

Critically compare  
and contrast Tolstoy's  
novella *The Death of  
Ivan Ilyich* with K...

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Critically compare and contrast Tolstoy's novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* with Kurosawa's masterpiece *Ikuru*. A great, philosophical thought passed through two stories about the most uninteresting, most common people in both Tolstoy's novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* and Kurosawa's film *Ikuru*. It seems that the main themes of both works are the issues of 'enlightenment' and purport of life. In general, it is not entirely correct to say that the above mentioned themes are the main topics of both stories, because each person can find something of their own while watching the film or reading the novella; for example, the theme of immortality, the topic of parental relationships, and the topic of happiness are also described in a bright way. Thus, we are going to critically compare and contrast Tolstoy's novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* with Kurosawa's masterpiece *Ikuru*. First of all it is necessary to mention that Tolstoy's novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* was written much earlier than Kurosawa's film *Ikuru* was produced; thus many critics stated that Kurosawa was inspired by Russian classics and he partially used two Tolstoy's stories such as *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* and *Father Sergius* as a plot for his own masterpiece. Characterizing *Ikuru* in general features it is possible to mention that the first novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* gives the film terminally ill person, who is faced to the problem of loss of the meaning of life (by the way, this is one of the first cinema films in which the protagonist is aware of his death), and the end of the film. The second novella *Father Sergius* gives the film the idea of serving others. Moreover, analyzing Kurosawa's film *Ikuru* we see that the idea of religiousness is not the main one in it, because specific narrative techniques shows completely secular moralistic idea that a person stays alive in the

memory of other people after the death and the good deeds which he committed in his life will be the best memory about a person. Observing the film *Ikuru* we can state that half of the film is told by third persons, and other half of the film is presented by people who visited main character's funeral. This specific technique allows Kurosawa to save the drama for the whole picture, not to sink into melodramatic treacle; moreover, the film is perfect in technical terms, because black and white arrangement make characters more visible and successfully chosen music in the Oriental style gives the audience a feeling of reality while watching the film. Comparing two great masterpieces, it becomes understandable that the tragedy of morality is tightly connected with social existence in society, because both heroes realized the horror of their past existence only in the face of death and they have not enough time to change something, because the death is interpreted as absolutely inevitable and natural consequence of the lifestyle that both heroes and everyone around them saw as something perfectly normal, common and absolutely correct. Both authors proved the audience that death is the grand leveler, and it is necessary to change something in own life while you are alive and have enough time and opportunities for such changes. Contrasting two stories, we see that it is great that each author shows the moment of 'enlightenment' of dying hero in different ways, because both of them were diagnosed with terminal illness, but each of them was looking for own way for enlightenment. For instance, Tolstoy opened belated epiphany of his hero, hopeless despair of a lonely man who just before his death knew that his whole previous life was a delusion with a brilliant mastery, while Kurosawa, being merciless to his hero, shows that

Kanji Watanabe was working 30 years without any aim, only making career and forgetting about simple life full of interesting things and emotions. Kurosawa puts unquenchable thirst for life in his hero, making this motive the main sense of all Watanabe's actions, because Watanabe is not afraid of death, but he is really afraid of a situation that he had no time to live while he was the bureaucratic chief. Kurosawa and Tolstoy opened in their heroes ability to self-assessment, introspection; and paradox lies in the fact that only a sense of the nearness of death contributes to the awakening of Ivan's and Watanabe's human consciousness. Both characters begin to realize that even their native people live a false, artificial, shadowy life. The struggle of both characters is described brightly, and their difference is in their way to 'enlightenment'. It is especially important to mention that Watanabe's clarification of views on life comes in three worlds: the physical world, as related to the disease; social world - a relationship with colleagues, superiors, subordinates; and personal world, where the interpretation of relationships with children, the reflection on personal feelings, thoughts and ideas have a place. In conclusion, basing on the above stated information it is necessary to say that Tolstoy's novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* and Kurosawa's masterpiece *Ikuru* have much in common, because both the film and the novella opens the possibility of clarifying views on life at the level of man's spiritual world. Tolstoy and Kurosawa, describing spiritual experiences of a dying person, reveal an opportunity for the audience to join these experiences and make them part of their own experience; both of them forced people to ask all necessary questions about the purpose of life to

selves. Works cited: Kurosawa, Akira. Ikuru, 1952. Tolstoy, Leo. The Death of Ivan Ilyich. Penguin Red Classic edition, 2006.