

Using Literature in Philosophy of Education

F. D. Santos

Research by philosophers of Education has generally ignored the copious field of World Literature, which comprises not only a selected set of canonical masterpieces but also an immense number of works that are, while less acclaimed, equally interesting for a number of purposes other than strictly literary ones. In line with the ancient tradition, both canonical and less renowned texts can be approached as exciting source material for philosophical exegesis. Moreover, in the classical Chinese and Greek traditions Literature and Philosophy were virtually inseparable; the Romantics based their theories of Art and Literature in the philosophical trends of the time; and modern thinkers, emulating ancient usage, ventured to present their philosophic ideas in purely literary form, like Nietzsche's poem in prose and verse *Zarathustra*.

As regards Philosophy of Education, some current research has focused on a number of literary works posing acute ethical questions: to this purpose the existentialist movement seems to have provided several works among the most provocative, by authors such as Dostoyevsky, Camus or Sartre; other studies have focused on the educational values embedded in Literature intended for children and young adults or in the always-stimulating ethnographic world of folk tales. But the immense corpus of novels and short stories closely related to school practice, the so-called school-stories or school-novels, has remained beyond the scope of most philosophers and theorists of Education. Yet, the authors of school-novels or school-memoirs illustrate eloquently what remains in our minds from our schooling experience decades after we left school, in works that are a reliable source for assessing the overall impact and lasting imprint of formal education on young minds. In some cases the author is also a teacher who is able to bring in key insights from the other side of the

school dyad, along with the today's almost universal pupil background.

In this presentation some suggestions will be made to consider literary texts no longer merely as an illustration of chapters on the History of Education, or as an assortment of experiments and explorations in Ethics, but rather as a corpus of prime interest that should capture our attention as philosophers of Education, namely around the discussion of the concept of *Bildung* and about the possibilities and limits of any attempt to fashion young minds.