

Lara Noe

Professor Kevin Pinkham

ENG202: Global Literature II: OA

29th April 2023

Literature Analysis Essay

Gustave Flaubert's A Simple Heart and Leo Tolstoy's The Death of Ivan Ilyich.

Class in the nineteenth century is discussed in both Gustave Flaubert's "A Simple Heart" and Leo Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Ilyich". Both readings offer fascinating views of 19th-century society and its intricate class system. However, what I found exciting was that the two authors take this topic from various angles and approach it using various narrative techniques. The main distinction, in my opinion, is that while Tolstoy shows the lives of multiple individuals from various social classes, Flaubert exposes the class structure through the viewpoint of a single character and their battles within it. Additionally, I'll talk about and examine the themes of loss and the certainty of death in both books. The goal that I have in writing this Literature Analysis Essay is to provide a thoughtful examination of the two novels and their applicability to the modern world while taking into account the depth to which each author uses his narrative to critique society.

Tolstoy and Gustave's novels are precise representations of contemporary society. The two authors create an accurate picture of society and the interactions among its members. For instance, Ivan Ilych, the protagonist of Tolstoy's work "The Death of

Ivan Ilyich," leads a simple life, but not in the correct way because he values money more than things that are crucial, including human relationships. He leads a selfish life that excludes other people from his circle of influence. He eventually starts avoiding his family and concentrating more on his job as a law enforcement officer, which causes issues. As seen by his desire for a higher paid career to support his family, his life is materialistic and shallow. Additionally, it can be observed in how he arranges his new home now that he has a well-paying work. When he becomes ill, his lack of concern for his relationships with people and society mirrors his last life, and the only person who can show him care is the servant Gerasim. Ivan regrets this in his later years when he asks Gerasim if he has been having a nice life since he doubts it because he bases his friendship decisions on people's socioeconomic position. But in his final moments, Ivan comes to terms with the fact that he has been interacting with society incorrectly (Tolstoy, Slater, and Kahn 19). The way most individuals in today's society prioritize monetary gain over improving society for future generations and for when they are elderly and in need of assistance is another example of how Ivan's character comes through in the novel. An impressive quote, I have found was: "The pain did not increase, but it never left him and seemed to be spreading through his whole being" (Tolstoy, Slater, and Kahn 22). It implies that the protagonist is going through mental suffering that seems to be pervasive, impacting not just one portion of his body but his entire being. The character's sadness is highlighted by the use of words like "never" and "spreading", which highlights how serious and pervasive the pain is.

If someone wants to live in accordance with society in a way that is different from that of Ivan Ilyich, they should look to Gustave's story, "A Simple Heart (Soul)". The

primary theme of the narrative is loss. Félicité, the story's protagonist, teaches society that loss cannot be completely avoided at any costs. Félicité is a hard-working young woman with a decent heart even though the story's premise portrays her as an illiterate, impoverished person because she enjoys getting along with everyone and forming new relationships with people, regardless of their age or social standing. Despite the fact that she has done nothing wrong to warrant punishment, she has struggled with feelings of abandonment since she was a young child because her parents passed away. "For half a century she held the same position and was paid the same" (Flaubert 8).

This quote is about Félicité and shows that Félicité has been stuck in the same position, servant, for fifty years. She went through plenty of suffering and loss, but she has remained caring and dedicated to the people she helps. She decides to live with a very controlling farmer and distances herself from her sister, whom she has never seen again. Her life is filled with the deaths of her loved ones because even her mistress passes away tragically, leaving her alone in difficult times. She smiles as the story ends because her favorite parrot saved her life (Flaubert 14). She may use it to pray and even invite others to pay her visits, which gives her a new lease on life. Her last days are seen as light since she is connected to the world of prayer even if she begins connecting to Christianity when she joins Madame Aubains' family. The narrative portrays the reality of the world in which people are getting divorced and maids are moving in with better families when their marriages don't work out.

Because one of the stories is about a man who values his material possessions more than his family, both stories depict different characters in contemporary society. The other is about a modest woman who appreciates and enjoys social interaction. Because people will pass away at the conclusion of the two tales, they also demonstrate how

death is unavoidable. Therefore, one should cherish others while they are still strong since there may come a day when they will wish to help them. Felicity is an excellent example of how people should live while going through difficult times like losing loved ones and running into financial difficulties. People shouldn't lead lives like Ivan Ilyich's because they can pass away unexpectedly and require the company of people in their final moments. The Death of Ivan Ilyich by Leo Tolstoy and Gustave Flaubert's *A Simple Heart*, on the other hand, differ in that Ivan experiences difficulties near the conclusion of his life as a result of accepting the role of society in his life. Félicité endures hardship despite leading a moral life. Ivan's narrative demonstrates to the world how life may occasionally be pointless even when one has the best jobs and a lot of money, especially when one has no time for others. It criticizes Ivan Ilyich's lifestyle when he was healthy because he set the class by socializing with individuals from higher social classes without considering that these people wouldn't be there for him during the difficult times. Only his servant is nearby to care for him once his health deteriorates, so people should pay attention to the kind of lives they are leading. The life of the underprivileged in the past is accurately portrayed in the story of Félicité. They are friendly and gregarious with everyone. In addition, they are going through a challenging time where they are oppressed by the farmer's treatment of Félicité. Both stories differ because the people live quite different lives. Felicity is willing to labor for minimal pay, but Ivan does not want to be paid less because of their educational backgrounds. They frequently demonstrate how higher education, when not used properly, can result in issues and how the poor can live a happy life while having positive interpersonal relationships.

In summary to have a higher quality of life at the end of their lives, society's members should live happily with one another, according to the authors of the two stories. They demonstrate how people can live sad lives even if they have a lot of worldly stuff if they have no one to take care of them. The story of Félicité demonstrates how happiness may be reached even from a low socioeconomic position by interacting with others. Ivan's life is an example of how people shouldn't treat those who are wealthy because Gerasim was the only one to stand by him while he was in need. Family ties are particularly important because Ivan never appreciated his family, which caused his wife to ignore his suffering. As a result, it will be appropriate for husbands in today's society to prioritize their family over their pursuit of wealth because their family will support them during the great depression.

Works Cited

Flaubert, Gustave, and Charlotte Mandell. *A Simple Heart*. Hoboken, Melville House Pub., 2008.

SparkNotes. www.sparknotes.com/lit/ivanilych/. Accessed 26 Apr. 2023.

Tolstoy, Leo, and Lynn Solotaroff. *The Death of Ivan Illyich*. Toronto, Bantam Books, 1985.

Worldpress. introtfiction141.wordpress.com/2021/02/13/character-names-and-meanings-in-the-death-of-ivan-ilyich/. Accessed 28 Apr. 2023.