

Frommian Biophilic Ethics in Tolstoy's *The death of Ivan Ilyich*

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ABSTRACT

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Ilene Philipson, the Californian born sociologist and licensed psychologist, asserts that Erich Fromm is the second widely read psychoanalyst in the world standing after Freud. Fromm discusses “necrophilia”, love of death, and “biophilia”, love of life. He also studies “being mode” and “having mode”, one’s general orientation toward being a better person or toward having more, respectively. This paper is the case study of Tolstoy’s novella *The death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886/2009) in light of Fromm’s insights as reflected in his later works. There are two opposing views arguing if Ivan Ilyich, the protagonist, eventually changes for better or worse. Invoking Fromm’s theories, we argue that Ivan Ilyich undergoes positive changes toward the end of his life which are actualized through the protagonist’s departure from necrophilia and conversion to biophilia. In this sense, it is also argued that Ivan casts “having mode” to embrace that of “being”.

Keywords:

Tolstoy, Erich Fromm,
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Introduction

Born in Frankfurt, Germany in 1900, Erich Fromm is the prominent philosopher, psychoanalyst and intellectual who is often associated with the Frankfurt School, an institute whose socialist members are described as Neo-Marxists. Besides, the eminent social philosopher has also been labeled a Neo-Freudian psychoanalyst. Thus, it is thought that Fromm's theories are mostly eclectic, merging Freud's insights with those of Marx.¹ Based on this assumption, the present study interweaves Fromm's psychological viewpoints with his philosophical contemplations, colored with ethical implications, to study Tolstoy's *The death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886/2009).

The death of Ivan Ilyich relates the story of an ambitious judge named Ivan Ilyich in his forties who encounters nearing death as a result of an accidental fall from ladder. Having adopted a complacent lifestyle, the initially oblivious judge, while losing equilibrium in every aspect of life, goes through excruciating physical and mental pain when he realizes how imminent his demise is. The story draws to a close as Ivan Ilyich, despite all his suffering, accepts death with content and eventually dies in peace.

Tolstoy as the creator of this literary masterpiece constantly portrayed the concepts of life and death in his novels and short stories, endeavoring to shed light on the ongoing conflict between the two. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that, Tolstoy's letters, diaries and essays reveal his grapple with intense horror of death throughout his lifetime (Pachmus, 1961 : 73). Such tremendous fear finds its repercussions in *The death of Ivan Ilyich* with striking skill as well.

In alignment with Tolstoy, Fromm was also preoccupied with concepts of life and death. In this sense, Fromm proposes "biophilic ethics" according to which whatever enhancing life and genuine human relations is described as virtue and, in contrast, whatever fostering annihilation and perpetuating frigid human relations is regarded as vice (1973 : 66). Therefore, "biophilia" is defined as love of life, lively experience of being and constructive relations with others wherein humans do not descend to the level of inanimate things (1973 : 365). In contrast, as Fromm contends, "necrophilia" is one's love of destruction and death while turning humans into things and human relations into "mechanical" entities (1973 : 332). Later in *To have or to be?* (2008), Fromm distinguishes one's two general orientations in life: "being mode" and "having mode". "Being mode" is a state in which one's primary concern is to "be" a better human being, whereas "having mode" orientation entails an intense yearning to "have" more. Being and having modes are indicative of one's biophilia and necrophilia, respectively.

Philipson describes Fromm as the second "most widely read psychoanalyst in the world" standing after "Freud" (2017 : 52). Apart from the simplicity of Fromm's prose, aimed at concrete human suffering while shunning abstract concerns (Funk, 2014: xxiii), the secret of Fromm's fair popularity may lie in, as Spiegel suggests, the novelty and originality of his contributions to psychoanalytic theories such as the concept of "social self", that is, "a dimension of personality

¹ To say so, as our discussion will later disclose, is not to say that Fromm's theories enjoy no originality at all.

developing in response to the impact of one's culture and society", which Fromm considers to be "more potent than one's biology", and this by itself makes Fromm's thesis "singularly and powerfully Frommian" (Spiegel, 1994 : 420).

However, in an article published in 1998, McLaughlin describes Fromm as a "forgotten intellectual" (1998 : 215) who has fallen from grace in the United States since 1960s.¹ McLaughlin delineates the reasons for Fromm's marginalization, ascribing it, among others, to the dominant "grain of antihumanist postmodernist current in American culture" (224), "the emergence of intellectual feminist in 1970s" (228) and Fromm's tendency to merely write for "the general readers" rather than academicians (231). Furthermore, McLaughlin points out why Fromm's theories have been ignored by literary critics; accordingly, the reason for such disdain is that the literary critics took no interest in Fromm's theories because they were about sociology rather than literature (231).

If we assume that McLaughlin's description regarding the ineptitude of Fromm's theories in contributing to literary theories is precise, there still remains a significant query: What about interpreting a literary work based upon Fromm's insights? Are Fromm's theories helpful in understanding a given character's psychological, existential (as related to philosophy) or ethical predicaments? In this sense, as we argue, Fromm's theories do help us shed light on some uninvestigated or less investigated aspects of Tolstoy's novella, *The death of Ivan Ilyich*. To our surprise though, apparently, no one has yet adopted a Frommian approach reading Tolstoy's *The death of Ivan Ilych*. We believe that such a gap needs to be bridged to illustrate how Fromm can assist us in delving into and uncovering the spiritual transformation of Ivan Ilyich.

This study aims at answering the following questions on the applicability of Frommian concepts to Tolstoy's story: How can we read *The death of Ivan Ilyich* in light of Frommian concepts? How does Ivan cast "necrophilia" and "having mode" to lead a life based upon "biophilia" and "being mode", respectively? How does conversion to "biophilic ethics" make the protagonist a better person?

The objective of this study is to illuminate how the Frommian concepts of necrophilia, biophilia, having and being modes of existence along with their ramifications can account for Ivan Ilyich's spiritual metamorphosis. We argue that Ivan Ilyich's transformation is in essence a departure from necrophilia to biophilia and, concurrently, from having to being mode. The theoretical framework of this study is restricted to three of Fromm's later works, namely *The heart of man*, *The anatomy of human destructiveness* and *To have or to be?*. We have on purpose chosen Fromm's later works to indicate even at the time of his allegedly waning popularity, his theories still help us delineate the reasons for Ivan Ilyich's supposed transformation.

¹ We think that the surge of consumerism in the United States of the time plays a key role in Fromm's being forgotten during the 60s as Fromm was a major opponent of consumerism.

2. The Review of the Related Literature

Scholars do not have consensus over Ivan Ilyich's positive changes throughout *The death of Ivan Ilyich*; that is to say, there are also critics who, either entirely deny any change in the protagonist's character, or presume that, if there are any alterations, they are for worse not better. Hence, we can categorize the scholars' views as such: (a) the critics that observe Ivan Ilyich's conversion or detect fundamental or partial positive changes in the protagonist; and, (b) the ones who argue for the lack, artificiality or implausibility of positive changes to be made in the protagonist.

Olney, belonging to the first group, argues that Ivan Ilyich's "old self" dies in order for him to undergo "spiritual conversion" (1972 : 105) and, according to Wexelblatt, what foregrounds such a redemptive change is "the establishment of a valid subjectivity" (1980 : 615). In a partially different way, Pratt employs Martin Heidegger's views to demonstrate how Ivan Ilyich's change owes itself to leaving "everyday concerns", relinquishing of which leads to "enlightenment" (1992 : 298). On the other hand, Valente reads the novel as the protagonist's religious conversion which is the reflection of Tolstoy's conversion to "the doctrine of Christian love" (1991 : 127). Likewise, Danaher explains how the protagonist discards "darkness" and the "false light" in order for him to embrace the "true light" (1995 : 227). Freeman poses, Ivan Ilyich's life gains ethically "narrative integrity" (1995 : 388) since the protagonist reveres others' "pitiable presence" (392). Kamm illustrates three deaths in the novel: "moral", "emotional" and "spiritual" (2003 : 208), and Ivan Ilyich is reborn morally, emotionally and spiritually by the end of the story. Besides, Sansom highlights how the resurrection of superego ostracizes Ivan Ilyich's ego while helping him find meaning in other-directedness (2004 : 311-328). In Brombert' view, the protagonist's transformation is, to a great extent, obliged to "the denunciation of a spiritual void" (2006 : 155). In addition, Hustis delineates how due to Ivan Ilyich's metamorphosis in terms of his relationships, "the dichotomy of self and other" (2008 : 271) is replaced with unity and love. However, Duns suggests that Ivan Ilyich undergoes a conversion which is devoid of a "creed"; thus, Duns interprets "Ivan's story as a conversion from the 'existentialist' to the 'mystical hero'" (2020 : 216).

However, turning to the arguments of the second group, Gavin questions the adequacy of the changes Ivan Ilyich undergoes, which lead him to overcome the fear of death. From Gavin's standpoint, unlike what Tolstoy insists on transferring to the readers, "the renunciation of self in favor of the other" is not "sufficient to deny death's sting" (1981: 222). As another critic, Comstock, argues, naïve readers tend to draw moral conclusions from Ivan Ilyich's tale, and doing so, enact "a closure on the text too soon" (1986: 331); nevertheless, Comstock stresses that neither "God, Christ, nor the after-life are explicitly figured in Tolstoy's text" (324). Sharing the same skeptical interpretation of the novel, Shepherd casts doubt on the "plausibility" of Ivan Ilyich's conversion before his death (1993: 402). As Shepherd contends, even Ivan Ilyich's revelatory moments may be "influenced by the increasing heavy doses of morphine" and perhaps "the key moments of his conversion are, at least in part, hallucination" (409). Correspondingly, Lang states

that "Ivan's way of coping with his death does not make him a better person, but merely exposes and magnifies what was always objectionable about him" (2014: 325).¹

In our view, both groups of the critics, as valuable as their findings are, deepen our understanding of *The death of Ivan Ilyich*; for the first group delineate the possibility of change even in the harshest conditions, and the second ones, through challenging the first group and fathoming the inner layers of the text, make us search for more convincing evidence concerning the protagonist's change. We assume that what is missing in the arguments of the former group is Erich Fromm's insights that can prove to be of substantial contribution to the related literature. In addition, we argue that the latter group, with an overemphasis upon the implausibility or incredibility of any conversions or changes ignore the evidence that supports the opposite view. Thus, to show how Fromm's theories contribute to deepen our understanding of *The death of Ivan Ilyich*, first, we provide the theoretical framework of this study in the following section.

3. Theoretical Framework

A glimpse of Fromm's thoughts explicated in his later works; i.e., *The heart of the man*, *The anatomy of human destructiveness* and *To have or to be?* Indicates how, to a considerable degree, Fromm examines the concepts of life and death. In *The heart of man* and later with more elaboration in *The anatomy of human destructiveness*, Fromm defines and elaborates on the two key terms: "necrophilia" and "biophilia".

Fromm suggests that "necrophilia" is not solely a type of sexual perversion which is oftentimes pertained to a pathological infatuation and obsession with corpses; rather, in line with the Miguel de Unamuno, the renowned Spanish philosopher, who approaches the term from a nonsexual angle of view, Fromm also investigates necrophilia in "the characterological sense" as a character type (1973: 332). In a nutshell, Fromm defines necrophilia as "*the passionate attraction to all that is dead, decayed, putrid, sickly; it is the passion to transform that which is alive into something unalive; to destroy for the sake of destruction; the exclusive interest in all that is purely mechanical*" (332, emphasis in original).

To illuminate the antonym of "necrophilia", Fromm coins the term "biophilia" which is a character type displaying opposite traits, indicative of one's love of life. Fromm (1964) differentiates his definition of "biophilia" from Freud's superego, arguing,

The conscience of the biophilous person is not one of forcing oneself to refrain from evil and to do good. It is not the superego described by Freud, a strict taskmaster employing sadism against oneself for the sake of virtue. The biophilous conscience is motivated by its attraction to life and joy; the moral effort consists in strengthening the life-loving side in oneself. For [these] reasons the biophile does not dwell in remorse and guilt, which are, after all, only aspects of self-loathing and sadness. He turns quickly to life and attempts to do good. (23)

¹ It seems that despite the profundity of Lang's argument, he totally ignores the positive aspect of Ivan's awareness of death.

Fromm (1964) further clarifies the difference between his definitions and those proposed by Freud, asserting that he is against Freud's view that both death drive, or what Post Freudians called Thanatos, and life drive, or Eros, are of "normal biological tendency", asserting,

The dichotomy of biophilia-necrophilia is the same as Freud's life-and-death instinct. I believe, as Freud did, that this is the most fundamental polarity that exists. However, there is one important difference. Freud assumes that the striving toward death and toward life are two biologically given tendencies inherent in all living substance that their respective strengths are relatively constant, and that there is only one alternative within the operation of the death instinct--namely, that it can be directed against the outside world or against oneself. In contrast to these assumptions [,] I believe that necrophilia is not a normal biological tendency, but a pathological phenomenon--in fact, the most malignant pathology that exists in man. (24)

Freud's death instinct is connected to his understanding of the psychological causes of the World War I. Andrea Heiss (2011) finds a similarity between Freud and Fromm's discussions on death instinct and draws upon Fromm's own opinions (1973) on Freud, stating,

What reasons motivated Freud to postulate the death instinct? One reason which I have already mentioned was probably the impact of the First World War. He, like many other men of his time and age, had shared the optimistic vision so characteristic of the European middle class, and saw himself suddenly confronted with a fury of hate and destruction hardly believable before August 1, 1914. (p. 498)

Fromm argues that "necrophilia" is the product of uncongenial and harsh environmental conditions, whereas "biophilia" is "a biologically given quality" (1973 : 358):

Biophilia is the passionate love of life and of all that is alive; it is the wish to further growth, whether in a person, a plant, an idea, or a social group. The biophilous person prefers to construct rather than to retain. He is capable of wondering, and he prefers to see something new rather than to find confirmation of the old. He loves the adventure of living more than he does certainty. He sees the whole rather than only the parts, structures rather than summations. He wants to mold and to influence by love, reason, and example; not by force, by cutting things apart, by the bureaucratic manner of administering people as if they were things. (Fromm, 1973 : 365)

Based upon his statements concerning biophilia and necrophilia, Fromm offers "biophilic ethics" (1973 : 365), the tenet of which is defined as: "Good is all that serves life; evil is all that serves death. Good is reverence for life, all that enhances life, growth, unfolding. Evil is all that stifles life, narrows it down, cuts it into pieces" (1973 : 366). It can be understood from these remarks that Fromm is against any orientation that mistakes a human for an object and that, he regards object-centeredness as an immoral act, for such orientation makes one's life soulless and indistinguishable from death.

Thus, later in *To have or to be?*, Fromm delineates two modes of existence, "having" and "being" which are conceivably the subsets of necrophilia and biophilia, respectively. The reason for such assumption, that is, the aforementioned modes of existence being considered subsets of

necrophilia and biophilia, can be elicited from *The Heart of the man* where Fromm argues that for a necrophilous person “having rather than being, is what counts” (2010: ch.3). As explained in *To have or to be?*, “having” is defined as a mode of existence wherein one’s “relationship to the world is one of possessing and owning, one in which I want to make everybody and everything, including myself, my property” (2008: 21). In contrast, “being” mode means “aliveness and authentic relatedness to the world” (21). In addition, being mode is “in contrast to *appearing* and refers to the true nature, the true reality, of a person or a thing in contrast to deceptive appearances as exemplified in the etymology of being” (21, emphasis in original). Although for a having-oriented person “I am= what I have and what I consume” (23), a being-oriented person “neither *has* anything nor *craves to have* something, but is joyous, employs one’s faculties productively, is *oned* to the world” (16, emphasis in original).

In *The anatomy of human destructiveness*, Fromm underscores how necrophilous individuals tend to find force and violence as the most effective tools in resolving conflicts (1973: 337), exhibit “lifelessness” in their conversations by remaining “cold”, “aloof” and “pedantic”, so do not listen with engagement and enthusiasm (339), regard dark to be more fascinating than light (339), “look” rather than “see” (343) or briefly speaking, “their enemy is life itself” (348) making them turn all “life” into “things” (350). This way, everything is already dead in the world of “no-life” and “no-persons” (350).

Blatantly ubiquitous necrophilia engenders “monocerebral man”, that is, someone who is one-dimensionally governed by intellect like a robot, at the expense of emotions (1973: 352). One can derive from this discussion that the opposite of such qualities are ascribable to the individuals leading their lives based upon biophilia. Interestingly, all these necrophilous and their opposite, i.e. biophilous traits are detectable in *The death of Ivan Ilyich*; especially, with more vivid manifestation, in the protagonist himself before and after he grapples with the debilitating sickness.

4. Frommian Reading of Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*

With the exception of Grasim and Vasya, Ivan Ilyich’s servant and son, who manifest biophilous traits throughout the story, other characters including the protagonist’s relatives and colleagues are, as we claim, the emblematic of necrophilous tendencies; however, the protagonist’s lifespan can be arguably treated differently considering his sickness acting as a landmark that divides his life into two episodes, first before losing health led in Frommian necrophilia, and second, after sickness led in biophilia. We also argue how, with striking overlaps, the same criterion, i.e. the protagonist’s disease, can be employed to categorize Ivan Ilyich’s life into two periods: one led in Frommian having mode of existence prior to his deprivation of health and the second led in being mode after losing it. In the following paragraphs, in a contrastive method, we will indicate the ramifications of necrophilia, biophilia, and having and being modes of existence in *The death of Ivan Ilyich*. Doing so, it will be shown how Ivan Ilyich changes for better through reclaiming his humanity.

A) Ivan's gradual disproof of separation

At the prime of his career, as a necrophile, Ivan Ilyich has a distorted understanding of authority, making him regard the ones who are at the mercy of his verdicts as some powerless puppets or things that have no say at his presence, which with their impotence, satisfy his need of being in charge and superior. Such dichotomizing and inhumane approach makes it a source of pleasure for Ivan to exert force upon the ones of lower status or power, as though they were merely some instruments to entertain him: "everyone was in his hands, and he only needed to write certain words on paper with a letterhead" (Tolstoy, 2009 : 49). Since the protagonist as a necrophilous character is in love with the inanimate and non-persons, as Fromm would describe it, while leading his life in having mode of existence, he extremely yearns for possessing other living humans, depriving them of their most primary human attributes, i.e. agency and subjectivity.

This defected perception of authority in the novel which is force-centered and imposed from outside while denying the very personhood of the Other, is substituted with a more humane depiction of authority that is "radiated" from inside (Fromm, 2008 : 31). For instance, Ivan Ilyich, disabled and sick, being attended by his servant Gerasim is moved by the latter's compassion when the young man "downplays and indeed dismisses the disgusting nature of his task" (Urban, 2015 : 47). Ministering to Ivan Ilyich as a guru, Gerasim helps the dying man realize all the humans do have an intrinsic "authority" simply because they are humans, regardless of their social rank or the degree of their power, and deserve to be treated as equally important; for instance, the once arrogant Ivan Ilyich, now at his deathbed, apologizes to Gerasim for all the discomfort and trouble: "I suppose this must be unpleasant for you. Excuse me. I can't help it" (Tolstoy, 2009 : 74). It is through such biophilous interpretation of authority that being mode of existence, Frommian oneness with the universe, comes into life in the novel and the hierarchy-induced and necrophilia-caused isolation gives its place to biophilous relatedness which is also the manifestation of being mode of existence.

Such oneness is absent before Ivan Ilyich's sickness. In the opening pages of the novel, we notice how dysfunctional his relations with his wife are; for example, during his wife's pregnancy, Ivan Ilyich attempts to avoid her since she has turned into an intolerably unpleasant spouse by finding fault with everything and becoming jealous of him. Instead of attempting to resolve the conflicts, the frustrated husband takes refuge in distracting activities such as dining and playing games (Tolstoy, 2009 : 51-2). The same relentless estrangement can be detected in Ivan's wife when death awaits her husband: "She began to wish for his death, yet she could not wish for it, because then there would be no salary" (Tolstoy, 2009 : 61). Such aloofness, originating from one's misconception that others are things and therefore not relatable, which is considered to be necrophilous, is a "sin" that, from a Frommian perspective, likens that of Adam and Eve who by putting the blame on the opposite party for their faults, prefer to "face each other as separated, isolated, selfish human beings who cannot overcome their separation in the act of loving union" (Fromm, 2008 : 100). Nonetheless, through Gerasim's generous help and Vasya's sympathetic kiss

that reaffirm the dying man's humanity, Ivan Ilyich unprecedentedly experiences sublimely unified relations based upon a human-to-human structure rather than that of thing-to-thing. This way, in a Frommian sense, lifeless, dysfunctional and necrophilous relations are replaced with productive and humanely biophilous ones.

The dysfunctional structure of noxious relations gives its place to a functional one through the power of a kiss. For Tolstoy, a kiss unifies "the body and soul", and it is through Vasya's very act of kissing his helpless father's hand that Ivan Ilyich experiences "joy" which leads the dying man to see "light" (Sansom, 2004 : 426). As well-put as Sansom's remarks are, we should add that Ivan Ilyich experiences light rather than darkness despite the imminence of death because, with the spiritual assistance of Gerasim and Vasya, he enters a realm that symbolically speaking, as Fromm poses, is associated with infatuation with light, be it hope, enlightenment or love. This territory is biophilia and being mode of existence. In this sense, light can be also read as the completion of Ivan Ilyich's emotional and spiritual maturation that was previously in the yoke of darkness as a result of his immature pursuit of necrophilous urges. Vasya's kiss, as the epitome of genuine emotions, acts as an emancipator.

B) Ivan's gradual disproof of being a monocerebral man

The marginalization of the genuine emotions in *The death of Ivan Ilyich* is so ubiquitous that, with the exception of Gerasim, Vasya and Ivan Ilyich shortly before his death, it can be traced in the entire setting. Having those three characters excluded, the doctors, Ivan Ilyich's family members and colleagues are the representatives of Frommian "monocerebral man" (Fromm, 1973 : 352) who lack genuine emotions, as though, resembling robots, the characters solely consist of a brain rather than both a brain and a heart. As an outcome, such disproportionate attention to intellect that is ingrained in necrophilia, deprives the characters of seeing through each other, fathoming one another's suffering, rising above mundane and trivial concerns and constructing mutually meaningful relationships.

Apathy is highly evident when Ivan Ilyich's colleagues are informed of his death. The prevalence and intensity of monocerebral inclinations are so notoriously broad that upon being informed of Ivan Ilyich's death, rather than feeling sorrow for the loss, the deceased judge's colleagues wonder whether they will have an opportunity to occupy the job vacancy while being relieved that death has not befallen on them (Tolstoy, 2009 : 40). The conspicuous absence of emotions can be also observed in Pyotr Ivanovich who is described as Ivan Ilyich's closest friend when the former finds the dead man's reproaching face "out of place" and "of no concern to him" (42). Likewise, utter emotional indifference is witnessed when Ivan Ilyich's daughter, Liza, in magnificent dresses visits her father, in austere clothes on the deathbed. Arguably, these two different dressing styles also imply emotional distance. The opposing effect of the dresses is further accentuated when Liza tells her mother how Ivan Ilyich's irritation, which is obviously caused by the debilitating illness, has nothing to do with her and the sick man should not act as if his family

were to blame for his illness: “I feel sorry for papa, but why torment us?” (87). Ivan Ilyich lives in a society in which the majority of people are “monocerebral” with no emotions, only capable of “looking” at, rather than “seeing” through one another’s suffering, and this makes Ivan Ilyich agonizingly invisible.

What does exacerbate such anti-emotion¹, or at least emotionless, atmosphere? We argue that the Frommian monocerebral conditions in the story are aggravated because, resorting to what Fromm aptly distinguishes in *To have or to be?* Ivan Ilyich and the majority of the characters alike are “busy” rather than “active”. According to Fromm, “busyness” leads to alienation because when busy, “I do not experience myself as the acting subject of my activity”, rather what matters most is the “outcome” of that activity (Fromm, 2008 : 74). In contrast, one really acts when one is engaged in “productive activity” which, perhaps, does not yield any “visible, external products”; however, it is only through such “internal activity” that one can experience unity with oneself (75). Thus, it can be argued, not only does Ivan Ilyich stand aloof from other human beings despite all the fun-seeking gatherings, parties and so-called social busyness, he is also separate from himself because of the very alienating nature of external activities. However, engaged in an internal court when on the deathbed, the protagonist contemplates the absurdity of all those practices and manages to rectify not only his relations with his circle but also with himself. Having realized that being busy, in effect, means being “acted upon” rather than acting (74), the protagonist’s illusive valuation of his busy social life shatters, ushering him into an internal activity that rescues him from superficiality and forgetfulness. Hence, we argue that genuine emotions and monocerebral inclinations are not, respectively, approved and refuted by Ivan Ilyich until he departs from busyness to settle in activity zone, which brings about oneness and relatedness.

In addition to impacting Ivan Ilyich’s relations, busyness and monocerebral inclinations also negatively affect the protagonist’s false overvaluation of things rather than humans and this leads to megalomania. As a consequence, the more Ivan Ilyich busily accumulates things (antiques, fame, promotions, etc.), the more he leads an ego-driven life having mode, without any place for a productive activity that may near him to the Other. In this regard, the protagonist’s obsession with ownership, be it people or materials, is in fact the desperate pursuit of a “secularized immortality” as a verisimilitude of “deity” which is essentially an escape from the penetrating horror of nothingness (Love, 2008 : 98-99). Ivan Ilyich’s insistence upon accomplishing such divine position through accumulation, busyness and superiority or, in short, through object-orientation is intensified in such a way that he himself becomes an object, without emotions and whole-hearted experience of being. However, the protagonist’s desperate longing to amass things through which he wishes to obtain deity is doomed to failure because once he himself as a necrophilous person turns into a thing, he cannot claim superiority over other humans. In other words, we argue, Ivan Ilyich who as a necrophilous character turns into “something” cannot claim superiority to other

¹ It should be clarified that Fromm is not against intellect; rather, as it can be understood from his remarks, he simply believes that a human with no genuine emotions lacks intellect.

humans; rather, with necrophilia, he is rendered inferior to “someone” as biophilous as Gerasim, because, obviously, the value of a thing does not equal that of a human.

C) Consumerism and its impact on Ivan's plight

The previous paragraph in a way sheds light on the prevalence of “consumerism” in the novel and the goal, though in vain, it serves. In *To have or to be?* Fromm addresses the phenomenon of consumerism, categorizing it as a type of “incorporation”, the inherent aim of which is “swallowing the whole world” (2008 : 23). Pursuing luxury, Ivan Ilyich in a futile attempt, desires to swallow the entire world and incorporate it into himself to inflate his ego but, ironically, although his cumbersome endeavor leads to such inflation, the inflated ego implodes when stricken brutally by a fatal illness, leaving Ivan Ilyich alone with the corpse of a crumbled ego. It is worth mentioning that, according to Fromm, massive consumption has another function: helping one escape from oneself (45). That is to say, as Fromm argues, consumerism is “a means of protecting oneself from being close to oneself or to another person” (145). So, the protagonist's obsessive attention to the decoration of his house is an instance which vividly depicts how distant he, having been obsessed with excessive consumption, is from himself and others; the condition being so severe that, at times, he becomes distracted at his workplace over a trivial thought as “pondering what sort of cornices to have for the curtains, straight or festooned” (Tolstoy, 2009 : 57). In order for Ivan not to meditate on the world within, he has no choice but to divert his attention on what makes him further and further away from himself, that is, the world without where consumerism is the idol to be worshipped and devoted to. In other words, to avoid encountering the superficiality of his existence, the protagonist resorts to a defense mechanism whose very use is to redirect his attention to inanimate things, that is, the mode of having and necrophilia.

Admittedly, Tamara Tatjana Waraschinski is right to assert that “consumerism is the prevalent death drive” that “entails marginalizing authentic awareness of mortality for the sake of symbolic immortality” (2017 : v). The illusion of such “symbolic immortality”, we argue, is the consequence of Ivan Ilyich's further distance from himself, for had he not, with an overtly necrophilous life, turned himself into a thing, he would have been aware of the very human fact which is death. Thus, it can be argued that, before becoming sick, because Ivan Ilych is intensely dissatisfied with who he is, he grabs what he has and what he consumes to divert his attention from the pain caused by a laceration within, an injury that is caused by and leads to isolation and a mechanically nonproductive life in which there is no place for the Other, love, activity (in contrast to passive busyness), oneness with the world, authenticity and self-discovery.

D) Ivan's discovering joy

What paves the way for Ivan Ilyich's self-discovery is the imposed detachment from a society that values mode of having and necrophilia while ostracizing mode of being and biophilia. Having wept “like a child” (Tolstoy, 2009 : 83), which as we argue, symbolically represents shedding necrophilia and the having mode of existence, the helpless and emotionally abandoned Ivan Ilyich

ponders the falsehood of his adult life, a life led in oblivion, momentary pleasures and meaninglessness. Shortly after, in an epiphany, the lonely man becomes “all attention” in silence while “listening not to a voice that spoke in sounds, but to the voice of his soul, to the course of thoughts arising in him” (83). Although later he engages in a dialogue with the voice of his soul¹, the very nature of such esoterically mystic epiphany is exclusively experienced by Ivan Ilyich and hence cannot be transferred to anyone else. This way, Ivan Ilyich enters the uncharted territory of being mode of existence that Fromm argues to be “indescribable” because it is all about “experience” (2008: 72) and thus likens to “Mona Lisa’s smile” which is mysterious” (72). Arguably, a sublime and tender experience as such can be only found in biophilous individuals, that is, people who fathom their souls, examine their lives and productively accomplish self-discovery. This self-discovery, though attained shortly before his death, serves Ivan Ilyich’s life, making it replete with transcendent joy and, therefore, can be regarded as the actualization of Frommian “biophilic ethics”, according to which virtue and good is “all that enhances life, growth, unfolding” (Fromm, 1973: 366).

The Frommian version of a virtuous life entails one’s adherence to conscience; however, the conscience that Fromm is the proponent of, to some extent, differs from conventional understanding of the term. From Fromm’s perspective, delineated in *The heart of man*, “biophilous conscience” should be differentiated from Freud’s superego with its tyrannically tormenting condemnations causing self-hatred; instead, it should be recognized as a conscience whose motivation is “attraction to life and joy” according to which “moral effort consists in strengthening life-loving aspect in oneself”, thus the motto of such conscience is formulated as: “sadness is sin and joy is virtue” (2010: ch.3). Ivan Ilyich, at the zenith of exercising biophilic ethics, embodies the ultimate biophilous conscience that congenially guides him to find rejoice and life even during the most physically painful hours right before his death, which helps him accept death with an unprecedentedly peaceful content: “there was no more fear because there was no more death” (Tolstoy, 2009: 91), so it is no wonder that taking his last breaths, the dying man utters: “what joy!” (91). Not fixating Ivan Ilyich to shame and guilt, practicing biophilic ethics with underlying compassionate conscience eventually both cleanses him of the sin of sadness and assists him to restore his oneness with the universe in a way that finally, in the protagonist’s eyes, the boundary between life and death pales and existence is experienced as an integral phenomenon wherein life alone is the permanently benevolent sovereign and joy is the ultimate virtue.

Of course, it should be noted that Fromm distinguishes “joy” from “pleasure” in *To have or to be?*; accordingly, “pleasure” can be attained when a “desire” is gratified, which is oftentimes accompanied with a “peak” and “high intensity” or, to put it simply, with “excitement” (Fromm, 2008: 95-96). Conversely, “joy” is not defined as reaching the climax of an insane gratification, rather it is actualized in the “process” of one’s “growing nearer to the goal of becoming oneself”

¹ This is reminiscent of Aristotle’s famous statement that knowing oneself is the beginning of all wisdom.

through “giving up having” (96). From Fromm’s remarks, it can be elicited that pleasure is achieved when something external takes place, whereas joy is experienced in an internal exploration. As such, Ivan Ilyich’s lifespan falls into two contrary periods, first the one led in search of pleasure and second the one led in pursuit of joy. For instance, while in having mode, the external event of not being promoted infuriates the protagonist in such a way that he determines to move to Petersburg to prove the ones not appreciating his capabilities wrong while “having spent a sleepless night” (Tolstoy, 2009: 54). Therefore, Ivan Ilyich indulges in extreme pleasure when, having succeeded in Petersburg, he feels “all those who had been his enemies were put to shame” (Tolstoy, 2009: 55). However, the experience of the joy by the protagonist is not fulfilled until, on the deathbed, he abdicates having mode of existence, by first, in an internal dialogue, questioning the correctness of his values in the past.

Sympathizing with his wife and son, Ivan Ilyich finds joy in unity rather than separation in the internally found and gradually discovered values of oneness with the universe. Intending to apologize to his wife in the last moments of his life, Ivan Ilyich, probably out of fatigue, mistakenly mumbles “propoostee”, meaning “let me go through” in Russian instead of “prostee” meaning “forgive” (Brombert, 2006: 161). Should we assume that a slip of tongue as such discloses the protagonist’s real intention, having shown how Ivan Ilyich spiritually goes through massive changes in this paper, we can interpret “let me go through” as the protagonist’s wholehearted request to be allowed to entirely unshackle the boundaries imposed by having mode and necrophilia to savor being mode and biophilia.

5. Conclusion

We indicated how Ivan Ilyich departed from understating authority as the exertion of external force toward regarding it as the radiation of awe-inspiring love; the way he cast being a monocerebral man in order to cultivate constructive emotions; how he withdrew from aloofness and dichotomy to settle in connection and oneness; how he devalued busyness to cherish activity; the way he disavowed object-centeredness to endear human-centeredness, the way he preferred joy to pleasure; and in short, the manner with which he converted to biophilia and being mode of existence while disclaiming necrophilia and having mode, all of which defend the assumption of this paper that by converting to biophilic ethics, the protagonist becomes a better person.

Erich Fromm’s theories, as insightful as they are, provide us with a coherent framework that are of invaluable help in fathoming the ethical, ontological and psychological intricacies of literary works. With the case study of *The death of Ivan Ilyich* in light of Fromm’s insights, we intended to prove Fromm’s thoughts deserve more warm welcome, especially in reading literary works, in the contemporary consumption-stricken world which is afflicted by hostility and emotional separation. Also, his theories bring to light our frequently disguised ethical and psychological maladies that are artistically reflected in Tolstoy’s literary masterpiece, *The death of Ivan Ilyich*.

The basis of this study was the later works of Fromm since 1960s onward. We limited this study to his later works to indicate even when Fromm's theories lost their primary popularity in 1960s and the following decades, they did not cease to be of relevance and theoretical depth. For further studies in this field, we would recommend that Fromm's best-seller *The Art of loving* be invoked to explicate how self-love or lack of it facilitates or obstructs Ivan Ilyich's path toward biophilia and being mode of existence.

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