

Multidimensional Interpretation of National Spirit and Literary Education: Cultural and Educational Value of Color Symbols in Tolstoy's Works

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Abstract: This article analyzes the symbolic colors red, white, and blue in Lev Tolstoy's works, exploring their interrelation and educational significance in reflecting the Russian national spirit. The article first reviews the symbolic significance of red, white, and blue in Russian history, and then analyzes in depth the multiple connotations of colors in Tolstoy's classic works *Anna Karenina*, *War and Peace*, and *Resurrection*. Through the combination of color symbols with characters' destinies, inner conflict, and historical background, this paper explores how Tolstoy's literary works reflect the historical changes and national spirit of Russia, especially the important value in education and cultural inheritance, providing a new perspective for the study of literary education and emphasizing the educational role of color symbols in literary works in shaping national spirit and cultural identity.

Keywords: Tolstoy; Color symbols; National spirit; Cultural identity; Literary education

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1. The relationship between colors in Tolstoy's works and the Russian national spirit

In the literary world of Lev Tolstoy, color, as an artistic symbol, profoundly reflects the emotions, psychological state, and destiny of the characters. In his works, the use of three colors, red, white, and blue, not only constitutes a unique artistic expression but also reflects the core connotation of the Russian national spirit. The red color symbolizes passion, conflict, and dramatic changes in history, reflecting the inevitable social upheavals and revolutionary storms in Russian history; the white color symbolizes purity, the pursuit of morality, and the washing of the soul, which is a sign of the character's pursuit of ideals and salvation amid pain and struggle; and the blue color contains loyalty, faith, and spiritual transcendence, which carries the character's adherence to the beliefs and the pursuit of higher ideals.

This paper will explore the application of color in literature teaching from a pedagogical point of view by interpreting the three classic works of *Anna Karenina*, *War and Peace*, and *Resurrection*, and analyze how Tolstoy expressed the characters' destiny choices, inner conflicts, and the background of the times through color, to map out the historical changes and spiritual pursuit of the Russian nation, to guide the students to deepen their cognition of Russian culture and history, and to improve their humanities literacy. This will deepen students' knowledge of Russian culture and history, enhancing their humanities literacy and aesthetic sensibility.

2. Symbolism of red, white, and blue in the context of Russian history

2.1. Red: Passion, conflict, and revolutionary spirit

In Russian history and culture, red is closely related to revolution, sacrifice, and historical conflict. From the bloodshed and sacrifices of the Russo-French War to the social changes of the October Revolution, the color red has always represented the spirit of fighting against oppression and for freedom ^[1]. Tolstoy profoundly presented the connection between the color red and the bravery and sacrifice of soldiers through the depiction of war in *War and Peace*. The color red not only symbolizes blood and pain but also expresses the revolutionary power and spirit of resistance that the nation emerges from its predicament.

2.2. White: Morality, purity, and spiritual cleansing

White color in Russian culture represents the purification of the soul, moral pursuit, and spiritual sublimation ^[2]. In Tolstoy's works, white often appears in the description of the inner world of the characters, Duke Maria in *War and Peace* and Katyusha Maslova in *Resurrection*, both of which show the pursuit of purity and morality through the symbol of white. However, with the development of the characters' destinies, the color white also presents complex symbolism, especially in the social and moral conflicts, the symbol of white gradually turns to the reflection and awakening of loss ^[3].

2.3. Blue: Loyalty, faith, and spiritual transcendence

As a part of the Russian natural landscape, the color blue symbolizes the vast sky and infinite possibilities, represents loyalty, faith, and the pursuit of higher ideals, and reflects the Russian nation's yearning for freedom, faith, and spiritual ascension ^[4]. In Tolstoy's works, the symbolism of blue provides a platform for students to discuss ideals, loyalty, and faith. Pierre seeks inner peace and spiritual transcendence by gazing at the blue sky; Andrei obtains spiritual sublimation from pain to liberation in the symbol of blue.

3. The educational significance of color symbols in Tolstoy's works: Cultural inheritance from the individual to the nation

Red, white, and blue are the most symbolic colors in Tolstoy's works. Their multidimensional use not only makes the characters more three-dimensional and emotionally complex but also provides profound cultural symbols for understanding Russian literature and the national spirit.

3.1. Red: The conflict of history and the power of revolution

The symbolism of red is expressed at different levels in *Anna Karenina*. The love between Anna and Vronsky is full of fiery red symbolism, a passion that is beautiful but also destructive ^[5]. The color red here

is not only a reflection of Anna's inner passion but also a symbol of her conflict with society ^[6]. In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy used depictions of red smoke, blood, and flames to show this theme through the experiences of the character Pierre, linking the color red to the spirit of sacrifice and revolutionary will of the Russian people as part of a profound reflection on war ^[7]. In *Resurrection*, Tolstoy profoundly revealed Katyusha's fate, emotions, and inner world through the multiple symbolism of red, which also symbolizes Nehludov's desire for moral rebirth and social transformation.

The red symbolism in Tolstoy's works provides an opportunity to explore historical change, social conflict, and individual sacrifice. By analyzing the red symbol, teachers can guide students to think deeply about the social conflicts, revolutionary forces, and the changes in individual destinies they brought about in the course of history. This not only helps students to understand the complexity of Russian history and culture but also prompts them to reflect on the ethical conflicts in the spirit of revolution and social change.

3.2. White: Purity, morality, and soul washing

In *Anna Karenina*, the white symbolism around the main characters Levin and Kitty initially runs parallel and then intersects. Levin feels the tranquility and fulfillment he longs for in the pure white imagery; Jidi witnesses the purity and sanctity of love and marriage in her sincere white character. In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy demonstrated the value of moral purity through Duke Maria, and her relationship with her lover Nikolai through the symbol of white to show the spiritual cleanliness they seek together ^[8]. In *Resurrection*, Katyusha Maslova, as a once fallen woman, gradually moves towards self-awakening and spiritual rebirth through her relationship with Nehludov and her eventual repentance.

In literary education, teachers can lead students to discuss morality, responsibility, inner awakening, and social ethics. By analyzing the symbol of white in these works, students can deeply understand the individual's moral choices amid historical changes, think about how to face moral dilemmas in real life, ponder over moral conflicts and redemption in human nature, stimulating their reflection on morality and personal responsibility and further cultivating moral sensitivity and a sense of social responsibility.

3.3. Blue: Faith, loyalty, and spiritual transcendence

Levin, the protagonist of *Anna Karenina*, often meditates on the nature of life and faith under the blue sky and white clouds, and the expanse of the color blue gives him inner peace and enlightenment from time to time. In *War and Peace*, Pierre, after experiencing the ravages of war and social upheaval, gazes at the blue sky, seeking inner peace and awareness of a higher spiritual realm. When Andrei is wounded and falls to the ground in the Battle of Austerlitz, he looks up at the vast blue sky, and in this moment, he feels a spiritual transcendence and sublimation. In addition, the color blue in *Resurrection*, as a symbol of loyalty and ideals, helps Nehludov towards moral awakening and spiritual revival ^[9].

The symbolism of blue provides a platform for students to discuss ideals, loyalty, and faith. Teachers can guide students to think about the significance of loyalty and ideals and lead them to explore the role of faith and loyalty in history and social change, and how to maintain the pursuit of spiritual values in real life, as well as to enhance the awareness of the diversity of national cultures in a pluralistic contemporary society.

4. The educational significance of color symbols: Cultural identity and value shaping

With the multi-level depiction of colors in Tolstoy's works, students can deeply think about the cultural

background of Russian history, and perceive how individuals and nations have shaped the cultural and historical process through faith, sacrifice, and moral reconstruction amid many social upheavals and historical transformations. Tolstoy's profound cultural message conveyed through color becomes an important way for students to understand Russian history and national culture.

By exploring the symbolism of the core colors representing the nation in different historical situations and how these colors reflect the core values of the national culture in the growth and choices of different characters, teachers can provide students with a unique perspective on cultural inheritance, national identity, and the historical process. It can also help students build a comprehensive understanding of Russian history and culture, compare similar symbols in other cultures, and form a more comprehensive cultural vision, which can also prompt students to reflect deeply on the social and political changes experienced by the Russian nation in different historical periods and their cultural impact.

5. The importance of color symbols in literary education

The importance of color symbols in literary education lies in enhancing students' perceptual understanding, stimulating critical thinking, and fostering a stronger sense of cultural identity and aesthetic appreciation.

In Tolstoy's works, colors as cultural symbols carry national history, social background, and moral concepts. For example, the color red represents the revolutionary spirit and sacrifice of the nation in *War and Peace*, while in *Resurrection*, the color red is associated with the theme of moral degradation and social change^[10]. White symbolizes moral purity and spiritual cleansing^[11], while blue reflects the pursuit of ideals and beliefs.

Educators can encourage students to examine literary works from a multi-dimensional perspective, moving beyond traditional reading approaches. Students are encouraged to combine the historical background, social change, and the psychological level of the characters, to think and analyze from multiple perspectives, and to enter a richer literary interpretation and cultural understanding. Through the symbolic learning of color, students can not only perceive the emotional conflicts and moral considerations in the works but also understand the cultural symbols and historical veins of the literary works at a deeper level.

In addition, as a carrier of emotions and thoughts, the study of color symbols can also stimulate students' interest in literary works, cultivate their imagination and creativity, deepen their aesthetic experience of literary works, and cultivate a more delicate cultural sensitivity and artistic appreciation.

Teachers can guide students to study the symbolism of color in different cultures by analyzing color and contrasting it with historical, cultural, and social realities, helping students to understand and appreciate the literary works of different individuals more deeply in the context of globalization, especially in the comparative study of Russian literature and other literary traditions, where cross-cultural analysis of color symbolism will help to reveal the commonalities and differences between different cultures.

With the introduction of digital platforms, visual arts, and multimedia resources, teachers can present multiple interpretations of color symbols more vividly, and the educational significance of color symbols can be presented in a richer and more diverse way, thus enhancing students' interest in learning and depth of thinking.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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