling. V. Astafyev shows different types of attitudes to nature: poetic, imbued with a sense of blood kinship; rationalistic, pragmatic, devoid of spirituality, responsibility; predatory, consumerist. Various characters presented in the book embody the types mentioned above. The author's distinct thought about the rejection of poaching as a quality of modern life devoid of wisdom and common sense runs through the whole book. As in Ch. Aitmatov's works, considering this topic at a philosophical level leads V. Astafyev to the idea of a cruel reckoning, the loss of the closest and dearest thing that a person has – his child, that is, procreation, the future. This type of presentation makes students think over and over of revenge that the nature can take on them.

An important part of forming ecological way of thinking of students through Literature classes at university is studying poetry, which did not remain aloof from environmental issues. Moreover, they are addressed as well as by poets representing the so-called "classical" lyrics, and by poets of contemporary directions. Two poets, who react equally acutely to environmental problems, are studied during the lessons of Literature in the framework of our course to develop ecological way of thinking of the students: Vladimir Soloukhin and Yevgeny Yevtushenko.

So, in the poems "Moose", "Animals run away from me", and "Hawk", the main character complains about huge and insurmountable gap between man and the natural world [8]. Despite the fact that the feeling of fear is not inherent in animals, they, by virtue of accumulated experience, tend to avoid meetings with a human-being because they know that he/she brings death to them. "Seeing me / Or just hearing the smell, / All living things run away hurriedly, / As if I am the last merciless / Animal executioner," - this is the impression left by the one who imagines himself the master of the universe (a human) on the animals living in the forest. However, the power of a human-being is imaginary, false, since it is achieved by deceiving gullible and naive "children of nature". The poem "Moose" is significant in this regard. The author's position is expressed here through a lyrical plot: in the spring, when an animal, like any creature of God, is looking for a mate to continue life, a ruthless poacher, having lured a young, beautiful moose with majestic horns with an artificial sound similar to the love call of a girlfriend, shot him with a carbine. The students feel that that they are on the place of an animal haunted by merciless men when the "joyful and spring morning was stained with blood".

Y. Yevtushenko's poems "Birch", "Ballad of Poaching", "What Life Takes", "Last Faith", "Ballad of Seals", "Monologue of Blue Fox ..." and many others are filled with similar experiences [9]. In the last two, the poet addresses a topic that many prefer to avoid: this is fishing or cellular breeding of fur-bearing animals, the skins of which are used for fur products. In the "Ballad of Seals", the main emotional mood becomes the author's merciless irony, bordering on sarcasm. And this is quite justified, because instead of life they are prepared for death, so that a certain lady will wrap herself in fur. We love the seals, but they will be killed because they are our money. In other words, the material aspect, money and profit, are more important than life of innocent animals. This example is the most horrible for students because they see not occasional and thoughtless destruction of nature but the

deliberate one. Besides, there is no serious reason for committing this, such as necessity to have food or place to live, but just the desire to have fur coat that is not necessary at all but just the sign of vanity and showing off.

The climax of the course is the poem "Monologue of Blue Fox", where the animal doomed to slaughter becomes the lyrical subject. With his chilling howl, it wants to remind humanity of the Last Judgment, but they are deaf and cynical, and therefore the only thing the unfortunate prisoner is praying for is to die as soon as possible. The animal farm is likened to a concentration camp, where prisoners are killed in a modern way by electric current. A terrible truth sounds in the poem, which acquires a philosophical and symbolic generalization - a hero born in captivity doesn't know what freedom is, he thinks this farmland their home. Nature is associated with freedom which is eliminated by people.

The last poem to study in the framework of the course is the poem with the symbolic title "Last Faith" written by Y. Yevtushenko. The lyrical hero reflects on the curvature of thinking a lot. The whole poem is built on the antithesis of the rhetorical questions with one lexeme "really", which embodies all the pain, unwillingness to believe in what is happening in reality, the horror of what is happening, and unwillingness to accept it. The main character believes that there will be no wars and an arms race, that the evil will end; people will understand that they are one family, because the essence of nature is an endless cycle where there is no place for the word "last", and a new birth follows the end of previous life. The positive attitude to the situation is necessary as it gives the students the idea that changes are necessary and they are effective.

The main representations of nature in the works of Russian authors that can influence the students and develop their ecological mind in the framework of the course "Ecological issues in Russian Literature" are presented in figure 1.

As can be seen, literature has an unusually wide potential for the education of ecological culture due to its original didactic, humanistic, aesthetic and ethical orientation.

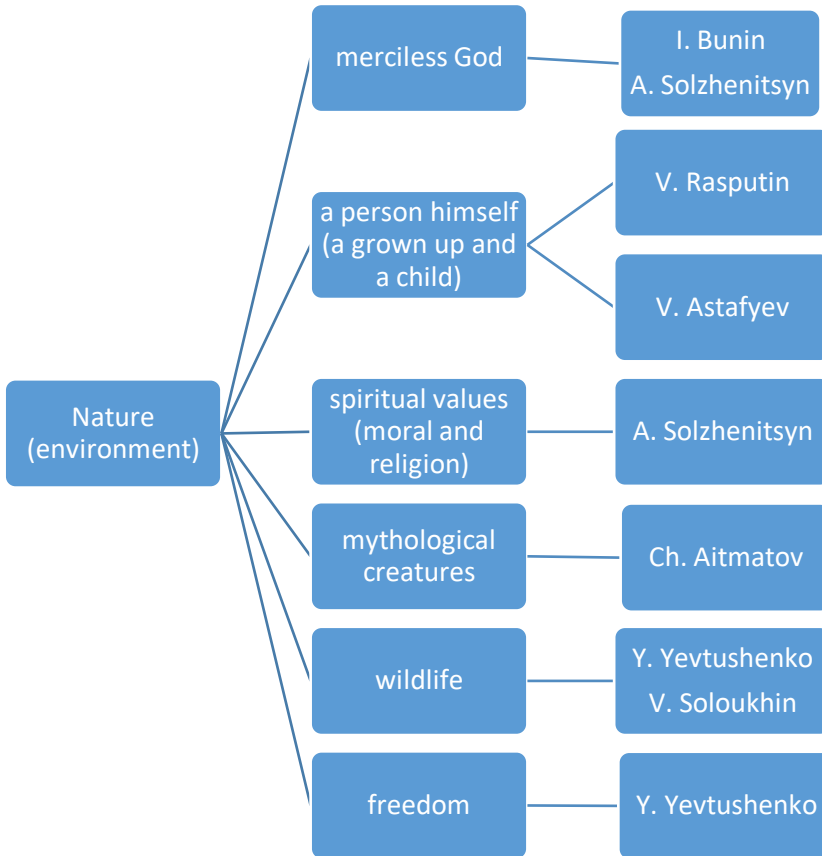


Fig. 1. Representation of nature in Russian literature

5 Conclusions

The practical significance of the developed practical course “Environmental issues in Russian literature” is due to the urgent needs of ecological education, since environmental problems today are not just a subject for disturbing conversations, but also a direct threat to humanity and its future. Successful results of environmental education in Literature lessons will allow to create a variety of interdisciplinary research projects related to the preservation of the environment, aimed at improving the ecological situation on the planet. The method of introducing ecological culture by means of literary education will allow its wide use in the student environment. It can already be argued that students immersed in the study of environmental problems in literature lessons will be able to further apply their knowledge in the field of future professional activity.

The high communicative-oriented, socio-cultural, spiritual and moral potential of literature is obvious as well as its educational orientation. In this regard, in the studying process it is necessary to make extensive use of the possibilities of national literature in the formation of ecological culture.

A hypothesis about the common mythological basis of all significant texts of environmental issues is put forward. In addition, filling in an “ecological diary” allows not only to elicit students’ ideas about environmental problems, about ways to overcome them, but also to collect quite extensive material for creating interdisciplinary research projects

aimed at improving the ecological situation on the planet. It is also important that such work can be continued, firstly, in terms of expanding the circle of authors, including the modern ones that are read by students in their free time. Secondly, the organization of various kinds of literary and environmental forums, festivals, intellectual games that allow expanding the audience interested in solving environmental problems can become a promising direction of environmental education in Literature classes.

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