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## THE THEME OF DEATH IN THE WORK OF L. TOLSTOY

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The article deals with the peculiarities of the perception of the phenomenon of death in the work of L. Tolstoy. He perceives death as one of the forms of affirmation of life order, in which death is the main justification of life. Russian thinker builds a holistic system of death, which combines rational, spiritual, religious and artistic and intuitive understanding of it. Ultimately, the existential experience of Tolstoy's death overcomes a reasonable awareness of the meaning of life, which is based on the moral and ethical component that gives the interpretation of death a holistic sense. According to L. Tolstoy, the love for all living things is the only spiritual source of life that overcoming the existential fear of death. It is the spiritual inspiration of the Living through Love that reveals the value characteristics of the Living being, reveals its meaning and meaning to the intelligent consciousness. Thus, L. Tolstoy realizes the drama of human existence, which is in contradiction between the inevitability of death and the inherent man's thirst for immortality.

**Keywords:** death, meaning of life, immortality, God, L. Tolstoy.

Nowadays the work of L. Tolstoy increasingly becomes the object of a wide range of studies: the last decade has been characterized by a wave of steady attention to the religious and philosophical works by the writer, who were in the focus of the intersection of the interests of philosophers, psychologists, educators and theologians. Among them, the honorary place belongs to K. P. Andreev, V. F. Asmus, M. L. Berdyaev, S. M. Bulgakov, V. V. Zenkovsky and many others. However, today's changes in the perception of philosophical and religious thought and new approaches to the history of literature, which are characteristic of our century, have opened new prospects in the study of the legacy of L. Tolstoy. The «late» ideas of the Russian thinker have not yet been sufficiently studied and remain today one of the most complex puzzles of the culture of thinking, which brought in new ideas and interpretations into the concept of life and death.

Therefore, the aim of the article is to analyze the problem of death in the work of Tolstoy and its relationship with the category of life and the attempt to overcome the fear of death through the realization of sin and finding options for immortality, which allows a person to reconcile with death and calmly accept its inevitability.

The theme of death has always been and will always be relevant to human consciousness. Furthermore, no great artist has avoided dealing with it in his work. «The strong sense of death» precisely «due to the same strong sense of life» was characteristic of great writer L. Tolstoy, whom A. Lisovskiy aptly calls «the poet of death» [see 1, p. 24]. However, it is not the death that symbolizes «eternal stagnation», «total numbness» or «stop in the large machine of nature», but the death that occurs as the «seeds of morally healthy, intelligent, clear and happy life» [see 1, p. 26].

Though the Russian thinker did not create a separate treatise on death, the «experience of death» became the main stimulus of the work of Tolstoy. But he is interested not only in death itself, but in the moral attitude towards it. The artistic creativity of the Russian thinker reflects the process of inner experience, awareness of the rules and laws of life and death. In general, according to Tolstoy, the higher purpose of man is «to prepare

for death» [5, p. 184]. He often liked to repeat the words of B. Pascal that a human being is a person «sentenced to death, whose execution is postponed indefinitely» [9, p. 78]. But we often forget about it.

That is why it is not surprising that the reality of death prevails in the world view of the Russian thinker and the attitude towards death, in essence, determines the human attitude to life. Indeed, only when «life meets death, a riddle meets a riddle, it is at this moment that light is born, an understanding is born» [5, p. 392]. So, L. Tolstoy consistently advances the idea on the pages of his works that the magic reality of death causes a person either to abandon life, or to give it a sense that cannot be destroyed by death.

«It is in man that life finds its true meaning, because the human society is the hypostasis of all the earth cosmos, and in this lies the responsibility of man for the world, for life» [2, p. 25]. In general, the category of «life» is comprehended by L. Tolstoy as a figurative and logical concept, which in the works by the writer is thought hierarchically, but perceived as a whole. The highest level of this hierarchy is the interpretation of life as a religious-mystical phenomenon, which is identified with the existence of God. At this level, life involves death and, accordingly, attempts to find the immortality, which is used by the writer to mitigate the tragedy of death, to search for internal laws that can give the ability to sustain the process of psychological stress for a person who feels the fear of near death.

The spiritual and moral mystery of dying and death in the religious and philosophical teaching of L. Tolstoy is connected with the revision of Christian ideas about the nature of man due to the exclusive desire of the thinker to perceive Christianity in the positive-enlightenment sense, as a kind of normative moral code of universal human orientation. At the core of the Christian doctrine of death lies the dogma of the original sin, through which death comes into the world, and the atoning sacrifice of Christ, through which the victory over death in the resurrection takes place.

God gave man a life and according to «Solomon's Wisdom»: «God did not create death» [Solomon's Wisdom 1.13]. But by virtue of God's freedom granted to man, man succumbed to the

temptation to eat fruit from the tree of knowledge and by this man achieved the distinction between good and evil. «The evil according to L. Tolstoy is life itself, therefore, good is not opposed to evil in life, but to life itself» [8, p. 498–499]. According to Tolstoy, if life is evil and becomes useless, then the man himself is guilty of it, not the life that was given to him as a blessing.

In this, as V. Zenkovskiy notes, lies the entire tragedy of man, who «went the external way to acquire a higher sense, and in doing so subjugated himself to external principles, becoming their slave, being their ruler from the beginning» [7, p. 66]. Therefore, in order to win over death, it is necessary that it be revealed to the end, that is, not only as a general death, from which no one can escape, but also as the «death of Christ», which opens the door of immortality to man. That is why death is necessary, since it is only death that renews the face of the world, carries out its transformation and «transcends to the new being, the new world and the new earth» [4, p. 239].

This prompted Tolstoy to depart from the Church teaching of life as unconvincing, temporary, neglecting all human life processes. The writer believed that it was important for a person not to stop the movement of life. It is necessary to have spiritual energy in order to realize oneself, and for this it is necessary to decide which way will lead to salvation and resurrection of the soul. Therefore, the writer reveals the Christian teaching of man and concludes that «Christianity is a religion of divine humanity», which «gives man the opportunity of self-expression and a way to find the highest freedom of the spirit» [8, p. 316].

As we can see, L. Tolstoy's notion of immortality from the outside was very different from church dogmas and notions of the other world. According to his moral and religious ideal, the writer understood immortality not as a continuation of life in another world, but abstractly philosophical: as the dissolution of the individual in the indefinite beginning of «mind» and «good». That is, death was interpreted as an awakening from life, which is very similar to the Schopenhauer and Buddhist theories of immortality.

As D. Merezhkovskiy noticed, Tolstoy did not manage to overcome death, and his religion eventually turned into «Buddhist nihilism, a religion of non-existence» [8, p. 325], as he was trying to create a new religion that would correspond to his contemporary thinking, infused with rationalism, for which mind acted as the highest judge in all matters and affairs. That mind, about which Pasternak said, that it was necessary not to know the truth, but in order not to be deceived in the confectioner's shop [see 2, p. 211] – this is the very mind that becomes for L. Tolstoy the highest arbitrator.

M. Berdyaev noted that «L. Tolstoy was passionately and painfully looking for the meaning of life and God. But he did not believe in God, because he was obsessed with the fear of death. It is impossible to call God the faceless law of life, which was discovered by him and which was to give meaning to life» [3, p. 42]. That is why a steadfast faith in God was needed by L. Tolstoy rather in order to drive away the ghost of death. But, as it is not

a shame, such a reckless and unconditional belief the writer never found for himself.

In the religious philosophy of L. Tolstoy, the main thing is the desire to penetrate every moment of human life and feel eternity, the thirst of which induces the thinker to learn the life and overcome the fear of death. In his writings, in particular the «Confessions» [10], L. Tolstoy established that the source of the fear of death was man's dissatisfaction with himself, his own life and his own inability to find harmony within himself. Similar considerations led the Russian philosopher to the thought of the need to eliminate the opposition of life and death, to destroy that negative potential, which in the minds of his characters merges with death.

Only harmony with oneself, harmony with others helps man to free himself from sufferings, dissatisfaction with oneself and with his life, deprives, in the end, of the fear of death. That is why the dialogue between life and death on the pages of works by L. Tolstoy looks optimistic, since they all are permeated with the apotheosis of life, which takes only a triumphant and bright secret of eternal life out of the dark secret of death.

In general, death has long been regarded as an axiological category (V. Ilyin, V. Sabirov, K. Isupov), as «the last instance», to which man turns in the absence of other moral justifications. In his works, Tolstoy also assigns to death the role of the valuation category, because it shows, like a litmus test, all that bad and good what happened in the life of heroes. In L. Tolstoy's work, the image of an ideal death is formed, to the comprehension of which he tries to bring his heroes.

According to the thinker, human death reinforces the uncontroversial moral and natural laws that must be obeyed. For the desire to give his life for good received from life, man is given, as a reward, the notion of sense of life, due to which man is endowed with the ability to overcome all difficulties, everyday troubles and not to be immersed in despair and despondency. L. Tolstoy believed that the value of life helps man to stand in the face of imminent death. The inevitability of death is very frightening to one of the heroes of L. Tolstoy – Ivan Ilyich. The story about him was written as a reproach and reminder for the living, because it is often compared with the court, in the session of which the case of life and death is heard. And, as it is known, there is no judge more rigorous and implacable than man himself. It was extremely important for L. Tolstoy to analyze the psychological state of a person, who lived his life «without meaning and without consciousness, and was brought by a serious illness face to face with the eternal questions and the mystery of life» [11, p. 27].

An important place in the story is occupied by rhetorical questions and internal tragic reflections of Ivan Ilyich. The narrator tells us about the beginning of the disease, the fear and concern of the personage, about his reflections on life and death, on the summing up of life. Ivan Ilyich, focused on the disease and the fear of death, is lonely in his emotional experience. No one can share his painful doubts about the past and the fear of death in the future.

Thus, the tragedy of the personage appears in the story of «The Death of Ivan Illich» as abso-

lutely inevitable and as the consequence of the very nature of the selfish way of life of the so-called «enlightened society». Its personage, who is an average man – and that circumstance is persistently emphasized in the story – easily and naturally obeys the norms of his circumambience without thinking about their essence. He unconditionally accepted all that «people believed to be correct». And he was accompanied by luck in all. He achieves everything he has dreamed of, losing only what he never thought of – the living soul. The light of consciousness flashed in the soul of Ivan Ilyich too late. Nothing could be corrected or changed. He began to contemplate his past and saw that he had «nothing to protect».

In this way L. Tolstoy reveals the inability of selfish existence as a lie, unseemliness and evil. And this imparts a special power of persuasiveness to his the criticism, as the plot of the story as if unfolds the whole range of inevitable consequences and properties of selfish life. The depersonalization of the personage, the void of his existence, indifferent cruelty to his neighbors, and, finally, the incompatibility of selfishness with the mind are shown here. «Selfishness is madness» [see 2, p. 93]. This idea, formulated by L. Tolstoy in the Diary, is one of the main ideas in the story and it is vividly manifested, when Ivan Ilyich understands that he is dying.

Death is already nearby. First, he tries to escape from this insight of death, but those «veils» behind which he rescued himself, were translucent as if death «penetrated through everything and nothing could stop it» [11, p. 54]. Ivan Illich thinks about the question of death and realizes that he does not want to die: «I shall not be there, and what will happen? Nothing will happen. So, where shall I be when I am not there? Is it really death? No, I do not want to die» [11, p. 56]. He appeals to God and to eternity. He agrees to receive the Eucharist and feels afterwards much better, not so much physically, as morally. His inner world is changing. For the first time in his life he feels sorry for others – for his wife and for his son. The higher world illuminates its consciousness. The fear of death disappears: «Light comes instead of death» [11, p. 234], the light of love. After all, it is love, according to Tolstoy, that can overcome death and impart meaning to any life. And the last words uttered by Ivan Ilyich mean just that: «Death has gone... It does not exist anymore» [11, p. 253].

Nevertheless, Ivan Ilyich's life of was no different from the life of other average men and his death did not become a significant event; it occurs rather as a logical result of his life. But another aspect is important for the writer – repentance, rethinking of life, reassessment of values, self-criticism and «awakening» of the soul for a better life in the last moment. The final theme can be formulated by the question of Ivan Ilyich: «What, if all my life has been wrong?» [11, p. 138]. This thought is both horrific to him and induces the desire to correct everything and live a different life. But he has not been destined to correct his life and he has little time even to repent.

Everything is reliable and accurate in the story, up to the physiological details of the disease. Basing upon this, critics often tried to make the story of L. Tolstoy seem closer to the works by French

naturalists. The Russian writer is really accurate in details, deep in psychological and physiological problems, but he is interested not only in and not so much in facts as in their profound moral meaning. This is the significant difference between the realism of L. Tolstoy and naturalism of E. Zola.

The power of the story by L. Tolstoy is that it destroys calmness and appeals to conscience with full faith in its presence. The contemporaries rightly called this story «a masterpiece of psychological analysis». Indeed, the concept of «death» is associated not only with the physical, but also with the spiritual death of the character. However, L. Tolstoy puts the «light at the end of the tunnel», claiming the necessity of moral norms for every man not as a subjective requirement or a good wish, not as a religious dogma consecrated by divine authority, but as an objective law of human nature itself.

Therefore, death is perceived by L. Tolstoy as the limit of being, which reminds man of the results of his lived life. And love, according to the Russian writer, is almost the only opportunity to remove selfish constraints of bodily life. Acceptance of Love as a world view provides for going beyond the limits of selfish interests. In this way, man removes the moral alienation and is revealed through Love to another, Supreme Absolute – God. This manifestation of man's infinity is the ultimate sense of life.

Thus, the notion of meaning of life in works by L. Tolstoy is closely associated with the concepts of «religion» and «faith». Furthermore, faith is interpreted as an un verbalized and unconscious understanding by man of the meaning of life. Religion, according to L. Tolstoy, is rather an embodiment, a verbalization of the understanding of the meaning of life (faith) of man. The difference between religions expresses a different degree of awareness of man's personal understanding of life and a different degree of man's proximity to the understanding of truth. «The concept of God in the teaching of L. Tolstoy expresses a certain degree of awareness of man's meaning of life, when man has realized the limitations of his consciousness of life as life in space and time, and thus discovered «the understanding of life» in himself [6, p. 139]. The understanding of life accompanies the fear of death, which expresses the insufficiency in understanding the limitation of one's life through understanding the unlimited beginning of life, which reveals the true meaning of life. In the works by the writer, the sense of life expresses the mode of man's cognition of being and the very mode of man's being.

Thus, the artistic and philosophical concept of life and death in the works by L. Tolstoy is a complex whole, the main semantic parts of which are the idea of «continuation» of life in death, the cyclic movement of man and nature, moral perfection of man to overcome the fear of death, and, finally, harmonious coexistence of men in the rejection of passions and selfishness.

The writer, as once A. Schopenhauer, denied life, but did not agree with his thesis about the absurdity of life. L. Tolstoy proved the contradictory statement of the absurdity of life, arguing that its devaluation was due to the subordination of man to the «flesh», and this served as the main obstacle on the way of man's cognition of his life, and

removing it brought man back to himself. Man's discovery of the limitlessness of his essence is the highest sense of life. Death, as well as life, are the main categories and concepts of Tolstoy's religious and moral teaching, as they form the spiritual space of Tolstoy's work and allow to answer the simplest and at the same time the most complicated questions concerning the deep-seated problems of human existence: the meaning of life, the overcoming of death and the search for immortality.

However, in spite of the large number of writings on individual works by L. Tolstoy and on the versatility of his approaches to the interpretation of life and death, there is still a lack of generalizing works, where all the variety of factors, the system of ideas and the form of their embodiment in the writer's work in light of the problem of genesis

his outlook and artistic vision were dealt with. His religiousness, which must be understood systematically and as a whole, corroborating it with the analysis of the philosophical and artistic context and comparing it with the tendencies of the development of the Russian religious thought, deserves a separate study. Only as a result of very intense efforts, one can determine the role and place of L. Tolstoy's insights concerning the human nature and the existential grounds of the religious life of mankind. The study of the categories of love, spirit and flesh, divine and human, which interact with the opposition of «life-death» and which permeate the being of the consciousness of the great seeker of the truth and ideal, seems to be fruitful. Therefore, the comprehensive study of L. Tolstoy's legacy lies still ahead.

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## ТЕМА СМЕРТІ У ТВОРЧОСТІ Л. ТОЛСТОГО

### Анотація

У статті розглядаються особливості сприйняття феномену смерті в творчості Л. Толстого. Він сприймає смерть як одну з форм утвердження життєвого порядку, в якому смерть постає головним виправданям життя. Російський мислитель вибудовує цілісну систему смерті, яка поєднує в собі раціональне, духовно-релігійне і художньо-інтуїтивне її розуміння. В кінцевому підсумку екзистенціальний досвід смерті Л. Толстого долається розумним усвідомленням сенсу життя, в основі якого покладена морально-етична складова, яка надає трактуванню смерті цілісний сенс. Любов до всього живого, на думку Л. Толстого, єдине духовне джерело життя, яке долає екзистенціальний страх перед смертю. Саме одухотворення Живого через Любов виявляє ціннісні характеристики Живого буття, розкриває його зміст і значення для розумної свідомості. Таким чином, Л. Толстой усвідомлює драматизм людського буття, що складається в протиріччі між невідворотністю смерті і властивій людині спрагою безсмертя.

**Ключові слова:** смерть, сенс життя, безсмертя, Бог, Л. Толстой.

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## **ТЕМА СМЕРТИ В ТВОРЧЕСТВЕ Л. ТОЛСТОГО**

### **Аннотация**

В статье рассматриваются особенности восприятия феномена смерти в творчестве Л. Толстого. Он воспринимает смерть как одну из форм утверждения жизненного порядка, в котором смерть предстает главным оправданием жизни. Русский мыслитель выстраивает целостную систему смерти, которая сочетает в себе рациональное, духовно-религиозное и художественно-интуитивное ее понимания. В конечном итоге экзистенциальный опыт смерти Л. Толстого преодолевается разумным осознанием смысла жизни, в основе которого положена морально-этическая составляющая, которая предоставляет трактовке смерти целостный смысл. Любовь ко всему живому, по мнению Л. Толстого, единственный духовный источник жизни, который преодолевает экзистенциальный страх перед смертью. Именно одушевление Живого сквозь Любовь проявляет ценностные характеристики живого бытия, раскрывает его смысл и значение для разумного сознания. Таким образом, Л. Толстой осознает драматизм человеческого бытия, состоящий в противоречии между неотвратимостью смерти и присущей человеку жаждой бессмертия.

**Ключевые слова:** смерть, смысл жизни, бессмертие, Бог, Л. Толстой.