



The Characterization of Ivan Ilych in Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych*

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to characterize Ivan Ilych's character in Tolstoy's the Death of Ivan Ilych. Indeed, the main character's characteristics are like people in common that he has been well characterized. However, the attraction is that he has to die young, whilst, the good character should have ended the story happily. Using Bogdan's qualitative approach, the study shows that the main character, Ivan Ilych, has good characteristics as follows simple and ordinary person, intelligent, agreeable, and lively, an ideal person, a man of high dream, not a boastful man, a very honest man, loving his career, caring for his official business and household one, a man of morality, optimistic, and patient. Through the good characters, the study also gives the readers a philosophical life that man exposes God disposes.

Keywords: characterization; new criticism; good character

INTRODUCTION

Character has two meanings, the exceptional individual sign referring to what a man and woman are like and the man and the woman themselves. It seems that the sign devoted to a person seems to be the person himself whose uniqueness of the mark is the exclusivity of that person. Therefore, a person's character is the depiction of the person as a whole (Eagleton, 2013) as well as the summary of a specific individual kind (Cuddon, 2013).

To confirm Eagleton's statement above, the researcher refers to Lina Varotsi's statement about character that the supreme perceptible representation of an individual is the behavior that distinguishes her from the rests of her kinds by a number of criteria. Just because a character of someone can be the copy of ways of thinking and acting that have been predictable, it does not mean that someone is prevented from acting out of character. Possibly, he acts out of his character on condition that he is with people with different characteristic (2019).

In the works of literature, characters are well-known as the life of literature. It means that characters become the focus of the interest and charm, love and hatred, respect and blame of the readers. Why then characters become the readers' focus is because only characters make the readers intense with them in the works of literature. By the readers' capability of identifying as well as sympathizing and opposing the characters, the

characters then become part of how the readers understand themselves, a part of who they are (Bennet, 2014). Therefore, character is the construction of a hidden human behavior with the undeniably limited form of a story (Figlerowicz, 2016) with the readers' participation with fictitious characters being a significant part of the literary practice (Thomsen, 2017).

In addition, currently, fictitious character can be widely noticeable in a movie, a novel, and a piece of promotion with the pressures as well as amplifies of the dangerous features and actions of the characters (Euron, 2019) with the depiction of worldwide human types with the actions and values having a worldwide human sense, detached from what their real personal, social and historical identities likely are (Owen, 2021).

Seemingly, there is an obvious disparity between fictional characters and real human beings; the former are identifiable inasmuch as they are articulate, foreseeable, and recognizable found in plots whether happy or sad, through which the readers create characters from signs in any literary work. The latter are either as not knowable or as not predictable as literary characters (Saje, 2014).

Thus, the researcher would like to analyze a character in a novel that is separated from the author as well as the historical background in which the novel is written. Therefore, the researcher refers to New Criticism in that the analysis is decently the formal aspects of literature, that is, a text's meaning (Berterns, 2014) excluded from definite authorial or historic contexts (Upstone, 2017). The novel belongs to Tolstoy's *the Death of Ivan Ilych*. The researcher gets interested in analyzing Ivan Ilych's character as his character is so unique in that it is quite different from other characters that end in happiness, whilst, Ivan Ilych's life end is in sorrow though he has a perfect character. It is in contrast of what Novalis states that character is fate that good people should end their life happily (Hardy, 1969). Good people, in commonly works of literature undergo happy ending but not the good person in this novel that dies young. Therefore, this study gives the researcher a learning that man exposes God disposes. Then, how Ivan Ilych is characterized becomes the researcher focus of study.

Recently, there has been some researchers analyzing characterization in their study: Ni Komang Karisma Dewi, et. al (2021), Ni Komang Arie Suwastini et. al (2022), and Syahrudin Said, et. al (2023). The former, in their article the Characterization of Amanda Collier in Nicholas Sparks' *the Best of Me*, analyze the character of Amanda Collier. Using the qualitative data analysis from Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, the study shows that the main character Amanda Collier is curious, brave, and impulsive.

The latter analyzes characterization in their two articles in the same year: the Characterization of Felix Salinger as the Main Character in Morris Gleitzman's *Once* and the Characterizations of Professor Snape in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Using textual analysis in the first article, the study shows that Felix Salinger is religious, brave, caring, and creative, whilst, in their second study, using close reading, Professor Snape is described as knowledgeable, curious, observant, hardworking, loner, partial, loyal, responsible, and authoritative.

The last analyzes characterization in Personality in Michael Punke's *the Revenant*. Using the concept of protagonist and personality, the study shows that the main character is brave and strong though he is abandoned and robbed by his friends, Fitzgerald and Bridger, in the woods.

It seems that the characterization of the main characters above are normal in that through their characterization they are alive. In fact, they end their story in happiness. It is quite different from the researcher's study that though Ivan Ilych's character is quite

good, however, he ends his life sorrowfully. Indeed, he dies young. This is the gap of the researcher's study from the previous studies in spite of the fact that the novel is different.

METHODS

Research Approach

As this study is concerned with social phenomena, a family, in a novel, the method of the study the researcher uses is qualitative method. This method regards a social fact holistically which is full of meaning (Sugiyono, 2010). Further, qualitative research is conducted in the natural setting, descriptive in that words are used instead of numbers (Bogdan, 1982). Likewise, the researcher can say that the qualitative method here elaborates the phenomena that happen in society.

Kind of Research

This research is a literary research whose main sources are taken from Tolstoy's *the Death of Ivan Ilych* from which the researcher quotes the words that have things to do with Ivan Ilych's characterization. Thus, not all items in the works are worth quoting here.

Data Collection Technique

The researcher collects the data in a table in a note with two columns; the first column is with the data of Ivan Ilych's wife's characterization and the second data is with Ivan Ilych's characterization. Therefore, this kind of technique makes the researcher easy to analyze the problems.

Data Analysis

To confirm the good character of Ivan Ilych, firstly, the researcher elaborates Ivan Ilych's wife's characterization. Then the researcher elaborates Ivan Ilych's characterization. From this way of analyzing the data, the researcher has a strong conviction that Ivan Ilych is well-characterized.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The characterization of Ivan Ilych

To understand and confirm how good Ivan Ilych is, the researcher needs to explore Ivan Ilych's wife's characterization here because through his wife's characterization, Ivan Ilych's character looks amazing. The wife, Praskovya Fedorovna, is so jealous. It goes without saying that a woman in pregnancy needs her husband's more attention than when not being in pregnancy. His wife goes too over. She is jealous without sensible reasons. Therefore, Ivan Ilych happiness is disturbed. The wife should not behave like that since her behavior can affect her husband's life even his career. As a wife to be jealous is quite normal, yet, she should behave fairly against her husband. It is because sometimes a role of a wife in a household encourages her husband to have a career. Many good people become corrupted due to their wives. Likewise, many bad people become good ones due to their wives. The following is the wife's jealousy:

She began to be jealous without any cause, expected him to devote his whole attention to her, found fault with everything, and made coarse and ill-mannered scenes (Tolstoy, 2013).

The wife, Praskovya Fedorovna, is not grateful. As a natural woman, she should serve her husband nicely and obediently, yet, she acts otherwise. The more children they have the more irritated she is, therefore, it influences Ivan Ilych's happiness as a father of the children. The mother should not have acted in such a way that as mentioned above that a wife may affect her husband's career. This attitude, that is to say, an irritation of

the more children that were born indicates that she is not like a woman in common. Woman's task is to bear children, to raise, and to bring them up, she should be happy with such a condition unless her husband is moneyless, cannot provide her and the children for everything. She is not grateful, anyway. The following quotation confirms the previous explanation:

More children came. His wife became more and more querulous and ill-tempered, but the attitude Ivan Ilych had adopted towards his home life rendered him almost impervious to her grumbling (Tolstoy, 2013).

The wife, Praskovya Fedorovna, does not look up to her husband. In every world, culture, religion, a husband is higher in family life than a wife, though she has a good position in her job, it does not automatically lead her to be in control of her husband. A husband will feel happy if his wife gives him some respects. Yet, what Ivan Ilych confronts here is quite different; his wife is purely a house wife in that she does not go out to make money, to make ends meet. No. She just stays at home. Still, she puts her husband lower socially than he should be. Further, she calls her husband with a sickening call: fool and imbecile, which drags him almost to divorce her. In a religion, it is taught that a husband should call his wife with a nice call not a wife to call her husband. It means that though a husband is socially higher than a wife, he cannot sicken his wife through a bad call. Still, he must be pleasant to her. Yet, what happens to Ivan Ilych's wife is quite otherwise. She is beyond of the woman in common, disrespect to her husband.

Praskovya Fedorovna called him "a fool and imbecile," and he clutched at his head and made angry allusions to divorce (Tolstoy, 2013).

The wife, Praskovya Fedorovna, is money oriented. It is admitted that money is of any help in living in this world. Everybody needs money to raise their children, to pay tax, to pay school fee, to provide for meals, and etc. Yet, money is not the goal for all of this. There is something invisible worth having which everybody needs, that is, a life bless and happiness. Money is not the thing that makes somebody happy. It is shown by the fact that many people with good salary but they do not live happily. Their family life is broken, instead; their children go out of their home for pleasure which drags them to a drug addiction which leads them to their moral abuse. More pathetically, many rich people end their life in sorrow by committing suicide though there is sounding money in their accounts. On the contrary, many people who are economically poor live peacefully because they respect each other between husband and wife. It does not happen to the wife, Praskovya Fedorovna. She babysits her husband due to his money. She is afraid of her husband's death due to his money.

"She began to wish he would die; yet, she did not him to die because then his salary would cease" (Tolostoy, 2013).

The wife, Praskovya Fedorovna, is so selfish. A marriage is built in order to unite different things between man and woman to come to a goal of life namely, happiness. To achieve such a goal, the husband and the wife have to work together; the husband has to work for the happiness of his wife and children, on the contrary, the wife has to take care household for the happiness of her husband and the children, too. Bottom line is that husband and wife are fulfilling each other. It does not happen to Ivan Ilych's wife. Ivan

Ilych works for the happiness for his wife and children but his wife does things merely for her own sake.

“Everything she did for him was entirely for her own sake, and she told him she was doing for herself what she actually was doing for herself, as if that was so incredible that he must understand the opposite” (Tolstoy, 2013).

In a nutshell, from the analysis above the researcher comes to know that the wife, Praskovya Fedorovna, has bad characters because she is unreasonably jealous, not grateful, disrespectful of her husband, money oriented, and so selfish.

Whilst, Ivan Ilych is a character who has been described as simply as well as ordinarily living person. Such a character is an ideal one whom everybody nowadays is supposed to live in such a way that they can get rid of a terrible depression. This is because the more property somebody possesses the more burden their life will be. The statistics shows that the mortality from the depression mostly belongs to the haves rather than to the haves not. Though in the novel Ivan Ilych is not described as a religious person but he behaves religiously.

“Ivan Ilych’s life had been most simple and most ordinary” (Tolstoy, 2013). Philosophically, Ivan Ilych deserves a long life.

Ivan Ilych is intelligent, agreeable, and lively. Ivan Ilych is worth a good health as well as property through which he maintains his life. Among his brothers, he is the one who is not so strict to the rules of life. He is smart, pleasant, and energetic. With his being smart, he is able to absorb knowledge as well as to make a sudden important decision. With his being pleasant, he is able to mingle with any sort of people to whom he can create a good network to which he can make money easily to which he will be prosperous economically. With his being energetic, he studies hard when he is a student. He works hard when he is a worker. Such characters easily lead him to gain success. The aforesaid explanation can be seen through the following quotation:

“He was neither as cold and formal as his elder brother nor as wild as the younger, but was a happy man between them—an intelligent polished, lively and agreeable man” (Tolstoy, 2013).

Ivan Ilych is an ideal person. He lives with what he gets from his school. He is with school of law through which he makes a professional living. Still, his good characters do not change; his being smart, his being pleasant, and his being man of society. With morality supported by good education, he deserves good position in his job through which he leads a happy family. Anything that anybody else is hard to get belongs to Ivan Ilych. His future seems to be flawless. Such kind of characters puts the researcher in mind of what Novalis states in Thomas Hardy’s *the Mayor of Casterbridge*, “character is fate” in that through a good character somebody can make a good life as well as leads a happy family. Thus, Ivan Ilych is supposed to have a good life, an ideal one though somebody cannot avoid of the death, yet, he will die in his very old day. That is Novalis’ idea of character. The delineation of Ivan Ilych’s character above can be traced through the following quotation:

“Even when he was at the school of law he was what he remained for the rest of his life: a capable, cheerful, good natured, and sociable man “ (Tolstoy, 2013).

Ivan Ilych is a man of high dream. From his boyhood, he has an ability to follow the ideology of a man of high rank. He has an ability to mingle with them, too. Supported by what he has got naturally above, he can be successful like the ones he has idolized. Such a dream matches with the following saying, "where there is a hope, there will be a way." In relation to Ivan Ilych's dream, Ivan Ilych seems to follow such a saying. The following quotation verifies Ivan Ilych's dream aforesaid:

"Neither as a boy nor a man was he a toady, but from early youth was by nature attracted to people of high station as a fly is drawn to the light, assimilating their ways and views of life and establishing friendly relations with them" (Tolstoy, 2013).

Ivan Ilych is not a boastful man. Ivan Ilych is still Ivan Ilych before and after he gets a good job. When he is assigned in the province, he takes his job pleasantly, politely. Therefore, he makes a good care. Such kinds of characters are badly needed in serving people. He posts himself as a trader who serves the customers. He does not break the heart of other trader because he does it professionally. Thus is Ivan Ilych. He makes his career increases because people around him are fond of him. Again, he is worth a long and happy life as he has no enemies. Though he has the power on other employees around him, yet, he never feels stubborn. He considers them as friends. He does not do harm anybody close to him. He is supposed to be happy ever after. The following quotation confirms Ivan Ilych's behavior aforesaid:

_____ and he liked to treat them politely, almost as comrades, as if he were letting them feel that he had the power to crush them was treating them in this simple, friendly way (Tolstoy, 2013).

Ivan Ilych is a very honest man in his job. He never corrupts his good position. People around him love him so much. The money he makes from the clean work he does should give him happiness which in a religion it is called blessed. From the clean money, it should lead to have an obedient wife, in general term, a happy family. If possible, he should have had another woman in service of him. He should have experienced what the English expresses as follows: one good turn deserves another. It means that if somebody serves others quite interestingly, he will be protected from dismissing. He can keep on working as long as he keeps on being honest. Yet, he confronts otherwise. It is not from within himself. It is from the invisible power outside, instead. The following quotation verifies his honesty in his career:

Ivan Ilych never abused his power; he tried on the contrary to soften its expression, but the consciousness of it and the possibility of softening its effect, supplied the chief interest and attraction of his office (Tolstoy, 2013).

Ivan Ilych is a man who loves his job. It is due to the fact that the achievement he has had; he has been appreciated to be a good official, his speeches get full attention. There is no reason for him not to be happy in his life. Again, he experiences another principle in career: love what you do, you will gain success. In fact, he is happy with his job. The following quotation confirms the previous delineation:

_____ So that on the whole Ivan Ilych's life continued to flow as he considered it should do—pleasantly and properly (Tolstoy, 2013).

Ivan Ilych has acted for the best not only in his official tasks but in his household as well. So caring is he towards his furniture of his house that he does it without his capability. Therefore, he has a slight accident which he regards as nothing happens. A man with hard tasks in his office still caring household business is an extraordinary man. Such is Ivan Ilych. He does things in his house which should have been handled by the experts in order that he makes his family happy, surprisingly; he was so interested in it all that he often did things himself, rearranging the furniture, or re-hanging the curtains. What Ivan Ilych has done is a reflection of a very kind person; on one hand he makes money for the sake of his family, whilst, on the other hand, he handles wife's jobs. The responsibility for the beauty of his house should fall on his wife. The following quotation verifies Ivan Ilych's being an extraordinary man:

He had been particularly successful in finding, and buying cheaply, antiques which gave a particularly aristocratic character to the whole place. But in his letters he intentionally understated everything in order to be able to surprise them (Tolstoy, 2013).

Morally, Ivan Ilych is an extraordinary man. Another thing that makes Ivan Ilych be a very extraordinary man is that he knows what things belong to his official works and what things belong to his personal matters. An ability to separate between official matters and personal ones has been shown by one of the good people in the world. Abdul Aziz bin Umar has done this. He does not lighten up the lamp whenever he takes care of his personal matters in his office. He turns it off, instead. Such morality is rarely confronted nowadays. Workers are mostly corrupted. They take advantages of the office's property for their own sake. Thus is Ivan Ilych. He is a man of morality. Though moral teaching has been found in the eastern countries, however, he behaves morally. Morality is a universal value. He does not need a formal education to understand it. The following is an example of his morality:

Ivan Ilych possessed this capacity to separate his real life from the official side of affairs and mix the two in the highest degree (Tolstoy, 2013).

Ivan Ilych is an optimistic person. Ivan Ilych has optimism of life through which he strives for survival. He gets such optimism from a syllogism that a man with a happy family, a man who has been brought up well deserves a long life. A man, he thinks, cannot be compared to fictitious character whose life come to a close because he is not treated well by his parents, whilst, he gets a good one. Optimism of life is one of the struggles that should be undergone by a sick people as it is a sort of power to bring the sick person to recovery. In real life, when curing sick people, doctors always treat them well either medically or entertainingly. Thus, such thing is done by Ivan Ilych from within himself that he does not have to die early. He does not have to die on his young age because he has had an idealistic and happy life from his parents. The quotation that shows Ivan Ilych's optimism of life runs thus:

The syllogism he had learnt from Kiesewetter's Logic: "Caius is a man, men are mortal, therefore, Caius is mortal," had always seemed to him

correct as applied to Caius, but certainly not as applied to himself (Tolstoy, 2013).

Ivan Ilych can stand being in pain. It is quite natural that a man who has strong desire to live longer never feels what should be felt hurtful by other persons. He has to do what he has to do no matter how painful it is that he feels. To this sub-analysis, Ivan Ilych puts the researcher in mind of Gus Dur, who, during his life, never feels painful of the disease he has experienced. Once, when he is in a hospital of his being sick, he insists on going home to write articles for a news paper because he thinks that he has to give contribution to this developing country through his thoughts. That is Gus Dur and it is experienced by Ivan Ilych in a matter of standing being in pain. Even though the pain from the accident he faces never ceases to make him sick, yet, Ivan Ilych feels better all the times. At least it is that he thinks. The following quotation confirms Ivan Ilych's standing being in pain:

The pain did not grow less, but Ivan Ilych made efforts to force himself to think that he was better (Tolstoy, 2013).

All in all, from the analysis above the good behavior of Ivan Ilych can be summarized as follows: simple and ordinary person, intelligent, agreeable, and lively, an ideal person, a man of high dream, not a boastful man, a very honest man, loving his career, caring for his official business and household one, a man of morality, optimistic, and patient all of which should lead him to be worthy of a happy and long life.

In a nutshell, not like the characterization in the previous studies that lead the main characters to end the story happily, the result of the characterization of Ivan Ilych is in contrast. Thus, Ivan Ilych experiences a well-known religious teaching: Man Exposes but God Disposes. Ivan Ilych has acted for the best for his life as well as for his family life. He has been an honest man, a good man, a professional man in his job through all of which he is worthy of a long and healthy life. However, God speaks otherwise. As though God says to him," even though you are a good person entire of your life but I have made up My mind. You have to die young, through which he makes a fuss to the God when his life comes to a close. The following quotation is an objection of his young death due to what he has done true: "But how could that be, when I did everything properly?" (Tolstoy, 2013).

CONCLUSION

The researcher concludes two main points from the analysis above: first of all, it is about the good behavior of Ivan Ilych that cannot keep him from death. Second of all, saying "one good turn deserves another" does not apply in life. Ivan Ilych has undergone it. He has behaved properly. Yet, he does not have another opportunity to behave well. He faces his destiny, instead; the bad wife that becomes a nuisance of his and the accident that gradually takes his life in his young age.

Finally, the researcher hopes so much that this study gives significant information to the readers that not all our kindness is paid in cash in this mortal world. Sometimes, it is beyond our hope. Likewise, there are researchers interested in analyzing this novel using other theories for the literary study development.

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