

PERCEPTIONS OF DYING AND DEATH IN SELECTED LITERARY WORKS

BY

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents Major Zadock Jaleha and my late mum Agnetta Usaji. Dad and mum, you taught my siblings and I to appreciate life in its fullness and to remain focused on doing our best despite the challenges that life throws our way. You emphasized the power of the collective and of loving one another. I also dedicate the work to my parents in law, the late Archdeacon Nathaniel Mweri and the late Naomi Sidi, who became my next set of parents and encouraged the principles of life that had already been established by my parents.

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Definition of terms

Below are definitions of key terms as used in the study.

Physical Death:

This refers to when a living organism's life comes to an end. It refers to the end of a viable life form when the parts of bodies will cease to function. In all the works of fiction in this study, it is the imminent death or the actual death of characters that form the inciting incidents, which trigger the reactions to death and dying.

Moral Death:

It refers to a person not feeling guilty of having committed immoral acts as defined by the cultures depicted in the texts. In most cases, the moral guideline is determined by religious doctrines upheld in the social settings in the texts. This type of death is significantly demonstrated in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*.

Emotional Death:

This refers to when a person has been so brutally injured, jaded or rejected emotionally that they turn off all feelings. It may also be referred to as a broken heart, heartbreak or heartache. It deals with the intense emotional stress or pain that an individual may feel especially after experiencing disappointment especially in love related matters. This is especially demonstrated in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*.

Journey Motif:

This is defined in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* as a “distinctive feature dominant in

artistic or literary composition. A journey motif can be physical or emotional and it can form the basic narrative structure upon which a story is built. This study views life as a journey and death is a significant part of that journey.

Physical journey:

This refers to a journey that is tangible. It allows characters to move physically from one place to another. It is within this journey that reader discerns the feelings of the characters about life and about death.

Emotional/ Psychological journey:

A journey that is not tangible. It focuses on what goes on in the minds of characters as they deal with death. Most of the characters move from the point of denial to one of acceptance of their own deaths or other characters' deaths.

ABSTRACT

This study deals with the manner in which writers of fiction have conceptualised the theme of dying and death, especially in the manner in which characters respond to it. The study captures the ways in which writers of fiction have used creative strategies at their disposal to capture what they perceive are human being's responses to such enigmatic phenomena as dying and death. The study is cognisant of the fact that literature is a useful tool for exposing the way humans approach dying and death because writers have the poetic licence to see what is beyond what the ordinary eye can see. Thus writers have the capacity to capture what goes on even in the minds of those that are dying. The study presupposes that characters' responses to dying and death are part of a power struggle relationship. Death is depicted as a hegemonic force that people have to contend with thus the responses presented are invariably human being's desire to overcome a phenomenon that acts as a powerful force that undermines their well-being. Characters are depicted as grappling with death as a force that brings disorder in life. The study thus examines characters thoughts, words and actions as they engage such a hegemonic force as death in attempts to order the world so that it can operate in a logical and discernible manner. In order to capture these responses the study utilises the analytical tools provided by three theories. The Cultural Theory, as espoused by Michel Foucault, helps unearth the manner in which power is played out when humans have to contend with death. The Freudian psychoanalytical theory unearths the psychological reasons that determine people's responses to death and dying. Finally, Formalism examines the techniques used by the authors in their attempts to present the characters responses to death.

The study thus ascertains that the different responses by characters indicate their attempts to deal with the challenges that obtain as a result of having to deal with their exit from the world. Individual differences as well as differences in socialisation make the characters experience death from different perspectives. In this way, this study has been able to capture the artistic presentation of how people deal with dying and death.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Death is inevitable. It is the major fact of life that one can predict with certainty that it will come to pass. People have all through the ages tried to understand death as well as its implication on human life. Societies have established belief systems that address the issue of how people should live in recognition that death is inevitable. People are also taught within their cultures how to handle the grief that comes with death. Elizabeth Bronfen and Sarah Webster Goodwin say that "much of what we call culture comes together around the collective response to death" (3). This indicates the importance of the perceptions that people have of death play in understanding a culture.

Despite all the sensitisation about dying and death that people get right from childhood to adulthood, they do not really know how to respond to death. This confusion can be discerned even from the debates that scholars have concerning how people respond to it. For example, anthropologist Earnest Becker believes that there is no single person who does not fear death. He says:

The idea of death, the fear of death haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is the mainspring of human activity, activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny of man. (ix)

This means that the fear of death is a recognised response to dying and death.

Sigmund Freud, Andrew Schopp and Kathy Charmaz, on the other hand, have suggested that the most significant response to dying and death is denial. Freud says that “at the bottom, no one believes in his own death”. In other words, unconsciously “every one of us is convinced of our mortality” (305). Schopp, in “The Encyclopaedia of Death and Dying,” suggests that the fear of death is not the only response to dying and death. This is because modernisation and civilisation allow humanity the space to imagine that they have power over life and death. Charmaz augments Schopp’s argument by saying that the modern life gives people “the illusion to self-sufficiency” (14). Friedrich Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, suggests that people in some cases embrace death and suffering and thus rise above the rest who are afraid of it or go into denial.

From the foregoing, it is clear that death is an enigma and responses to it are varied. There is thus an obvious debate concerning the responses that people give to dying and death. This study recognises that every society has its own socialising engines that drive people’s views concerning death thus it would be incorrect to make a blanket statement concerning how people respond to such enigmatic phenomena as dying and death. This therefore calls for an in-depth study aimed at capturing the nature of the responses to this enigmatic phenomenon. The purpose of this study is to examine these responses and how they manifest themselves in works of fiction.

The manner in which people respond to dying and death, may not be appreciated or closely analysed in real life situations. However, works of art make it possible for readers to examine such responses at close proximity. According to Michel Foucault, artistic works are so

versatile that they are able to capture what may appear to be difficult to capture in real life, through a method known as transgression. They do this by “testing the limits of its regularity, transgressing and reversing in order that it accepts and manipulates. Writing unfolds like a game that inevitably moves beyond its own rules and finally leaves them behind” (qtd. in Gutting 22).

Creative writers, because of the strategies of transgression, are able to make the dying and death the canvass upon which they explore the manner in which people die as well as how people respond to death. They are not only able to portray the outward aspects of the individual but also interrogate what goes on in the mind. They go beyond the natural and are able to deal with issues which in the day to day world one cannot possibly discern. In this way, this study has been able to capture the artistic presentations of how people deal with death, a phenomenon that is not only traumatic but also elusive. Bisi Ogunsina points out that literature is not only a transmitter of ideology but also a active creator of meaning. This means that literature does not simply present reality, it also reconstruct it. In this case the writer uses available writing techniques to direct the readers towards confronting the limitations of the human form. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to identify how characters respond to death and dying as a way of ascertaining the general human being’s responses to this phenomenon.

To understand the various responses to dying and death, this study utilises an eclectic approach in which three theoretical concepts have been employed. Using the analytic tools provided by the Cultural Theory concerning Foucault’s views of how power operates, the

Freudian Psychoanalysis, and Formalism, the study examines the artistic representations of how people deal with tensions that emanate from having to confront a power such as death. The texts that I singled out for my study include: *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner, *The Spare Room* by Helen Garner, and *Place of Destiny* by Margaret Ogola, *The Death of Ivan Ilych* by Leo Tolstoy, as well as “Big Mama’s Funeral” by Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Statement of the Problem

This work investigates various responses to dying and death in various works of fiction. The study focuses on characters’ thoughts, words and actions to determine writers’ perceptions of how people respond to dying and death. The study examines how various cultural and philosophical persuasions presented in the texts determine the range of responses that people have towards death and dying. The study also investigates the extent to which writers’ insights about dying and death contribute to our understanding limitations of life. This has been made possible through an examination of how the writers depict the manner in which characters negotiate their positions and identities despite the threat of death. By focusing on works by writers from different eras and socio-cultural backgrounds, this study has sought to demonstrate how writers use a variety of techniques at their disposal to present the dying process as a reflection of the social cultural worlds that they write from.

Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine how characters thoughts, words and actions demonstrate how they experience and respond to dying and death.

2. To examine the roles that the social and cultural contexts presented in fiction play in generating responses to dying and death.
3. To determine how different writers use the narratives of death and dying as creative endeavours to present their views of how people live and how they die.

Hypotheses

This study is guided by the following hypotheses:

1. Death is a traumatic and fearsome experience, thus people's thought patterns, words and actions demonstrate their attempts to deal with and alleviate the fear that they have of it.
2. Responses to dying and death cannot be detached from the social and cultural contexts that people live and die in.
3. Writers use narratives of dying and death as canvasses and imagined spaces to creatively illuminate how people die and experience death.

Justification

Scholars have noted that the responses to dying and death are many and varied. Indeed, different cultures and individuals respond to this phenomenon differently and writers of fiction have captured these responses differently. However, these differences as presented in works of fiction have not been adequately analysed so as to provide deeper insights as to how people from different cultures experience death and how they make a transition from life to death. The works selected for this study are from different geographical and cultural regions,

historical times, and philosophical and literary standpoints. These works have so far not been put together for such a detailed comparative analysis as this study has done.

Issues pertaining to dying and death are often thought of as concerning only religion, medicine and anthropology. However this study believes that in order to critically examine very closely how people respond to death, literature provides the best space to do this. This is because literary works have the capacity to examine people's experiences, values, and attitudes in a much deeper and extensive manner. The creative power inherent in literature provides literary artists the license to present even that which cannot be openly discerned by individuals. Thus medicine, anthropology, and religion may not offer as much insight about the responses to death and dying as much as literature would. Literature also affords people the opportunity to examine and critique what the writers have presented as their views of society and more importantly, it affords people the opportunity to compare different writers' views of this topic.

Literature Review

The one thing that human beings have in common is that at some point in life they have to deal with death. Life is not complete without the reality of death. People's consciousness of their mortality has for centuries provided the impetus for them to reflect on issues pertaining to the nature of human being's existence and the manner in which people deal with dying and death. Scholars have also discussed the general meaning of death and examined various works of fiction and non-fiction so as demonstrate how death has been presented. Our

literature review, which is two pronged, sets out to examine what these scholars have said about dying and death.

Firstly, the literature review focuses on criticism that deals with the cultural and philosophical meanings and values concerning death and dying in general and secondly it focuses on works that interrogate the manner in which death and dying has been handled in works of fiction in particular. An examination of these works makes it possible to point out the gap in knowledge that this study has sought to fill.

The Pathology of Death

In “Death,” Thomas Nagel reminds us of the inevitability of death. In this article, he brings up a philosophical argument as to why death is evil. He says that death is considered evil because it deprives human beings of the goodness of life. It deprives a person of conscious existence and the ability to experience life. Since a person cannot permanently experience the goodness of life because of death, then it is evil. To this end, Nagel notes that people often do not want to imagine what dying entails. As a result, they try as much as possible to evade it. He says that “any death entails a sense of loss of life that the victim would have led had he not died at that or an earlier point...it would be better for him to have had it instead of losing it” (79). Nagel’s general feeling is that although people have natural life spans, their experiences do not “embody this idea of a natural limit. [Their] existence defines for [them] an essentially open-ended possible future containing the usual mixture of goods and evils that [they have] found tolerable in the past” (80). The ambiguity of the situation is not lost on us.

Human beings know that death is inevitable but at the same time they do not want to let go of life. Despite all the evil that there may be in the world, human beings are still aware of the abundance of goodness in it. Nagel highlights the already established entry point for this paper. The responses to death are varied. Some people view it as evil while others consider it a natural process of attrition. To this end, this study has sought to analyse how works of fiction present the various responses that emanate from these divergent views of death and dying.

In “To Die with Others,” Alphonso Lingis, just like Nagel, reiterates that death is inevitable. He points out that there are situations when people do not die alone. He notes that human beings have dual power. They not only have power to bring forth life and nurture it, they also have the power to influence the death of others. This can be seen, for example, when a woman gives birth to a dead child or when someone murders another. One argument that Lingis puts forward, which this study disagrees with, is that in the face of death the individual has no power to deal with it. He says that people find that “there is nothing to do but suffer and wait for death” (110). He believes that human beings cannot confront death and instead face it with resignation. My view is that even though death is inevitable, dying people still negotiate spaces for themselves within the world of the living. An analysis of literary works has thus determined the manner in which writers depict how people deal with this inevitability of death.

Jeffery Murphy, just like Nagel and Lingis, says that the fear of death is inherent in humans. In “Rationality and the Fear of Death,” he calls for people to be rational about death because

it is this rationality that makes them accept that death is a part of life. Despite acknowledging that doing so does not necessarily give man comfort, Murphy argues that when people are rational, they easily seek therapy so as to accept their deaths. What is of interest to this study is that Murphy acknowledges that the fear death and people's attempts at self-preservation are reactions that characterise human responses to death and dying. He details the various ways in which people go out of their ways to deal with dying and death. He especially indicates that people respond to death through fight or flight. This means that people opt to escape from those things that threaten their lives if they realise that they cannot confront them physically. The irony of this is that, even though Murphy calls upon people to be rational in accepting death, his last statement shows that he doubts that this is possible. He says, "Even a man who clearly recognises the irrationality of fearing death will sometimes, I am sure, be tormented by the fear of death anyway" (200). This study has anchored itself on such sentiments by Murphy which suggest that even though the fear of dying and death is a natural human response, it is not the only response. This study has thus endeavoured to analyse how writers of fiction have captured a range characters' responses to it. The study has done this through an analysis of characters' thoughts, words and actions.

Calvin Moore and John Williamson in "The Universal Fear of Death and the Cultural Response" are also clearly in agreement with the other scholars mentioned above that people, universally, are afraid of death. They argue that people are so comfortable in being social beings that they fear death because it disconnects them from others in society. They single out religion and the mass media as some of the institutions that not only perpetuate but also lessen the fear of death. These scholars say that religions often remind people that they are

mortal beings because they will die one day but at the same time remind them that they have the potential of being immortal when they die. The mass media on the other hand, perpetuates the fear of death by reporting deaths of people but lessens that fear by hiding facts about death. This study agrees with these researchers' arguments that institutions in society are responsible for people's responses to death. To this end, this study has focused on how works of fiction capture the manner in which various institutions shape characters' responses to death and dying.

Ernest Becker in his book *The Denial of Death* is very categorical that people fear death. He points out that the reason for this is that human beings like presenting themselves as invincible beings. He argues that fear of death is caused by people's narcissistic tendencies that make them think that they should never die. Just like Moore and Williamson, Becker says that it is the socialising institutions that people operate from which give them this leveraged view of themselves. He says that scientific, religious and magical systems within a society provide people with the ammunition that cause this inflated perception of themselves. Just like in the case of Moore and Williamson, Becker's work has assisted this study in demonstrating that institutions, as socialising agents, direct people's responses to death and dying. This study acknowledges fear as only one of the responses. It has thus endeavoured to capture other responses in works of fiction.

Criticism Focusing on Death and Dying in Works of Fiction

Whereas in the previous section I have focused on how scholars generally view death, in this section I have focused on what critics have said about the depiction of death in works of

fiction. Claire Messeud acknowledges that it is in fiction that an ordinary experience in life can be transformed into something with a different status. This section focuses on criticisms of works of fiction in which writers have presented the manner in which people respond to death.

One criticism that has a direct bearing to this study is Oscar Maina's "Exploring the Motifs of Death and Immortality." In this study Maina, highlights the ironies that characterise human being's incessant desire to be immortal beings despite knowing that death is inevitable. Maina analyses a number of oral and written works and explains the ways in which characters try to evade mortality. He says that the external and objective world might remind people that they are mortal (because death frequently reminds them of its presence), but their internal world defies death. Nowhere is this defiance of death best presented than in creative works where such literatures become the imagined spaces where the defiance takes place. According to Maina, art provides the place where people in the material world "mock, jeer and repudiate mortality" (185).

Having established this fact, Maina then provides his views of how defiance of death has been handled in oral and written works. He argues that defiance is achieved by the characters moving to the spiritual realm so as to control or interact with living characters. It can also be discerned in the manner in which characters defy death through stoicism as seen in poems such as Dylan Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night" and John Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." Maina also points out that people attempt to defy death through their belief in reincarnation and rebirth. The belief in the notions of the Ogbanje in

the Igbo mythology and in *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and the Abiku in Yoruba mythology and in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* illustrate the notions of reincarnation and rebirth. The Ogbanje and the Abiku are children who are born, die and are reincarnated or reborn and renew this cycle that torments their mothers and other family members. The broken cycles of the Ogbanje's and Abiku's teasing ways exemplify the idea that immortality can, to some extent, be achieved. Maina's views are thus useful to an understanding of the multifaceted way in which characters respond to death and dying especially in their quest for immortality. This study moves the discussion in the direction of investigating how death and dying is constructed against the socio-cultural spaces that people operate in and especially in the manner people live their lives despite the threat of death.

David Bevington in "Is This the Promised End? Death and Dying in *King Lear*," presents the bleakness of life that aging and dying characters face. By examining Shakespeare's plays *King Lear*, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *A Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, Bevington sees the tensions brought about by the binary oppositions of the young and the old, the living and the dying. He argues that the tensions are brought about due to the fact that the aged characters are so threatened by their impending deaths, that they do all they can to hang on to life despite the fact that they are dying. By focusing very closely on *King Lear*, Bevington uses Kubler-Ross's five phases of dying to analyse his resistance to dying before he finally accepts that he is dying. Bevington's points out that aging characters subconsciously find escape from the reality of death by clinging onto their children, the way *King Lear* does. Bevington thus uses the young versus the old age trope to explain how the dying and the living contest for space and power on the stage of life. Such views as posited by Bevington,

are quite seminal to this study because they provide insights concerning how resistance is a major response to dying and death.

In “King Lear and the Psychology of Dying,” Snyder, just like Bevington, recognises people’s aversion to death as exemplified in King Lear’s fear of dying. Just like Bevington, Snyder uses Kubler-Ross's phases of denial and acceptance of death to analyse what King Lear goes through. According to Snyder, there are a lot of naturalistic details that Shakespeare uses in his attempt to show Lear’s denial of his inevitable destiny with death but later his acceptance of it. All in all, Snyder’s work demonstrates how a work of art can benefit from a psychoanalytic analysis. Unlike Bevington who focuses on human to human contestations, Snyder’s main focus is how individuals face numerous internal conflicts before finally accepting that they are dying. This article thus gives insights into how characters respond to death. It indicates that human beings have an ambivalent response to death. They know that death is inevitable, yet they do all they can to stay alive. Even an old man like King Lear, who knows that his days on earth are numbered, refuses to accept the inevitability of his death. Snyder captures the foolhardiness of this struggle by man to stay alive by positing that, “bargains of the dying which attempt to put off the inevitable do not work, and Lear's pleas get him no reprieve from his daughters or the gods” (456). Later when Lear finally accepts that his death is inevitable, he becomes a more peaceful individual. Clearly, this article captures the essence of this study. It captures one of the most evidenced responses to death: fear and denial. However, this study is cognisant of the fact that there are other responses to dying and death which this study has endeavoured to examine.

In “The Man Who Fears the Plague is not safe from it,” Muchugu Kiiru argues that people should not live in the fear of death because the fear of it does not “immunise us against its coming” (68). He suggests that death can only be understood by confronting it. Kiiru says death transcends place and time, and it reveals the complex emotions within people as they navigate through the dying processes. Just like Bevington and Maina, Kiiru is of the view that examining literature that deal with death opens out people’s reaction to it. Nevertheless, Kiiru does not make a clear analysis of how people respond to the fear of death something that this study has done.

Robert Penn Warren, in *An Introduction to Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays*, posits that Faulkner’s work reflects the truth about the experiences about living in the American South. Warren provides background information that reveals that there is more that goes on around death than just the act of dying. Warren is aware of how personal and cultural backgrounds can be discerned even in a work of fiction. This background is important to this study because it demonstrates how the different cultures represented in this study define characters' responses to death and dying.

Michael Millgate notes that Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* is highly experimental. He acknowledges that in the novel, the words and actions of the characters reveal a lot about their reactions to death. The characters, whether living or dying, are propelled by selfish motives. Millgate thus implies that although the story may appear like an outrageous and macabre fantasy, it portrays human being’s experiences with death and dying especially their tendency to be self-centred. He especially focuses on how Faulkner uses the stream-of-

consciousness technique to present this egotistical nature of people as well as their attitudes towards death. Millgate's analysis of people's self-centered response to death as well as his insights concerning Faulkner's use of the stream of consciousness technique is useful to this study.

Frank Duster in "The Short Stories of Garcia Marquez" sees the story "Big Mama's Funeral" as an inter-play between objective reality and fantasy. He recognises the bold political statements made in the story. Big Mama is unwilling to let go of her position of power even though she is dying. She is a good example of people who do not give up easily. She still pursues political ambitions and tries to retain her social relevance even as she is dying. Duster's views on how the quest to retain power often makes it difficult for people in power to view death as a reality are a pointer to the kind of analysis that this study has engaged in.

James Rice in "Comic Devices in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*" describes the various comic devices that Tolstoy uses in this work. He discusses the author's circumstances in life as well as what he considers to be Tolstoy's "joking about mortality" (77). Rice recognises that there are some critics who might not find Tolstoy funny but insists that there are many comical situations and expressions in the text. He then goes on to give details of what he considers funny. He uses the Freudian psychoanalysis to examine the truism, that "much of the human comedy involves pain" (93). By also engaging in textual analysis albeit by focusing on the comic device, Rice clearly benefits this study by showing how formalism can be used in a study of texts. The import of Rice's analysis is that he highlights the idea that within the atmosphere of death there is humour. Nevertheless, his focus is not on the various responses

characters have towards death and dying. This study endeavours to examine these responses which, sometimes, turn out to be humorous.

Roy W. Perret in “Tolstoy, Death and the Meaning of Life” focuses on the philosophical lessons one can learn from a work of fiction and a corresponding work of nonfiction. In this case, Perret uses Tolstoy’s autobiography, *A Confession*, to analyse his work of fiction, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. Perret engages in a psychological analysis in which he draws a parallel between Tolstoy and Ivan who by the end of their lives realise that to understand life one must understand death. Perret's views are very important to this study because he demonstrate how writers’ personal circumstances can be reflected in characters’ responses to death and dying.

In “Experience, Metaphor and Meaning: *The Death of Ivan Ilych*,” James Olney, just like Perret, recognises that writers’ personal backgrounds affects the content of their works. Olney argues that art goes a step further than real life because it can metaphorically present that which artists cannot experience since they are not dead. He says that structurally and thematically *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, draws life and death together. At the metaphorical level, the reader can discern people’s attitudes towards death especially in the desire to escape it. Escaping death, projects the control that people exercises over it. This article is thus beneficial to this study because it helps demonstrate how writers' personal backgrounds are important to understanding their works.

In the review of the relevant literature, I have endeavoured to show how generally the fear of death is a major response to dying and death and determines how people live their lives. I have observed that literature captures the idea that death is a significant theme in works of fiction. The review has revealed the gap that this study has sought to fill in that it recognises that while dying and death are universal experiences, the behaviour and responses that people have towards them are different. Various cultural, religious and philosophical persuasions determine and refine the range of responses that people have towards death and dying. This means that beliefs, attitudes and responses to death, dying and life in general are moulded by societal and cultural dictates. As a result of this, the responses are bound to be many and varied. By focusing on works by writers from different eras and social and cultural backgrounds, this study has dealt with the various ways in which characters respond to death and dying and the manner in which the writers have captured these responses artistically. This study has unearthed these responses through a comparative analysis of select works of fiction.

Theoretical Framework

The responses given to dying and death are many and varied. The quest to overcome death is invariably a question of humans' belief that they can overcome the power of hegemonic forces inherent in death and dying. To some extent, people believe that they can order the world so that they can live life in a manner that is comfortable to them. Nonetheless, when they encounter death, they soon realise that they cannot have total control of their lives. They thus engage in myriad activities as a way of dealing with the physical and psychological discomfort they feel when they confront death. Writers have endeavoured to capture a gamut

of these responses in their works of fiction. In order to examine these responses, this study has been guided by three theories: Cultural theory on power as espoused by Michel Foucault, Freudian psychoanalytic theory as well as Formalism.

Cultural studies provide avenues for theorising how literary texts deal with cultural issues. One of the issues that cultural studies deal with extensively is the question of power within societies especially in the manner in which power is exercised. Michel Foucault is one of the major influences on the more recent development of cultural studies approaches to literature.

The works of Michel Foucault, the French postmodernist, have been very influential in shaping understanding of power. His opinions are markedly radically and distinctly different from previous modes of thinking about power. For example, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and in *The Communist Manifesto* argue that power in society is so limited that it can only be held by one person or group at a time. In capitalist societies, the ruling class hold all the power and use it to exploit the working class. In other words, power is viewed as an exploitative top-down structure. On the other hand, Foucault sees power as being “diffuse rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive, and constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them” (Gaventa 1). In *The History of Sexuality*” he says that ‘Power is everywhere’ and ‘comes from everywhere’ so in this sense is neither an agency nor a structure (63). Foucault feels that there is no human being who has no power and that the power humans have can be a “negative, coercive or repressive” force, but also a “positive force in society” (Gaventa 2). He also says that power is power only if there is resistance to it. Foucault’s view of power is important to this study because it recognises that human beings have agency to fight against hegemonic forces.

Dying character as “othered” beings may appear to have no power when facing death, but Foucault’s argument is that these characters have power that they use to deal with the hegemonic forces that they have to contend with as they approach the end of their lives. This study has thus used Foucault’s notions of power to determine how characters wield and perform power in situations of death and dying.

Foucault also notes that power is also a major source of social discipline and conformity. This is especially in schools and prisons. He calls this ‘disciplinary power’ and says that it is normally achieved through surveillance. He uses the notion of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon to explain how social discipline and conformity is achieved. The Panopticon is a building with a tower at the centre from which it is possible to see each cell in which a prisoner is locked up for punishment. Because the occupants of a cell can be seen but cannot see inside the tower, the Panopticon induces in the occupants a sense of permanent visibility. Even if the prisoners are not being watched, they have a feeling of permanent visibility. This ensures the functioning of power. In this way, prisoners learn to discipline themselves and behave in expected ways. This study argues that institutional cultures acts like a Panopticon because they enculturate people into certain views and reactions to death and dying. Characters are viewed as being prisoners of these institutional cultures. Thus the surveillance power of culture over people cannot be ignored. Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* argues that people are forced to behave in expected ways within a society because of “bio-power” which defines what is normal, acceptable or deviant. However, these norms or values are “discursive”. This means that they are in a constant flux and change over a period of time. A key point about Foucault’s approach to power is that it transcends politics and sees power as an everyday, socialised and embodied phenomenon.

Nonetheless, Foucault says that even though cultures insist on certain norms of behaviour, there are ways in which people can resist and question the norms. They can do this by “detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time” (Foucault, in Rabinow 1991: 75). One indicator of how power and the resistance to it operate in society is through the language and practices or “discourse” used by people in a given society. This then means that people can escape the prison created by institutional cultures and behave towards phenomena such as death in distinctly unique ways. Foucault theory of the Panopticon power is thus very important to this study because it has been used to address the ways that cultural norms concerning death and dying can be so embedded in people’s minds that it is these values that they use to respond to this phenomenon through resistance or acceptance of it. Therefore using Foucaultian views on how power is played out in works of fiction, the study focuses on the language used by characters as well as their modes of behaviour as a way of stressing on power relationships within the dying process. In so doing the study has analysed how individuals view the world of which power within relationships is played out and how this affects the people’s responses to death and dying.

Another theory that guided this study is the psychoanalytical theory as developed by Sigmund Freud. According to Freud, the human mind is essentially dual in nature. It has the irrational and illogical part known as the Id and the rational and logical part known as the Ego. These two parts of the mind are constantly in opposition. The Ego has a projection known as the Superego which is outside of the self and makes moral and value judgments

thus insisting that the individual does good. The Ego and Superego constantly remind people what is acceptable within a given culture. The unacceptable is pushed to the unconscious mind where it lies repressed.

Peter Barry in *Beginning Theory: An introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* says that according to Freud, repressed or unacceptable feelings normally come out as disguised dreams and creative activity. To this end, Freud puts the writer into focus. According to Freud, the latent content is the writer's repressed wishes.

Together with this, Freud examines the idea that people have narcissistic tendencies which reflect on the way they relate to situations and to other people. In his seminal essay "On Narcissism: An Introduction", Freud while theorising about the human psyche, says that all people are narcissistic. He argues that all children are primarily narcissistic because they desire to be loved, admired, and pampered. Freud says that it is normal for people to carry these traits even into adulthood. However, there are those who carry abnormal levels of narcissistic behaviour. They seek and require excessive attention, admiration and rewards from others and believe in their superiority over others and exploit others without feelings of guilt. Such people easily get angry and behave irrationally when they do not get what they want. This is what Freud calls secondary narcissism. "Loving oneself," Freud argues that such people love themselves too much. Loving oneself is an "instinct of self-preservation" (74). Self-preservation and a desire to have good things for oneself is a normal human response to life. Death is an occurrence which most people would not want to happen to them. Therefore when most people realise that they are dying their first instinct is that of self-

preservation. The manner in which people try to ensure that they preserve their lives is determined by their narcissistic levels. This study thus used the Freudian views of personality formation and behaviour to examine the characters as they deal with death in the selected works of art.

The third theory that I used is the formalist theory. As a literary theory, formalism deals mainly with the structural nature of a text. Formalist critics assume that a work of literature is a self-contained entity, whose meaning can be found in relationships between its parts. It devotes itself to the intrinsic nature of a literary work: form as opposed to content. Formalism focuses on features of the work itself. These may include symbolism, imagery, metaphor, point of view, paradox and technical devices used in the work. Two schools of formalism, the Anglo-American New Criticism as advocated for by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren in their work, *Theory of Literature*, as well as the Russian Formalism as developed by scholars like Boris Eichenbaum and Roman Jakobson agree that a work of art is autonomous and that the meaning of the work can be found in the work itself. Eischenbaum reminds us that “form and structure of a work is an integral part of the content” (205).

Formalism has been used in this study to examine the intrinsic elements of the texts under study. It focuses especially on the language used by characters in order to reveal their responses to matters pertaining to death and dying and how their words helped them formed distinct relationships with other characters. It also examines not just the words and their meanings but also their thoughts. An examination of the interior monologues and the stream

of consciousness techniques revealed, not just what the characters were thinking about a situation but also about the contradictory and confused thoughts patterns that form their reaction towards death and dying. Other technical devices that the study focused on like the journey motif, flashbacks, and ironies majorly revealed the actions that the characters engaged in after going through certain thought processes. They revealed how the characters behave towards others in situations of death and dying.

The theories chosen for this study have thus been used to reveal the social conditions that determine how characters behave when dealing with death. They help in focusing on the thoughts and actions of the characters and the various behavioural traits that are on display when they have to deal with a powerful force like death that destabilises life.

Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study focuses on Margaret Ogola's *Place of Destiny*, William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, Helen Garner's *The Spare Room*, Leo Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez' "Big Mama's Funeral." These books are written by writers from different historical epochs, different geographical locations and with different ideological persuasions. What is interesting about these texts is that despite these differences they present characters that are dying, albeit in distinctly different ways. I have thus been able to scrutinize them closely so as to understand how different cultures and individuals within the texts perceive, experience and respond to death and dying.

I have chosen to study prose narratives because they allow writers enough space and time to present themes in detail. As a result, I singled out the novels and short stories as the best genres of fiction to enable me do this study. Although memoirs are prose narratives that focus on the theme of death and dying, they were outside our scope because our focus was on fiction and not non-fiction works. However, works outside our scope were used to elaborate ideas within the study.

Research Methodology

Throughout history, the prospect of human mortality and attitudes towards it has been presented and interpreted in a myriad ways. Medical science tells us that death occurs when all the body cells die completely (“International Guidelines for the Determination of Death”). Science thus offers an empirical explanation of what dying entails. However, science does not offer any explanation for non-empirical views of death. Filz Peach reiterates this when he says that science offers a “materialistic explanation of the cessation of the activities of human body, the non-physical aspects of the human being does not form part of the explanation” (11). This means that a scientific explanation cannot suffice to give a comprehensive view of what dying and death entail. Writers of fiction have attempted to capture what human mortality entails. What they capture aesthetically carries valuable philosophical and ideological interpretations concerning human mortality. Science based instruments cannot capture this. Philosophers like Heidegger argue that humans cannot experience deaths through the death of others. They can only experience it once they die. Others like Max Scheler argue that people know about death instinctively. Literary artists go beyond these

arguments. They capture what they have never experienced. They imaginatively capture how they believe human beings respond to dying and death. Because what they capture is non-empirical, there is need to use appropriate tools to examine the metaphysical explanations within the creative works. Such tools capture the visible actions as well as unearth the invisible thoughts of characters concerning dying and death. This, in turn, demonstrates an intimate connection between external world and the internal one. The theories chosen for this study were thus used to explore the non-empirical and philosophical views inherent the texts selected for this study.

To capture the said non-empirical aspects of dying and death, the study employed a qualitative research design since it relied on descriptions for data analysis and presentation. The study was library based and involved textual study in which information presented for analysis was collected from primary texts and secondary sources as guided by the study objectives. Library research was utilised in gathering secondary data. This involved readings obtained from secondary materials from the library books, online journals and critical works. Critical works on the subject of death in general, the theme of death and dying as presented in novels, the fear of death and general information about the texts chosen for this study were the main point of reference.

Primary and secondary information was used simultaneously in this study. The selected texts were subjected to close reading. Features such as how the characters respond to death and how the authors infuse their personal backgrounds and historical backgrounds of the period within which the stories were set, were used to deduce the writers' social visions. A

comparative analysis of texts in terms of how the characters respond to death and how this informs the meaning of life as experienced within the diverse settings and periods depicted in the texts was the core of this study.

The information was presented in the form of descriptions, analysis and use of relevant literary arguments. This involved interpretations of the findings from the selected novels. This was augmented by secondary sources. The interpretations were done using the various analytical tools chosen for this study namely Michel Foucault's concept of power, the technologies of power and the treatment of madness, Freud's psychoanalytical theory to explain the underlying reasons why people respond to death the way that they do. Formalism helped me deal with the literariness especially in how the writers used characters to present content.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One

In this introductory chapter, I have included the background to the research, the statement of the problem, the objectives, hypotheses, justification of the study, the literature review, the theoretical framework, the scope of the study and the methodology.

Chapter Two

In this chapter, I have focused on *The Spare Room* by Helen Garner. The focal point of this chapter is in the manner in which Garner demonstrates that denial is the trigger for characters engaging in shopping for doctors or moving from one doctor to another in the hope of getting

a better prognosis of diseases as well as better treatment techniques. Denial and the need for the dying person to try and stop the dying process bring challenges between the care giver and the patient especially if the dying person accepts to use surreptitious methods to do so. Anger and pursuit of self-interests were thus demonstrated as some of these responses by characters, to death and dying. The significant stylistic devices used by the writer to present her perceptions of death and dying are the symbolism, the journey motif and irony.

Chapter Three

This chapter examines how Gabrielle Garcia's Marquez in "Big Mama's Funeral", especially uses magical realism to present his perceptions of death and dying. The chapter demonstrates how a rich and powerful leader in Makondo, an imaginary town in Colombia, responds to this phenomenon by having the best doctor all to herself. For the period that she is sick, the doctor lives in her house so as to administer all kinds of medicines but fails to find a cure for her. This is an indication that no amount of power or wealth can stop death. The chapter also demonstrated that political power and influence of a leader can only be felt when the person is alive and if the people concerned decide to adhere to the will made by a dead person. In "Big Mama's Funeral," her relatives and her fellow leaders do not care about her once she dies.

Chapter Four

This chapter demonstrates how William Faulkner in *As I Lay Dying* uses the stream of consciousness technique as well as interior monologues to allow the reader to examine what goes on in the minds of the characters. I have determined that it is a novel that expressly

presents how characters conceptualise the way they live, die and deal with dying and death. Death and dying and life are presented as being intrinsically joined phenomena. This chapter especially discusses the reactions of the various characters to Addie Bundren's death. I argue that Faulkner allows the readers to enter into the minds of characters so that they can see how people, when faced with tribulations, respond through denial and withdrawal, self-centeredness, fear and rationalising. The writer significantly uses the journey motif to unearth the high levels of individualism displayed by individuals on the journey through life and on the journey of interment.

Chapter Five

This chapter examines how Leo Tolstoy in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, deals with the manner in which people live and how this affects their acceptance of death. I have argued that denial, rationalising, leaning on doctors, focus on religion, arrogance and kindness are some of the ways that characters deal with death. I have also argued that dying within societies where people have been socialised to be highly individualistic makes dying very difficult and painful. I have also examined the various stylistic devices that Tolstoy uses to elucidate the theme of death and dying.

Chapter Six

The chapter demonstrates how Margaret Ogola in *Place of Destiny*, uses a variety of techniques to depict the characters' responses to death. I focus on juxtaposition, shifting narrative technique and the emotional journey motif as the key stylistic devices used to highlight these responses. I single out rationalization, denial, flight, focus on the collective,

use of religion and leaning on doctors as ways characters use to alleviate their fear of death. I also argue that dying is made easier for both the dying as well as for their friends and relatives because of the care and comfort that emanates from a positively collective response to dying and death.

Chapter Seven

This is the conclusion. It is a chapter which summarises the findings captured in the study. It also provides a way forward for other areas that can be studied in future.

CHAPTER TWO: THE BURDEN OF DYING: RESPONSES TO DYING AND DEATH IN *THE SPARE ROOM* BY HELEN GARNER

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I have presented the background, objectives and the theoretical framework that have informed this study. In this chapter, I focus on *The Spare Room* by Helen Garner and examine the extent to which Garner demonstrates how power is played out between the patient and caregiver as they grapple with the challenges brought about by the fear of death and dying. The chapter has examined the extent to which taking care of patients can expose the deep tensions that come between the caregivers and the patients. The chapter captures the role that doctors play in giving their patients hope as well as the patient's spirited attempts to stay alive before finally accepting the inevitability of death. The study explores the following questions that are raised in the novel. What are the forces that influence people's acceptance or non acceptance of the inevitability of death? What discourses and actions do they engage in to demonstrate the acceptance or non acceptance of this inevitable part of life? In analysing this novel, the study also looks at how Garner uses various techniques to highlight the challenges that human beings encounter in the face of death and dying. How people die and how others stand with those who are dying is issue at the center of discussion in this chapter.

About Helen Garner

Helen Garner was born in Geelong, Victoria province of Australia in 1942. She has written many books including her novels *Monkey Grip*, *The Children's Bach*, *Cosmo Cosmolino*, *The First Stone*, *True Stories*, a novella, *Honour and Other People's Children* as well two

collections of short stories *Postcards from Surfers* and *My Hard Heart: Selected Short Fiction*. Her screenplays include: *The Last Days of Chez Nous* and *Two Friends*. All her works focus on the challenges of modern existence. According to Michael Faber, some of her books are a reflection of her life. Faber says that *The Spare Room* is, in fact, closely based on Garner's own experience nursing a terminally ill friend. However, in an interview with Michael Williams appearing in *Reading Monthly*, Garner she explains the novel in this way:

Over the last few years five people I've loved have died. And with four of those people I've been closely involved with the care of them right up until they died. One of the many things I've learnt from those experiences was that being in that role with a dying person brings out all sorts of feelings, many of which you are ashamed of, many of which can be quite ugly. (4)

This indicates that Helen views this novel, not as an autobiographical work the way critics like Faber view it, but as a novel that draws generally from her experiences of having watched people close to her die.

About *The Spare Room*

The Spare Room tells the story of two friends, Helen, the narrator of the story, and Nicola her friend who is suffering from bowel cancer. They have been forced to confront Nicola's looming death. Helen is a woman who is divorced and lives in a suburb of Melbourne next to her daughter, her daughter's husband and their two children. Soon her quiet life is interrupted

by a request from her long-time friend, Nicola, to allow her to come and stay with her for three weeks as she seeks treatment at a clinic referred to as The Theodore Institute.

Helen accepts Nicola's request, hoping that she and her friend will catch up and have fun like they did in the past. Helen lovingly prepares her spare room in order to accommodate her friend with the hope that she will enjoy sleeping in the room. When Helen picks Nicola up from the airport, she is shocked to see, not the vibrant woman that she knew but a very sick woman. It is only when they get home that Helen realises how sick really Nicola is.

Nicola, unable to get treatment for her colon cancer from mainstream hospitals in Sydney, decides to try alternative medicine in Melbourne at the Theodore Institute. In the institute, people are treated through daily infusions of vast amounts of Vitamin C. This, in Helen's view, makes Nicola's condition worse. However, Nicola believes that it is the best Medicine for her.

The back and forth movement from home to hospital and vice versa as well as having to nurse Nicola day and night, soon becomes too much work for Helen. Coupled with this physical tiredness is Helen's irritation with Nicola for refusing to accept that she is dying. The novel then builds toward a confrontation between the two women with Helen trying to force Nicola to accept that she is dying and Nicola rebelliously refusing to give up. Nicola remains very cheerful despite the unbearable pain she feels. This distressing journey of friendship is tested by a final reality that Nicola's death is inevitable. At the heart of the story in *The Spare Room* are Nicola's and Helen's responses to not only Nicola's terminal illness,

but also to her impending death. The role of caregivers and that of doctors in situations where terminally ill patients are in denial is highlighted. The next section deals with the various ways the characters deal with Nicola's sickness and the dying process.

Self Preservation, Stoicism and Resilience

In the modern world, terminal illnesses such as cancer are on the increase. In most cases, being diagnosed with cancer indicates that one's days on earth are numbered. The manner in which cancer affects people in the prime of their lives and the way in which people respond to it is at the centre of discussion in *The Spare Room*. Garner highlights the physical and psychological challenges of dealing with cancer and how this debilitating disease forces patients to slowly but painfully experience death. The novel draws the reader into *The Spare Room*, where dying from a terminal illness is presented as being brutal. Despite the brutality of this invasive disease, the human desire to hang onto life is captured in the novel. What comes out strongly is Nicola's stoicism and desire for self-preservation as a way of fighting off the incapacitating sickness.

Death in *The Spare Room* is presented as an existential phenomenon that people confront at all costs. Through Nicola, the writer demonstrates that people feel secure knowing that they have options available to them when they face the vulgarities of life especially when they fall sick. In the modern culture, people have a strong faith in disease management techniques offered by main stream treatment methods and technology. These are what Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, refers to as "technologies of Power". In the modern cultures there is the expectation that science and technology as icons of power can be manipulated to serve

people, to their advantage, in many ways. For example, in hospitals, these technologies can be used to flush out diseases from sick bodies. However, as demonstrated in *The Spare Room*, cancer has proved to be a disease that is difficult to tame. Often, these technologies of power are unable to counter the effects of the disease. Many researchers have pointed out the devastating effects of cancer on the human population. According to researcher Doru Paul, cancer causes the deaths of millions of people all over the world. He explains that this is because of the doctors' lack a proper "understanding of the nature of this disease" (8). This means that despite all the immense knowledge that doctors have of how to handle diseases, cancer is the one disease that is an enigma. Thus, as is captured in *The Spare Room*, many doctors give up. David Karnofsky, in "Why Prolong the Life of a Patient with Advanced Cancer?" provides one reason why doctors give up on patients with advanced cancer. He says:

To the physician, active care of the advanced cancer patient is time-consuming and exhausting, particularly since benefit to the patient, in terms of prolonged improvement, is rare. Furthermore, the physician has an understandable distaste to continue to care for someone who is an offense to his pride as a healer.

In *The Spare Room*, it is not clearly stated why the doctors in give up on Nicola, but it is the explanation provided by Karnofsky that most likely informs their decision.

It is clear from the above, that doctors have the power to determine when to stop caring about human life. By giving up on Nicola, the doctors are in essence suggesting that she should

give up and get ready to die. Nevertheless, Nicola's actions prove that she is not ready to take this easy way out. Using the journey motif in which Nicola moves from Sydney to Melbourne to seek treatment, Garner demonstrates that at the core of human beings endeavour, is the desire to do everything within their means to save their lives. Before coming to Melbourne in search treatment at the Theodore Clinic, Nicola has already been on a doctor shopping spree in Sydney. According to Lin, Ming-Hwaiet.al., doctor shopping refers to patients' movement from one doctor to another in search of other opinions about the diagnosis of an illness or in search of a better and more favourable treatment method. It is one of the methods that people use to overcome the challenges brought about by having to deal with life threatening diseases. Doctor shopping, to a large extent, empowers patients who believe that treatment of illnesses is not a monopoly of any one doctor. They believe that if one doctor fails to find an appropriate cure for a disease, there is another doctor who can find that cure. Nicola's basic instinct for survival can be discerned from her single-minded movement from doctor to doctor in search of the best treatment regime. Her desire to extend her physical life span gives her the power to confront death. To this end, she becomes sceptical of the mainstream doctors and their treatment methods and puts all her faith in an alternative medicine health centre. Nicola is determined to find her own way to deal with her illness, regardless of all the challenges this has.

Nicola's move from one doctor to another in search of a cure demonstrates the various shifts in power as well as the various points from which power is exercised. The irony inherent in the manner in which power is performed is very clear in the way Nicola moves from doctor to doctor. Initially, she assumes that the mainstream doctors have power invested in their

treatment methods. When these doctors fail to find a cure, she immediately understands that their power is limited and sets off to find another doctor she believes has more power.

The Foucaultian conception of power as coming from many sources is demonstrated in the action taken by Nicola. She uses the self will power within her to fight a hegemonic power inherent in the cancer through doctor shopping. It is also important to note that there is a power shifts from the doctors who use more mainstream treatment regimens to others who use the alternative method of treatment. This decision to doctor shop, somewhat, puts Nicola in control of her destiny. It empowers her to believe that death is a phenomenon that can be overcome through people's efforts to circumvent it. Nicola's insistence on the use of alternative medicine is an indication of the resilience that patients have when they are faced with the prospects of dying. Psychoanalyst Suzette Henke suggests that a person who faces imminent death is a traumatised individual and that "traumatic situations generate considerable psychic fragmentation" (p.40). She argues that a fragmented individual is empowered and has agency to try and search for a cure. Doctor shopping and movement from the main stream doctors to alternative medicine doctors is indicative of Nicola fragmented nature because it borne out of the fact that at this juncture, she is an individual at cross-roads as she contemplates what action to take. Nevertheless, she uses her fragmented nature to buoy up hope of recovery. The role that hope plays in the lives of patients facing imminent death can thus not be ignored. In a Freudian sense, it plays an ego enhancing function because it makes the patient have confidence that they can conquer death. Nicola thus represents individuals who have the spirit that seeks immortality. Such a spirit is evident in patients who go to great lengths to find doctors who can give them hope that they will not

die. This situation highlights many patients' psychological disposition to fight to stay alive. Thus this movement from doctor to doctor becomes a lifeline and a symbol of hope. It not only liberates the patients to look beyond their sicknesses, it also plays therapeutic, emotional, and cathartic functions. The physical journeys that Nicola makes by moving from doctor to doctor suggest that sitting back to wait for death is not a path that she wants to take.

Considering the terribly weakened physical condition that Nicola is in when Helen picks her from the airport, it seems that it is the hope that she has that she will get better treatment in Melbourne, that has kept her alive. The tendency to remain hopeful, in a way explains the reasons why in many cases patients are ready to spend as much time and money as possible so as to find a cure. Just like Nicola, patients shuttle across cities and nations to get treatment from doctors they believe have the best treatment regimes. The behaviour of people like Nicola captures the resilience in human beings. Charles Figley in "Compassion Fatigue: An Introduction", defines resilience as "the ability to physiologically and psychologically adapt to environmental changes. It is a survival skill required of every member of the animal kingdom. In humans, it is manifested as the difference between survivors and victims" (n.pag). Nicola puts this animal instinct of survival on display and it is this instinct that empowers her to forge ahead. She does not want to be a victim of her circumstances. Instead she seeks to be a survivor.

Despite having this survival spirit, many patients, in a quest to beat all odds in order to regain their health, may sometimes end up being taken advantage of by quack doctors. In *The Spare Room*, it is very clear that Doctor Theodore of The Theodore Institute is one such doctor. As

an observer, Helen quickly sees through the scam inherent in The Theodore Institute and in Doctor Theodore himself. However, Nicola is too much in need of treatment to see the ruse. Helen's objections to and scepticism about the clinic and its treatment is based on the condition of the clinic itself and of the patient after she leaves the clinic. The hospital and the treatments are described in the following way:

The room within was painted a strange yellow, the colour of controlled panic. Jonquils had dried in a vase on the reception counter, behind which a female attendant flustered at a computer.... The whole floor was taken up by cardboard cartons, some of them toppling waist-high stacks, others split and spewing manila folders. Empty metal shelves stood about on pointless angles. (29, 38)

The nonconventional treatment procedures that Nicola goes through include, sitting in an ozone sauna as well as applying Chinese cups to the shoulders, neck and belly in order to "scoop the cancer cells out of the body" (44). To crown it all, Helen and Nicola are informed that the main doctor, Professor Theodore, with whom Nicola has an appointment, has suddenly left for China without even informing her.

One may argue that it would be obvious to anyone that the treatment facility and the doctors are a sham. However, Garner's underlying message is that people who are very sick often have very little inclination towards rationality. Just like in the case of Nicola, they tend to portray significant levels of selfishness in their quest for a cure. The patients become focused on getting whatever medication that promises to alleviate pain and extend life. To a well

person, the medicine might look like a sham, but to a sick person this treatment is what offers the only hope to the patient.

Nicola shows her hope when she says: “That’s what the pain is-the cancer being wrenched out” (58). The irony of this is that, instead of Nicola getting better, her condition worsens. Nevertheless, her almost fanatical faith in her doctor and the new treatment regime does not allow her to see the limitations of the treatment. Instead she only sees its supposed efficacy. Nicola is a woman who is faced with a situation in which her body bears a terminal illness which is an indication that it is disintegrating and moving to the end of its viability as a living human form. Yet, this is in conflict with her vibrant mind which can still see herself as a powerful being that can get itself out of this quagmire. She believes that she has the power to change her situation around. Her mind does not allow her to see the end of her life as a possibility. This belief in the limitless power of medicine, including alternative medicine, is what Philippe Aries calls “invisible death”: a state of affairs where people believe that death can be destroyed (595). This, I believe, is the reason that dying people hang onto life. They are buoyed by the power of medicine. This in essence makes death “invisible”.

What appears as discomfort to Helen, is what Nicola believes is the cure and an assurance that she can beat death. In a bid to ensure her preservation, Nicola readily withstands the “discomfort|. This is an indicator that to Nicola, the pain of dying is far worse than the pain accrued from treatment methods. This, in my view, explains why patients are often ready to undergo a series of painful surgeries if the doctor tells them that that is the best treatment for ailments. They will endure the pain as long as they are promised a cure. This obviously raises

a question of how long patients with terminal diseases should take before accepting that they are dying and whether it is alright for them to keep moving from one doctor to another so as to find a cure. Another question that is even more significant is how far doctors should go in allowing patients to believe that they can get better? Although Doctor Theodore seems to believe that as long as patients have a fighting chance and have the resources to secure any possible treatment, they should not be denied that chance. Helen seems to believe that this is foolhardy. She believes that doctors should at the earliest possible time give patients a diagnosis of the sickness and prepare them to accept that they are dying. She expects Doctor Theodore to do this and also believes that Nicola should just accept her fate and lie back and allow the sickness to ravage her body so that she can die. She says, “I had been working towards a glorious moment of enlightenment, when Nicola would lay down her manic defences; when she would look around her, take a deep breath, and say, “All right. I’m going to die. I bow to it” (95).

Helen is clearly not cognisant of the fact that the one thing that many dying patients have left to hang onto is hope. Doctor shopping may be indicative of desperation, but it is also a sign of hope and self-preservation. Helen, by insisting that Nicola should give up hope ends up showing her myopic view of the power of hope. For Nicola her hope is in alternative medicine. The physical journey that she makes from Sydney to Melbourne is symbolic of the psychological journey she makes. Both are journeys of hope. She has to put her faith in this one doctor who seems to understand her desire to live. She says the following words to affirm her faith in Professor Theodore and the alternative medicine: “I have to trust them. I don’t have a choice. I’ve got to keep myself revved up and directed and hopeful....If I don’t

have faith, the only alternative is to lie down and say OK, I give up. I'm dying. Cancer, come and get me" (105-06). Since doctors offering conventional treatment have given up on her, Nicola has to put her hope and faith in another form of treatment. Alternative medicine is what works for her at this time. Nicola carries the faith that many patients have as they seek possible cures for their illnesses. In fact there are many situations where alternative medicines have indeed been used to effectively treat dying people. Such people have reported getting cured through alternative medication even in situations where mainstream and scientifically tested medicines failed them.

Regrettably, many patients like Nicola do not realise that some of these doctors may not really affect any cure. Garner demonstrates this when she indicates that despite all the energy that patients might use to try and overcome death, death is something that humans cannot have complete power over. No matter the treatment regime that the doctors use, people still die. The power of doctors is very limited. Karnofsky recognises the limited power of doctors. He says:

The doctor's duty is to cure patients of their diseases: to cure them safely, quickly, and pleasantly. If that ideal cannot be achieved, then his duty is to prolong life as far as may be and to relieve pain, that worst of evils,' both bodily and mental. [Provided] the good doctor is quite aware of the distinction between prolonging life and prolonging the act of dying. The former comes within his reference, the latter does not.

Karnofsky is aware that it is possible for doctors to prolong life but they have no power to stop death. Doctor Theodore, in this case, cannot stop the Nicola's death.

By the end of the story it is clear that Nicola despite all her efforts to stay alive will the end up dying. The capricious nature of death is captured in even though people may desire to preserve themselves. Although the modern cultures that people operate in makes them have a lot of hope in science and technology or in other forms of treatment, the fact that people die, complicates the human desire to be hopeful. Nicola's futile search for a cure thus affirms the bankruptcy of too much faith in modern technology, medicine and doctors as sources of healing. However, it confirms that a dying person has an opportunity to put up a spirited fight against death using these symbols of medical power.

The Power Struggle between the Care Giver and the Patient

Garner uses friendship as a backdrop to present how the fear of death may force a dying patient to seek solace and care from a family member or a friend. She also presents the challenges that accrue from a patient/caregiver relationship. This process is what Joseph Nowinsky in "Terminal Illness and Family Upheaval" calls "the new grief." Unlike sudden death, this new grief is a crisis that involves both the patient and family and friends who have to transform into caregivers who are forced into a prolonged grieving period as they watch the life of a close friend or relative ebb away.

Many well-meaning would be care givers, be it family or friends, do not initially understand

the difficulty of taking care of a patient, especially a terminally ill one. They believe that they have the power and ability to handle patients. According to Bonnie Teschendorf et al., “family caregivers frequently step into their new role with little understanding of the complex ways it will alter their lives” (183). They do not understand the enormity of the task of care giving ahead of them. Though description Garner explains how Helen prepares for Nicola’s coming in a caring and loving manner. When the novel opens, Helen is preparing a room for her guest. She is careful about the freshness and colour of the sheets. She chooses a pink sheet because it is “flattering even to skin that has turned yellowish,” (1). She cares about the best size of pillow. She remembers that her friend is vegetarian thus she wonders if she will be comfortable using pillows filled with feathers. She is even worries that the room does not have a view good enough for her friend. Helen is so careful about her ministrations that she goes out of her way to buy a new carpet so that Nicola does not hurt her feet on the wooden floor. Finally Helen fixes a mirror in the room wondering whether Nicola would want to “look at herself” (3). Helen’s ministrations, excitement and optimism demonstrate how oblivious she is of the challenges that come with caring for terminally ill patients.

Stylistically and thematically, Garner foregrounds Helen’s careful and loving preparation for Nicola’s coming so that when she later details the frustrations that Helen goes through while nursing Nicola, she can make a definitive statement about dying and death in relation to the manner in which people conduct their relationships before and after a severe and life threatening illness sets in. Garner juxtaposes the two periods, namely, the period before Helen becomes a care-giver and the period during her role as a caregiver. In so doing the reader can see that one period captures Helen’s excitement and happiness as she waits to

reunite with her good friend and the next period captures the fear and confusion that taking care of her good friend, causes Helen. In essence the two extremes capture two sides of friendship: the good and the bad. This, to a large extent, is how life is.

It is normal for humans to want to reach out to other humans for emotional and physical support especially when they are going through traumatic situations such as severe sickness. It is also normal for these other humans to want to give as much help and comfort to those who are suffering. Family and friends are often expected to accommodate very sick individuals in their homes. To do this, they have to open out emotional and physical spaces that can allow for the comfort, of not only the sick individuals, but also for themselves. As they do this, they often do not think about or care about the challenges of care giving. Instead they focus only on what they can do to alleviate the pain of their relative or friend.

Opening out her emotional and physical spaces is exactly what Helen does. At the time she welcomes Nicola into her home, there is no sense of fear or dread in the preparations. As Garner captures the ritual that Helen engages in as she goes into preparing a space for a guest, she also captures the manner in which people live in obvious ignorance of the challenges that life brings. Even though Helen is aware that Nicola is sick, nothing prepares her for the challenges that her sickness will bring into her life. As if to warn Helen that her excited preparation for her friend is just a facade, the mirror that she has fixed in Nicola's room breaks in "a horrible two-staged smash, so sickening, so total, that [she] thought someone had thrown a brick through the side window" (4). The symbolism of this is obvious not just to the readers but even to the characters-Helen and her sister Connie. It is symbolic

of the capriciousness of life. It foreshadows the challenges that Helen is going to go through by having to deal with Nicola's terminal illness and possible death. It reminds people that sickness and death can dismantle the established fabric of life without any warning whatsoever. The broken pieces of glass are described as being "mean shaped and stubborn" (4). This is symbolic of the challenges that Helen will face when trying to handle the terminally ill Nicola. Monica McFawn reiterates this symbolic aspect when she reminds the reader that when people are called upon to make room in their home spaces and mental spaces for relatives and friends, the challenges they are bound to encounter are often quite numerous. The shattered mirror thus foreshadows the manner in which this experience will eventually affect the close relationship that, over the years, Nicola has shared with Helen.

Juxtaposing the loving fixing of the room and the shocking breaking of the mirror also symbolises and reiterates the idea that death plays games whose rules go beyond human control. Helen believes that she has done a good job of fixing the mirror, only for it to fall down and break into pieces. Similarly, people often believe that they are in control of various aspects of their lives. However, they soon find that they are not really in control. This especially happens when they encounter challenges like severe illnesses or death. The power trajectories of their lives often shift drastically. The mirror that falls and breaks even after being fixed firmly on the wall reveals the uncertainty of life. The ominous symbol of the broken mirror elicits a shocked response from Connie who says, "A mirror broke? In her [Nicola's] room?...Don't. Tell. Nicola" (5). By the time Helen meets Nicola at the airport and brings her back home, the reader is to some extent already prepared for the fact that things

are not going to be very easy for both Nicola and Helen. The response to Nicola's sickness shows how ill prepared people often are for the challenges that severe sicknesses pose.

The work of taking care of a terminally ill person calls for care-givers to prepare themselves physically and emotionally. However, according to Peter Hudson, many care givers are often unprepared for the heavy and emotionally charged task of care of such patients. Linda Kristjanson and Samar Aoun, explain that, "the illness experience profoundly affects family members' psychological and physical health" (359). This effect is normally so serious that the care-givers are often referred to as "hidden patients" (360). This means that the care-givers become patients without necessarily being sick. According to Kinsella et al., they become fatigued and depressed and according to Keighran they suffer from "secondary trauma" (2). Helen captures the fact that she is depressed and fatigued when she says, "I've hardly had a night's sleep since she arrived. I shop, I cook, I clean. I field her unwanted phone calls. I'm a hand-maiden. A washer-woman. I lump her fucking mattress and prop it in the sun" (135).

Helen's description of the chores that she has to do, obviously, points to the fact that she is tired of doing them. At first she believes that she has the power and the competence to take care of Nicola to the extent that she "would get a reputation for competence." (48). She soon realises that the task of nursing a patient requires far more than "straightforward tasks of love and order" (48). She also realises that she has the dual task of not only nursing Nicola and helping her accept that she is dying, but also having to deal with her own emotional preparation for Nicola's impending death. What upsets her is that Nicola does not want to

live up to the rules prescribed by Helen. She expects Nicola to accept that she is very sick and at the verge of dying. She also wants her to acknowledge that the Vitamin C treatment that she is getting at The Theodore Institute is not good for her. Her desire is to create a relationship with Nicola in which she expects Nicola to behave like a victim of her sickness but Nicola rejects this position. Helen also wants to be in control of what happens to Nicola but Nicola believes that she is in control of her destiny. The fact that Nicola refuses to become subservient to Helen and refuses to be the othered individual in the relationship irritates Helen very much.

Here are two friends reacting to the same situation in two distinct ways. This causes a push and pull in the relationship. The fact that they are both facing death from two different points creates a strain on the relationship. Both are unable to appreciate the challenges that each of them is facing within this experience. Helen expects Nicola to openly accept defeat and quickly acknowledge that she is dying, while Nicola feels that such a response is flawed. She expects Helen to understand her desire to find a cure for her illness. Each one of them believes that their response to dying and death is the correct response. These divergent behaviours between two bosom friends arise because the experience is new and strange to both of them. In the earlier phases of their friendship, they lived carefree lives that were full of fun and excitement. The sickness opens new behavioural traits that had gone unnoticed. The two friend's narcissistic tendencies suddenly emerge. Their narcissistic personalities are seen in the manner in which each one of them wants to appear superior to the other. They have little regard for other's feelings. But behind this mask of confidence lies a fragile self-esteem, vulnerable to the slightest criticism. Both of them are afraid of being told that they

are wrong in their approach to this illness. Suddenly, Nicola's terminal illness creates a rift in the friendship. A lack of preparedness to handle the illness and a desire to take the position of power in the relationship by both the caregiver and the patient are the reasons for the disagreements between the two friends. Indeed, while Peter Hudson reiterates this by explaining that a major challenge that affects many family members and friends who have to take care of terminally ill patients is the lack of preparedness, Kristjanson captures other challenges. She says:

Families of patients receiving palliative care are profoundly affected by the challenges of the illness. They must manage daily care giving expectations, alterations to their roles, and changing responsibilities within the family. They also confront shifts in their understanding of the meaning of life and relationships as they come to recognize the terminal end point of the patient's illness. Family members manage physical care changes and practical difficulties with daily living while they handle their own emotional distress about the patient's care and concerns about the future. (359)

People often believe that caring for terminally ill patients is easy only for them to find that it is not only physically challenging but also emotionally exhausting. The physical journey made by Nicola is supposed to connect two long time bosom friends but it is, ironically, the same journey that creates tension between them and culminates in a harrowing emotional journey that the two have to walk together on. Helen has to make significant lifestyle changes. She has to ignore members of her own family, especially her granddaughter Bessy,

so as to take care of Nicola. She has to change her schedules of work so that she can drive Nicola to hospital as well as doing extra chores around the house to ensure that Nicola is comfortable. Over time, stresses and tensions emerge especially since Helen has not prepared herself adequately for the challenges of care giving. She also feels let down by what she considers a lack of appreciation from Nicola.

The idea here is that death comes in such an inconspicuous manner that one does not really plan for it or even know how to react to it. Helen and Nicola inability to cope with the illness is especially confounded by the fact that they do not take time to sit down and discuss about what each one of them expects from this encounter. Thus they both end up treating each other abrasively with each wanting to control the other physically and emotionally. This is an indicator of what human nature is like. The reactions of the patient and care-giver in this case indicates that even in a delicate situation of sickness such as the one witnessed in this novel, individuals whether in the patient position or in the care-giver position, will always want to be in control.

Helen on her part tries to force Nicola into accepting that she is dying even though Nicola is not ready for this. She becomes almost tyrannical in her treatment of Nicola. Patricia Stanley in "The Patient's Voice: A Cry in Solitude or a Call for Community" explains Helen's reaction to Nicola. She says, "Much of illness's isolation is as a result of the social and cultural intolerance of illness, which leads to a construction of illness that identifies an ill person as other" (347). The vulnerability and sense of powerlessness of sick and dying people is captured in Stanley's words. In her imagined world, Helen believes that Nicola

should be controlled and pummelled into submitting to the idea that she is weak and dying. She treats Nicola as an “othered” person. Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism*, says that the other (the one assumed to have no power), is pitted against the “self” (the one assumed to have power). The “self” is the privileged or believes that he or she is privileged over the “other” (93). Arthur Kleinmanre capitulates this by saying sick people are often moved to the peripheral spaces in the imagined world of those who are well. In those peripheral spaces, they become the “othered” people in the relationship. This signifies that those that are well believe that the sick and dying have no power to control facets of their lives. According to Foucault in *Madness and Civilisation*, this is the same way that mad and people lepers were treated in the past. They wereexcluded from "normal" society because the abnormal was frightening. Houses of confinement were places where power was exercised. Instead of taking people to medical establishments, they were put in the houses of confinement in order to be policed. Helen expects Nicola to contain her “madness” and accept to be policed by Helen as an “othered” person.

The problem that accrues from this kind of imagination is that those that are sick may not consider themselves as mad or “othered” people. They too make an effort to impose their power onto the spaces they live in and on the people they interact with. Within such a scenario, there is bound to be a battle of wits. Richard Gelles in *The Violent Home* describes ways in which people, including the “othered”, display their power. He says “interpersonal dimensions of power can be expressed by decision making, dominance, the ability to engage in behaviours against a partner’s wishes, and the ability to control a partner’s actions” (96). The push and pull between Nicola and Helen with each one of them wanting to be in control

of how Nicola's illness should be managed, is illustrative of the fact that the space of sickness and death creates competing and oftentimes antagonistic behaviour and reactions.

Garner juxtaposes the two characters' power struggles as a way of demonstrating that the space of death and dying often garners different reactions from people. Helen is especially interested in preserving her sanity. She wants to control the hospital that her friend goes to as well as the medication that she receives. To this end she insists that Nicola should take morphine because they are much stronger painkillers and she also insists that she should inform the palliative care people about Nicola. She insists on this even though Nicola is against it. Nicola only believes that she should get medication from the Theodore Institute. She is not interested in the mainstream treatment regime any more. Finally, however, Helen has her way. The two friends thus react to their fear of death in two different ways. Helen believes that using the mainstream treatment and care methods will garner good results. She believes that she will sleep easy that she is using the old and trusted ways. Nicola's fear of the conventional medicine and is more interested in trying out new forms of treatment. Her intention is to derive a personal meaning and purpose from her difficult circumstances by trying out new methods of healing. Helen's objection to this further enhances her fragmented sense of self who has to do the bidding of her heart but at the same time meet her friend's demands.

To this end, the emotional journey creates a push and pull, a kind of contest between the two friends, with each one of them focusing on getting their way. Stevie Davies posits that Nicola and Helen engage in a "clash of titanic wills, imperious personalities, in intimate space. Life

and death, host and guest, engage in a bitter, paroxysmicagon, transgressing taboos. Helen's house becomes a force-field of grief, trauma, rage” (Par 3). Davies thus acknowledges that the care-giving and being a recipient of care as responses to death and dying brings about a change in people’s characters. The formerly very friendly individuals suddenly become combative because they each want their opinions in this situation to be taken into consideration.

Helen’s and Nicola’s responses reflect what Foucault suggests is the manner in which power is exhibited in relationships. It can come from any point in that relationship. In this case, both Helen and Nicola end up having their way. Nicola manages to go through her treatment regime at the Theodore Institute and Helen ensures that Nicola takes on a more realistic approach to how to handle her sickness and finally her dying. Their responses are also a demonstration of Freud’s views concerning people being egocentric in his desire to selfishly want to get their way. These narcissistic tendencies demonstrate that people often find it hard to handle death and dying.

Indeed, Garner’s intention is to make us see that on such an emotional journey that involves care-giving of a terminally ill patient, a care-giver should be psychologically and physically prepared. One needs to have had some form of preparation in order to understand the challenges of dealing with a patient who is in denial and one who clearly wants to hang onto life.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated that the fear of death is normal response to death for both the dying person and the care giver. It is also normal for people to go to all lengths to alleviate this fear and to ensure that they stay alive. Nicola's fear of death results in her decision to go doctor shopping. In terms of story development, it is this doctor shopping that is the inciting incidence that allows the writer, Helen Garner, to use a physical journey to move Nicola from one doctor to another in search of an effective treatment regime. This movement ensures that Nicola moves away from the doctors who are a source of her fear of death to a doctor who gives her hope that her cancer can be cured. Her desire for self-preservation as well as her resilience makes her ignore doctors' prognosis of her illness and seek new ways of treatment. I have thus demonstrated that even though doctors initiate their patients' fear of death through the prognosis they give for an illness, it is the same doctors who often have the power to alleviate this fear. Thus doctors are presented as being both being powerful and powerless when handling the treatment of illnesses. They are powerless when they are unable to provide a treatment regime that gets rid of an illness and powerful if they can manage the illness.

The chapter has also determined that there are often challenges when strong willed patients encounter strong willed care-givers. The reactions to death and dying by the two sets of people can be very self-centered if not very well handled. Garner through merging a physical journey and an emotional one, juxtaposes the tranquil life that Helen leads before the coming of Nicola and the disruption that comes into her life once the sick Nicola comes to Melbourne to show that being a care giver is not an easy task. She illustrates the irony of

having friends and relatives take care of patients. She demonstrates that when someone is not sick, the bonds often flourish strongly but when sickness sets in these bonds are often tested and narcissistic behaviours can accrue from such tense situations. Using a flashback Garner indicates that the emotional and physical spaces that family and friends occupy before sicknesses set in, often shift drastically because living with the uncertainty that is associated with a terminal sickness is stressful, not only for the patient but for the entire family.

The strains in the house shared by Nicola and Helen are especially exaggerated because both characters have different perspectives concerning the best treatment method to be used. Each one of them believes that their way of handling the sickness is the best. Impatience, anger and resentment often build up in a poorly managed handling of terminal illness situations. The two characters self centeredness and desire to control makes management of the sickness as well as the dying process quite challenging. Luckily they sometimes feel guilty about having such self-centered feelings and it is this realisation that finally gives them an opportunity to face death in a more realistic manner. Helen's thought that, "Death will not be denied. To try is grandiose. It drives madness into the soul. It leeches out virtue. It injects poison into friendship, and makes a mockery of love. (89)" are finally acknowledged by Nicola who moves to a Hospice back in Sydney and by the end of the novel, she is presented as having accepted that her death is imminent.

CHAPTER THREE: THE MYOPIA OF AUTOCRACY IN THE FACE OF DYING AND DEATH IN “BIG MAMA’S FUNERAL” BY GARCIA MARQUEZ

Introduction

In this chapter I demonstrate the extent to which Gabriel Garcia Marquez in “Big Mama’s Funeral, uses literary strategies especially the magical realism mode and its attendant characteristics like humour, irony and the *dues ex machine* as well as his presentation of the novel in the form of an obituary to present the implication of Big Mama’s dying and death on herself as well as on other characters in the text. I argue that the writer makes a conscious effort to present political autocracy as a questioned construct especially in the manner in which autocracy affects responses to dying and death. As a result, dying and death are foregrounded and interrogated within the relationships of the rulers and the ruled. The responses point towards the self centeredness of the rulers and their family members and the negative reactions to this self centeredness by the ruled.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez

According to Gerald Martin in a biography entitled, *Gabriel Garcia Marquez: A Life*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez was born on March 6th, 1927. He spent most of childhood living with his grandparents in Aracataca, Colombia. This tropical coastal town is what he would refer to as Macondo in his literary works. The strike by the workers was an agitation against the poor working conditions and poor remuneration for work done. Aracataca, just like many towns in Colombia had many such impoverished workers and people in general. Thus, Garcia Marquez at a very early age was aware of the poverty and the violence in Colombia. The

Columbian history was a replica of many Latin American countries that had recorded numerous civil wars, coup de tat and revolutions.

Despite all the upheavals in Columbia, Marquez grew up as a happy boy under the care of his grandparents. He was very close to his grandfather who became the subject of his novel *No One Writes to the Colonel* detailing the nature of the “Thousand Days’ War” which his grandfather fought in. In an interview with Peter Stone of the *Paris Review* Marquez indicated that the decision to become a writer was triggered by his reading of *The Metamorphosis* by Frank Kafka. The magical realism in the book excited him. Later he was intrigued when he read William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury* and realized that in writing, one could create and an imaginary place. Just as Faulkner created the mythical Yoknapatawapha country so did he create Macondo.

Marquez’s chosen writing style is magical realism which he uses to address the social political concerns of Latin America in general and Columbia in particular. Other books that he has written include *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, *Chronicles of a Death Foretold*, *Love in the Time for Cholera*, *The General in his Labyrinth*, *Strange Pilgrims*, *Love and Other Demons*, *News of a Kidnapping*, and *Living to Tell a Tale*, *Leaf Storm*, *In Evil Hour*, *No one writes to the Colonel*, *One hundred Years of solitude*, *In Evil Hour*, and a collection of short stories which includes “Big Mama’s Funeral”. Marquez died on 17th April 2014.

Marquez infuses the history of Columbia in his works. However, he exaggerates it so that it looks like he is not referring to it. He focuses on the atrocities, specially the political violence and repression, in Latin America in general and Colombia in particular. “Big Mama’s Funeral” focuses on some of the atrocities and repressive actions that Big Mama subjects her people to in the guise of benevolence. Death in this short story is presented as a phenomenon that comes to momentarily give respite to those who have had to live under the power of a ruler who pretends to be a benevolent ruler yet she demonstrates clear autocratic tendencies.

About “Big Mama’s Funeral”

"Big Mama's Funeral" whose original title in Spanish is “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande”, is a satirical commentary on Latin American life and culture but more so a satirical presentation of the life and death of Big Mama as well as the funeral activities that accompany her death.

Big Mama is an overly powerful woman whose real name is Doña Mariadel Rosario Castañeda y Montero. She is a 92 year old matriarch, unmarried virgin who lives in a fictional country known as Macondo. With no children of her own, the heirs to her big empire and vast amounts of wealth are her nine nieces and nine nephews. The eldest is her nephew Nicanor.

Marquez depicts Big Mama is an extraordinary matriarch. She is said to own property that is visible and invisible, tangible and intangible. She has also surrounded her fortune only with

those who are related to her. She has all along encouraged her family members to get married within the family, so as to ensure that the family wealth is retained in the family. Despite this, Big Mama ends up leaving all the wealth to one her niece, Magdalena, who has renounced marriage and has opted to become a nun in the Catholic Church. The fact that Magdalene is in a convent, means that all the wealth will go to the state. When Big Mama finally dies there are all manner of responses to her death.

The Nature of Magical Realism

“Big Mama’s Funeral”, is a story that is presented through Marquez’s distinctive use of magical realism. Magical realism which is often associated with the Latin American writers especially, Garcia Marquez, is a literary genre or style that incorporates fantastic or mythical elements into otherwise realistic fiction. According to Gloria Clark, this technique “includes magical occurrences in texts that essentially and primarily mirror daily existence, or present recognizable human experiences, no matter how seemingly extraordinary” (76).

Because the story incorporates fantasy, this style allows for extreme exaggerations and humour that the writer uses to explore human experiences. Marquez uses it to highlight the nature of life and existence, especially the hold of power that autocratic leaders hold in Latin American nations. He also incorporates the magical realism in an obituary that gives a detailed background of how Big Mama lived and how she died. In order to expose the meaning inherent in the characters’ responses to dying and death, it makes sense to examine them one by one.

An Ambivalent Response to Dying

An ambivalent response to anything refers to an individual having a contradictory response to an issue. When we first meet Big Mama, she is at the point of death. Right from the start, her response to death is indecisive. She accepts that she is dying yet still insists on controlling aspects of a life that she will soon be exiting. As I have indicated earlier in the analysis of *The Spare Room* by Helen Garner, survival and the instinct to avoid death as much as possible are inherent in most human beings. It is no different for Big Mama.

Human beings by nature want to get to the highest levels of achievement as possible. Their main concern is to build their self-esteem and self-worth. Their worth is determined by how much they have accomplished. Earnest Becker says that a human being is a creature “who lives in a world of symbols and dreams and not merely matter....And this means that man’s natural yearning for organismic activity, the pleasures of incorporation and expansion, can be fed limitlessly in the domain of symbols and so to immortality” (3). In other words, humans constantly engage in activities to better their lives. Because of their desire to expand their domains, they constantly yearn for bigger and better things. This desire for what is good underscores what Freud says is the fact that human beings are basically driven by the impulse to attain pleasure and avoid pain. A reading of “Big Mama’s Funeral” demonstrates the manner in which Big Mama is driven by the pleasure principle which then affects the way she lives her life and the manner she responds to her dying.

Big Mama is a political big wig. She is presented as a woman who is very powerful and wealthy. It is believed that she owns the whole of Macondo including all the material and

non-material wealth as well as all the people who live on the lands. Big Mama is a representative of the perpetrators of the feudalism system of governance and of leaders who believe that they as members of the privileged class, they are in power because of divine will. They also believe that their subjects are also in their positions because of divine will. Because of this, she and her clique of leaders believe that they own everything in their area of jurisdiction. The writer describes Big Mama in this way:

Everyone was used to believing that big Mama was the owner of the waters, running and still, of rain and drought, and of the districts roads, telegraph poles, leap years and heat waves, and that she had furthermore a hereditary right over life and property.
(172)

It is not just the people who believe that she owns the power and wealth including the tangible and non-tangible. She too believes it. “When she sat on the balcony in the cool afternoon...she seemed, in truth, infinitely rich and powerful, the richest and most powerful matron in the world” (172). These properties are the symbolic power statuses that she uses to effectively pursue her pleasures.

Obviously, Marquez exaggerates Big Mama’s view of herself and the view that others have of her. It is not possible for anyone to own things including things like rain, heat and leap years. Marquez uses the exaggeration to demonstrate the extent to which Big Mama has negotiated her identity based on mercenary ideals. It is the wealth that she has that gives her power. Marquez demonstrates that a combination of power and wealth form a lethal weapon

that Big Mama uses to control others. Power and control then creates in her a bloated ego which inhibits her ability to realize that humans' capacity to fully control life is very limited.

Big Mama's view of power is based on how much control she has over people and anything else within Macondo. Over the years Big Mama has also ensured that the people who live under her are aware of her importance. We are reminded that, "Big Mama had been the centre of gravity, as had her brothers, her parents, and the parents of her parents in the past, in dominance which covered two centuries. The town was founded on her surname" (172). This indicates that the masses have not been exposed to any other type of leadership other than the dictatorial leadership perpetuated by Big Mama's family. The citizens have been lulled into believing that only Big Mama and those of her family lineage have a right to property and power. Consequently, Big Mama is a woman who is not only powerful in her home, but is also symbolically the centre of power of her village and nation.

Through the exaggeration of the extent of Big Mama's power, Marquez sets out to depict how extreme power corrupts human beings' thinking about life. Marquez exaggerates the amount of power and wealth that Big Mama has as a commentary on the idea of absolute dictatorship corrupts the way people view life. Marquez suggests that people who are dictators often think of themselves as owning even those things that cannot be possessed, such as the sky or sea. In reality, they own nothing and sickness and death comes as a stark reminder of the limitations of their power. More often than not, the dictators even imagine that they own power over life. Marquez says, "it had not occurred to anyone that Big Mama was mortal" (172). Big Mama herself only begins to appreciate that one's mortality is never

in one's control when the priest comes to administer the final rights over her. All along, "she believed that she would live more than a hundred years, as did her grandmother" (172).

Magical realism allows for a humorous and satirical exaggerated presentation of people's responses to life and death. It seems that it is hard for powerful and wealthy people to imagine that their lives have a limited span. Marquez by presenting Big Mama dying despite her control and power and her desire to live to a hundred years like her grandmother, is thus able to present the limitations of the human condition.

Using the Freudian psychoanalysis, we can deduce that Big Mama has repressed the knowledge that death cannot be controlled and has instead replaced it with an ego enhancing view that she can control how long she remains alive. She imagines that she can live to a hundred years like her grandmother. Big Mama has such an inflated belief in her self-worth that she even expects death to concede to this belief and spare her life until she is ready for it. Jacques Maritain argues that this belief is "inscribed in [humans] ontological structure" (413). This is also what Freud refers to as narcissistic tendencies where individuals' egos are so inflated that they believe that they are entitled only to that which makes them comfortable. This inflated ego is what makes Big Mama have an ambivalent response to death.

Getting a doctor to treat Big Mama is a normal reaction to sickness. Doctors are often the go to people when diseases strike. It is the nature of human beings to look at doctors as the main source of earthly power against sicknesses. As already demonstrated in the *Spare Room*, doctors are expected to be centres of power that avail treatment that can ensure the wellness

of their patients. Thus the fact that Big Mama calls in her doctor is not strange. However, what is strange the doctor decides to is “install himself in the sick woman’s bedroom” and spends fourteen weeks treating her with “poultices, mustard plasters, and leeches”(173), despite being the only doctor in Macondo.

Considering that he is the only doctor in Macondo it is obvious that by installing himself in Big Mama’s room he privileges her life over his other patients’ lives. Her importance as a human being is obviously marked by her wealth and powerful standing in the society. Autocracy breeds self centeredness and the doctor advances this egocentric response to life. Marquez exaggeration of the treatment regime is quite humorous but it indicates the extent to which the doctors privilege the powerful individuals within the society. Nevertheless, death has its own rules and it is no respecter of persons. The doctor’s power over death is limited and Big Mama realises that her end is near. As a result of this, she seemingly appears to accept this fact.

After realising that she is actually dying, Big Mama seems to finally accept that she is dying. This can be seen in her allowing the priest Father Anthony Isabel to come and assist in putting “the affairs of her soul in order” (171). Just like the doctor who installs himself in Big Mama’s room, the priest who is the only priest in Macondo is forced, because age and big body size, to stay in Big Mama’s bedroom because it would be very difficult to move him in and out of the room. As a result of keeping the priest in Big Mama’s bedroom, her life is again privileged over the other people in Macondo who might require the priest’s spiritual guidance. It is probably the extra attention that has been given to Big Mama all through her

life that has made her think of herself as a more advantaged being than others. Her initial acceptance of the fact that she is dying seems to suggest in Freudian terms that she is on her way to becoming a well-adjusted individual who despite her initial struggle with acceptance of death, finally gets to accept it. However, her next action shows her regression into her initial narcissistic tendencies.

Before she becomes sick, Big Mama lives expansively in Macondo. It is hard to imagine how much wealth she has. But immediately she becomes sick, her world, like that of King Lear in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Nicola in *The Spare Room*, begins to shrink. Yet, despite the shrinking space, Big Mama just like the two aforementioned characters find it hard to let go. Just like she controlled all aspects of her life, Big Mama also wants to exercise control over her dying process and this is what depicts her ambivalent response to death.

At dawn, she asked to be left with Nicanor [her nephew] to impart her last instructions. For half an hour, in perfect command of her faculties, she asked about the conduct of her affairs. She gave special instructions about the disposition of her body, and finally concerned herself with her wake. 'You have to keep your eyes open,' she said. 'Keep everything of value under lock and key, because many people come to wakes to steal. (175-76)

It is ironical that Big Mama despite knowing that her days on earth are numbered, tries to ensure that her material wealth is not lost when she dies. Her will as well as the warnings she gives her relatives about how her wealth should be managed, is her way of controlling the

space she has lived in for many years. She tells her nephew Nicanor, “You have to keep your eyes open. Keep everything of value under lock and Key, because many people come to wakes only to steal” (175).

Her objective by giving such orders to her nephew is to ensure that her presence is felt even when she is gone. Marquez presents the obvious dilemma that dying people find themselves in. Their sick and deteriorating bodies remind them that their end is near, yet their minds tell them that they can still have control of the world from which they are about to exit. Those who have money and power are especially caught up in the challenge of having to let go. The fact that Big Mama has always had a doctor at her beck and call has enhanced her ego ideal into believing that sickness can always be dealt with. As a result she and the doctor try to play at what Becker refers to as heroics. Becker says that it is “natural for man to strive to be a hero” (4). When Big Mama realises that no heroics can stop her from dying, she focuses her energies towards trying to secure some level of control on the living even when she is dead. Unfortunately, her control disappears immediately she dies. Thus, Big Mama’s ambivalent approach to her own death indicates the confusion that dying causes humans especially those who focus on their power and the wealth that they own.

The story is thus an attack of powerful and wealthy people who often foster a myopic view that they are indispensable. Marquez also points out people’s myopic view that they can effectively control the living through wills. Such people fail to appreciate the fact that effective execution of a will is only possible if the living adhere to it. The careless treatment that Big Mama’s corpse receives and the manner in which her wealth is shared out

immediately she dies, signifies that a dead person has an insignificant amount of power in the world of the living. Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* says that people cannot be coerced by those in power. People only become disciplined through socialisation and acceptance of the cultural values that they are socialised into. Big Mama's relatives' refusal to heed her orders on how to handle her wealth shows that they are resistant to the socialisation that Big Mama has tried to impose on them. As a result, her power is no longer recognised immediately she dies. If living people decide to execute a dead person's will in the manner decreed by a dead person, then it is because of the respect that those living have for the dead person or if some other power forces them to adhere to the dead person's will.

Marquez thus sounds a warning especially to autocratic leaders by demonstrating that the money and power they have has very limited power. They only have it when they are alive. When they die, other people end up enjoying it instead. Thus desire to control wealth after one dies is a futile attempt at posthumously continuing their dictatorial tendencies. It is also an indication that the power and money that such leaders hold does not really belong to them. It belongs to the masses for which they hold in trust. Death thus comes in to remind people of this stark reality. Thus accepting death means letting go of what is worldly.

Marquez puts a twist to the story by having a woman as a dictator. Latin American societies generally have a male oriented power structure both at home and outside the home. Thus Big Mama's character traits are not of typical of Latin American woman. According to Graciela M. Castex in *Hispanic-American Families - Latino Family Roles*, "Family systems tend to be patriarchal, and men are the prime protectors, mediators with an often-hostile world outside

the bounds of the family”. The woman, on the other hand, is expected to be “selfless, all embracing, demanding little and totally self sacrificing creatures whose identities are inseparable from their nurturing services” (Ghasemi and Hajizadeh 477). By presenting Big Mama as not operating within the normal expectations of how a Latin American woman is expected to behave, Marquez is most probably reflecting on the new emerging trends where women are now getting into national politics.

By as far back as the 1990’s the Latin American region had already developed the tendency to elect female political leaders to the high office. Htun in her article “Women in Political Power in Latin America” says that the reason for this was that the people felt that women leaders were more honest and that they could outperform men by being honest and good decision makers, who would reduce poverty, improve education, combat corruption, protect the environment and manage the economy. However, Marquez raises a red flag against taking for granted such notions about women in power. That many leaders in post-colonial nations, whether male or female, tend to use their positions to favour themselves and their families and fail to benefit those that they lead is depicted in this story. Marquez seems to be of the opinion that Latin Americans should debunk the myth of the benevolent matriarch because he believes that these so called matriarchs are often capable of having what Roberto Echevarria calls “a death grip” (56) on their people. They can easily become death causing agents rather than life sustaining ones. In other words it is not necessarily one’s gender that makes one a good leader. Good leadership is cultivated through policies that enhance a good life for the people.

Marquez thus demystifies and deconstructs the view that it is only men who play heroics with life and even death. He seems to suggest that ambivalence to death is not determined by gender and that leaders, whether men or women, when they are reigning supreme, never factor death into their lives. They operate in life as if they will live forever. Thus when their deaths become imminent, they are caught flatfooted. He reminds them that even though modern societies have privileged power and wealth over most other things in life, ownership of such assets in life does not last forever. Even if no other person can take away this power, death does. Power and wealth can ensure that one is outwardly comfortable, but it cannot protect man from the inevitability of death.

A self Centered Response to Death: Unearthing of Latent Power of the Masses

When Big Mama dies, the only people at her deathbed are Father Anthony Isabel, the doctor and her nephew Nicanor, who takes charge of all the assets. The other person in attendance is Magdalene to whom Big Mama gives the family heirloom, a big diamond ring, because she is the immediate heir to the vast kingdom. There are no clear goodbyes because all along none of the people around Big Mama are convinced that she is dying. However immediately she dies there is an immediate shift in power.

Marquez seems to indicate that death is the one sure thing that can limit or destroy power. When individuals establish dominions over others, one thing that can put a stop to such dominions is death. Death gives others an opportunity to display their power. When Foucault in his lecture entitled “4 February, 1976” says that power is something that circulates continuously through institutions like blood through veins and that it cannot be derived from

a single body, he seems to have in mind a place like Macondo. We see power being displayed in a manner it had never been before been displayed. Apparently, this power had been lying latent. The fear of Big Mama made the people not display it openly. The significant power shift is evidenced in a very humorous manner.

Before her death, Big Mama gives clear instructions about the treatment of her body and about safeguarding the wealth it ironical that none of her immediate family members seems to care about this warning. Immediately her body is removed from the house for burial, her “nephews, godchildren, servants, and protégés closed the doors, pulled the nails out of the planks, and dug up the foundation to divide the house” (185). This description of the treatment of Big Mama’s property is Marquez use of a hyperbole to indicate the unconcerned attitude that her relatives establish as they share out the wealth that Big Mama had protected over the years. Death is thus presented as providing a lacuna that enables Big Mama’s family members to clearly let out a power that they had let lie latent for years. Marquez illustrates the family members’ displeasure towards a family structure that had previously favoured only one individual. Big Mama. Their reaction is to tear down everything and individually try to carry away anything they deem to be valuable. This highlights a negative reaction to Big Mama’s female leadership that pretended to be nurturing yet in effect had killed individual pursuit of social and economic well-being. She had all along discouraged her family members from being independent. Readers are thus reminded that, “Big Mama’s matriarchal rigidity had surrounded her fortune and her name with a sacramental fence” (171). To do this she ensures that relatives married each other so that the wealth would stay within the family. While Big Mama was alive they seemed to accept it without questioning. However,

immediately Big Mama dies, they quickly display their aversion for how she had led the family. Her death reveals their previously innate feelings.

The family members' actions demonstrate that Big Mama had all along been surrounded by relatives with parasitic tendencies and that none of them really care about her. All they care about is what they can get for themselves. Even before she is buried, they set about plundering the wealth. Marquez hyperbolic description of what they do is quite humorous. He says that "the nephews, godchildren, servants, and protégés of Big Mama closed the doors as soon as the body was taken out and dismantled the doors, pulled the nails out of the planks, and dug out the foundations to divide up the house" (185). Through this hyperbole Marquez presents the idea that the level of plundering was enormous and that Big Mama's relatives did not spare anything.

The power shift here is very clear. Whereas Big Mama's power was ensured through herding together of individuals into a group of people that she could control, when she dies the collective element that kept wealth within the family disappears. Instead, the individual selfish pursuits come to the fore. An individualist power structure becomes pronounced as each of the family members seeks wealth in a selfish manner. Their libidinal energies move from concentrating on Big Mama to focusing on the wealth that she leaves behind. Apparently Big Mama's hold on them has been very severe. They only pretend to accept it because she holds the money purse that they all desire. When she dies, even her will which is supposed to be a symbol of power that is supposed to control the wealth is totally ignored.

The family members thus get to individually enjoy the wealth and power that had been denied them by Big Mama.

Among the public, the apathy they have towards Big Mama death is seen when they do not take a moment to mourn her death but instead they mark the death with festivities and celebrations. Big Mama's death also avails to them an opportunity to engage in business. This is demonstrated by Marquez description of what transpires on the day of her burial. He says that the streets were "crowded with carts, hawkers of dried foods, and lottery stalls, and men with snakes wrapped around their necks...the crowds had set up their tents and unrolled their sleeping mats....They were awaiting the supreme moment" (183). The celebrations that are witnessed at Big Mama's burial carry the image of what Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*, refers to as Carnavalesque. This refers to a celebratory mood that is often seen at carnivals where people are permitted to engage in revelry of whatever form. The rigid order of the world is briefly done away with as people, especially the masses, are allowed to let off steam. Inverted power relationships are temporarily celebrated. Through his use of exaggeration, Marquez depicts the manner in which the citizens' engage in wanton celebrations. It is an indication that they have suddenly found a freedom that they have never before enjoyed. So excessive is the excitement at the funeral, which is described as "the greatest funeral in the world" (184) that Marquez describes some of the citizens as being "delirious" (183) and "dazzled" (184). This kind of celebration is not expected at a funeral but it is quite clear that the wanton celebration that borders on the grotesque is exhibited just because of Big Mama absence. The death of an autocratic leader is thus presented an opportunity for those who had previously been sat and oppressed, to suddenly feel a sense of

liberation and empowerment. This is an indication that the end of unjust political order as a result of death destroys the death grip that has all along strangled the masses. They have for a long time felt the inequalities that have been perpetuated through power being handed down within a lineage of family members. Big Mama's leadership has especially consolidated power around her. The people who have thus felt enslaved because of this inherited family hegemony gain a freedom, however brief. This is thus a just cause of their celebration.

Other people known as the "veterans of Colonel Aureliano Buendia's camp" see Big Mama's death as having provided an opening to come and ask for "the payment of their veteran's pensions which they had been waiting for sixty years" (185). Big Mama's dictatorial hand no longer holds them back. Death effectively disempowers her. As a result of this, those who have felt wronged like the Veterans have never had an opportunity to seek payments of their pensions. Big Mama's death now gives them an opportunity to seek redress for their problem. The space of death gives them a power that they use to pursue their own interest.

Confusion and Bureaucracy as a Response to Death and Dying

Because Big Mama is a politician, the government involvement in her funeral arrangements is quite prominent. Although Big Mama is a landowner in a village in Macondo, her autocratic hegemony is felt throughout the nation and even beyond the borders. In exaggerated fashion Marquez shows the extent of her power. He says that because of her death, "all the church bells tolled" (178), "in dilapidated buses, in the elevators in the Ministries, and in the dismal tearoom hung with pale decorations, people whispered with veneration and respect about the dead [Big Mama], and more importantly her death disrupted

“the social order” (179). Because of her immense power the president “decreed nine days of national mourning” (180), the cathedral is “readied for nine days of funeral rites” (179), the ministers in government immediately get “dressed in funeral garb” (179), and the lights of congress” are lit at the National capital (179). Beyond the borders, the impact of her death is felt enough to make the Supreme Pontiff make a most uncomfortable journey using a canoe that “had been filled with bags of yucca, stalks of green bananas, and crates of chicken” (182) and even stay on for “interminable weeks and months” (183) before Big Mama is buried.

From the above enumeration of the effect that Big Mama’s death has on the state, it is clear that she had negotiated an identity and a space for herself that makes her a one of the cream of the society. Her death indeed ruffles quite some feathers.

Clearly, the government recognises that Big Mama is an important person deserving great honour in death and even at her burial. Ironically, however, this is not to be and instead a lot of outrageous things happen before and during the funeral because of the government bureaucracy that sets in. Marquez puts it succinctly by saying, “such a noble aim [of giving Big Mama a decent burial] was to collide, nevertheless, with certain grave inconveniences” (180).

All through her life, Big Mama had made use of government machinery to impose her dictatorship on the people. Yet it is curiously ironical that the inhumanity she shows others

when she was alive is met by a similar “inhumanity” when she dies. Jonathan Dollimore says that institutions are fraught with what he refers to as “the cancer of the Human [together with its double] the inhumane” (124). He argues that people may want to treat others properly and in a humane manner but often the inhuman infringes upon this desire to do good. In the case of Big Mama, the president and the ministers have the intention of ensuring that Big Mama’s funeral is given the prominence and pomp it deserves but unfortunately the inhumane sets in and things do not work out as they should have.

It is ironical that the reason for the debacle of Big Mama’s funeral is brought about by the political machinations that Big Mama’s ancestors created. “The judicial structure of the country, built by remote ancestors of Big Mama, was not prepared for events such as [Big Mama’s funeral] (181). Apparently, the president cannot just attend the funeral unless certain laws are changed. Thus the time it takes between when Big Mama death and her burial is unnecessarily prolonged. For example, to ensure that the president attends the funeral, a lot of rules and regulations stopping him from attending have to be annulled first and this takes a considerable amount of time to effect. Marquez says that,” Interminable hours were filled with words, words, words, [and] the historical blahblahblah” (180). This means that the government operatives spend a pointless amount of time trying to beat the red tape installed by no other than the leaders themselves. This is because they had never envisaged a situation where one of them would die and their burial necessitate the attendance of the president himself. Marquez exaggerates the waiting and says that they had to wait for months as “the corpse awaited the decision in a 104 [degrees] under the shade” (181).

The level of government red tape that results in the poor treatment of Big Mama's body depicts the absurdity of the human conditions. First of all, the writer highlights the manner in which leaders make rules to govern people. They often make rules that favour their stay in power. These rules end up forming the basis of the bureaucracy evident in many governments. However, the irony is that the originators of some of the regulations are often so myopic that they do not foresee that these same rules could affect them or other leaders like them. This is what happens in Big Mama's funeral. The rules created by previous self-centered regimes mar a funeral that was supposed to be “the greatest funeral in the world” (184).

Secondly, regimes that establish inhuman rules often institutionalise such rules. The institutions have no humane face. The people in the institutions suffer from what Jean Baudrillard refers to as the “cancer of the human” (qtd. in Dollimore 207). This means that the institutions are anchored on policies that are inhuman as evidenced through their repressive, discriminatory and violent nature. According to Marquez, such regimes are more concerned with ensuring that “formulas are adduced, viewpoints [are] reconciled, or constitution amendments made to allow the president to attend the burial” (180) than how their former shrewd crony is handled in death. The dead person thus becomes the “othered” individual once he or she dies. In a Freudian sense, the people within the government thus divert their libidinal energies from focusing on Big Mama, who now has no visible power because she is dead, to the president who has the more visible power because he is alive. Death thus makes Big Mama a marginalized form that requires no dignified treatment. Institutional laws of governance are more concerned with the living than the dead. In this

case, the government is more concerned with the image of the president in Macondo than the importance of the dead individual. This is why while Big Mama's body is left to rot in the sweltering heat.

In her coffin draped in purple, separated from the reality of the copper turnbuckles, Big Mama was at that moment too absorbed in her formaldehyde eternity to realize the magnitude of her grandeur. All the splendour which she had dreamed of on the balcony of her house during her heat induced insomnia was filled by those forty eight glorious hours during which all the symbols of the age paid homage to her memory. (184)

This excerpt clearly shows the irony and the absurdity of the human condition. When Big Mama was alive she never got to see such grandeur. She only dreamt about it. In death she really has no need for such a grand parade. This therefore calls to attention the futility of people trying to accomplish great feats when they are alive. These great feats come to nothing when someone dies. It is often worse for autocratic leaders. Their treatment of others gives them an elevated sense of power but it ends up estranging them from those that they lead. Thus their deaths are often welcomed with a great sigh of relief. Marquez again highlights this by describing the reactions of the government dignitaries present. He says:

Some of those present were sufficiently aware as to understand that they were witnessing the birth of a new era. Now the pontiff could ascend to Heaven in body and in soul, his mission on earth fulfilled, and the President of the Republic could sit down and govern according to his good judgement, and the queens of all

things that have been or ever will be could marry and be happy and conceive and give birth to many sons. (185)

Although it is clear that Marquez is again engaged in a hyperbolic presentation of the blissful life in Colombia after the death of Big Mama, his intention is to show the futility of living life without realising that power and wealth are momentarily and that death destroys that power. By also saying that finally after the funeral, “the garbage men will come and will sweep up the garbage from her funeral, forever and ever” (186), Marquez especially denounces dictatorship as a very myopic and limited type of power that is built on selfish and narcissistic tendencies. Death finally comes in to demonstrate the fragility of the human condition that no amount of power and wealth can cushion.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the various responses to Big Mama's death. Firstly I focused on Big Mama herself and have taken cognisance of the fact that as a dictator she lives life as if it has no end. Thus the fact that her life is coming to an end catches her by surprise even though she is ninety two years of age. Using the exaggeration inherent in magical realism, Marquez demonstrates the futility of her doctor's attempt to cure her using all kinds of weird treatments. Marquez depicts Big Mama as, sadly, coming to the realisation that she is dying. Ironically, despite knowing that her death is imminent, she still responds with the outright sense of wanting to control aspects of life even when she is dead. However, her attempts to control fail. Marquez seems to be suggesting that the power that dictators wield is very limited and that death comes to remind people of their limited power.

The chapter has also noted that Big Mama's relatives respond in a self centered manner. They are more intent on grabbing the wealth that Big Mama leaves behind than on mourning her passing away. For the general citizenry the response is one of relief because they have suffered under an autocratic matriarchal leader who pretended to be benevolent yet denied them their freedom and independence. They engage in festivities and celebrations instead of mourning Big Mama. Marquez indicates that they engage in this self centered and celebratory approach to death because "the only one who could oppose them and had sufficient power to do so had begun to rot beneath a lead plinth" (185). From a Foucaultian point of view, power emanates from those previously considered too low ranked to question Big Mama's power. Also, as a dead person, Big Mama's power has become absolute because even those in her own family have no intention of heeding to her authority as per her will.

The response of people in government has also come into scrutiny. They are presented as being confused because of the red tape and bureaucratic tendencies in the government institutions that are mandated to organise for the attendance of dignitaries to Big Mama's funeral. They end up ignoring the dead body and concentrating more on ensuring that the dignitaries are comfortable. These dignitaries, ironically, become the centre of focus and not the dead person whom they have come to pay homage to.

Through the usage of the magical realism technique Marquez describes and exaggerates the extent of the absurdity of the dying, death and interment of Big Mama so as to present the manner in which power is very momentary. Magical realism is used to ridicule dictatorship, autocracy and government bureaucracy. It pointedly presents death as a force which

dismantles political and autocratic power. Death reminds dictators that their power is very fickle and short lived.

CHAPTER FOUR: INDIVIDUALISTIC RESPONSES TO DYING AND DEATH IN *AS I LAY DYING* BY WILLIAM FAULKNER

Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that William Faulkner's novel *As I Lay Dying* uses the stream of consciousness technique and direct interior monologues, to expressly examine how characters' minds work especially when confronted with tribulations such as dying and death. This chapter cites display of power, rationalising, denial and regression, perpetuation of selfish interests as the key responses to the fear of dying and death. Proceeding from the analysis, this chapter argues that Faulkner has used what goes on in the minds of the characters to comment on the human experiences of living and of death and dying.

In this chapter, I also demonstrate that Faulkner presents life as being a long journey of death because of the loneliness and isolation of the characters. I examine his use of the journey motif in capturing the power games that the characters engage in as they plan for and finally execute the main character's, Addie's, interment. The study presents the narcissistic behaviour, especially self-centredness, displayed by the characters as responses to the fear of death and dying. I argue that these responses elucidate the kind of unique responses the human's give to unpalatable situations in life. In the final analysis, I argue that the manner in which people live their lives consciously and unconsciously affects their response to dying and death.

About William Faulkner

William Faulkner's biographers Edward Volpe and Dorothy Tuck say that he was born on September 25th, 1897. They have all documented the fact that he dropped out of school at the age of fifteen because of his lack of interest in education and joined the Canadian Royal flying corps so as to go and fight in the 1st world war. However, he did not go to war because a peace agreement was signed on the day he graduated from the flying corps.

He had weird behavioural patterns both at the university he later attended and at the job he undertook at a post office. Nevertheless, he was a good writer and wrote *Visions in the Spring*, *Marble Faun*, *Soldiers*, *Mosquitoes*, *Sartoris*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Sartoris* also known as *Flags in the Dust*, that Faulkner first used the setting of the imaginary Yoknapatawpha country, an imaginary country on which he also bases other works like *As I Lay Dying*. None of these books did very well in the market, thus he earned very little money from them.

Although many critics for a long time found Faulkner's works difficult to respond to, he was nevertheless awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950. This award turned his career around and changed his financial status considerably. In 1962, while at Oxford he got a heart attack and died.

William Faulkner's personal background influenced him to write *As I Lay Dying* just as it did *The Sound and the Fury*. One important influence on the story is that Faulkner grew up in the South. The main source of his inspiration was the history of the American South, especially in the town of Oxford, Mississippi, where he lived most of his life. In addition to the setting,

another influence on the story is Faulkner's own family. Perhaps the most important influence on the story is Faulkner's education, or lack of it. He never graduated from high school, let alone college, but always took pride in his lack of education and his creativity.

Faulkner and the Twentieth Century Modernist Experimentation

During the early part of the twentieth century, in a modernist trend, writers began to experiment with techniques that probed the minds of characters. Prominent among the American authors who experimented with this mode of writing is William Faulkner. Faulkner uses the stream of consciousness technique especially through direct internal monologues and flashbacks to present the characters' varying viewpoints.

The term stream of consciousness was coined by psychologist William James in his book *Principles of Psychology*. James is of the opinion that people do not think logically. Their thought processes are so disjointed that they engage in a process of “now seeing, now hearing, now reasoning, now recollecting, now loving, now hating”(James 2). In other words, their thought processes fluctuate constantly thus there is no logical sequence. In literature the term is used to refer to the manner in which writers “depict the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind of characters” (Cuddon and Preston 886) is stream of consciousness. This means that the stream of consciousness techniques is more character centred than plot or structure centred. Writers use this technique in order to get deeply into the characters' minds so as to examine the sequence of thoughts that determine the characters' actions.

Faulkner, more specifically, used the direct interior monologues. The direct interior monologues entail the presentation of characters thoughts without a commentary from a third person narrator. This is in contrast to indirect interior monologues in which the third person narrator who also comes in to present, guide and comment on a characters thoughts.

Whereas interior monologue allows the reader to get into the psyche of the characters, the stream of consciousness presents the jumbled up nature of the characters' thoughts. The ideas are presented sporadically with the various ideas emerging haphazardly. The characters thoughts move from the past to the present without a clear sequence, yet within this disorder and clear lack of structure, there is still a sense order. For example, the story line in *As I Lay Dying* is very clear despite the novel's seemingly chaotic structure and discourses. Betty Alldredge puts it more concisely by saying, "the reader [has]to hold juxtaposed images suspended in the mind until the total work has been read then allow the emergence of a total thematic image" (3). This means that the novel is like a jigsaw puzzle whose real picture only emerges when the entire puzzle has been completed. It is through a reconstruction of the characters' thought processes that one can get a clear picture of what it is Faulkner intended to present about life in general and death and dying in particular in *As I Lay Dying*.

It is important to note that through 59 interior monologues belong to the 10 family members as well as neighbour and friends who are 15 in number, the character draw attention to their feelings about life in general and express their thoughts concerning Addie's death and the interment journey.

About *As I Lay Dying*

William Faulkner's *As I Dying* is a novel set in the imaginary country of Yoknapatawapha. The story is majorly about a woman, Addie Bundren, who because of being disappointed in her marriage to Anse Burden, extracts a promise from him that when she dies he should move her body from New Hope, where her marital home is, to Jefferson her land of birth, for burial among her people. She wants this done to her so that she can be as far away as possible from the Bundrens. When she dies, her family embarks on a treacherous journey to Jefferson. During the preparation, the journey itself and after the burial, we hear different perspectives of life in general and death in particular from the different characters.

We learn that when Addie got married to Anse, she had hoped to find happiness in marriage only to be disappointed when he does not fulfil her. When she gets her first born son, Cash, she believes that her husband had only hidden behind the word love to get her pregnant. She believes that he did not love her. She decides to get back at him after she gives birth to her son, Cash. To do this, she befriends another man, Revered Whitfield, and she gets a child, Jewel, with him. This is something that her husband does not even know about. She then gets other children, Darl, Dewey Dell and Vardaman, with her husband to compensate him for the fact that she had gotten one child out of wedlock.

The only child that she dots on is Jewel whom she believes is her saviour. However, Jewel is a selfish young man who only thinks of himself and his comfort. Another son, Darl, has a unique characteristic of being able to read other people's minds. It is this characteristic that makes the reader know many things that are happening in the lives of the other characters.

For example, he is the only other character, other than Addie, who knows that Jewel is not Anse's son. Darl holds this against Jewel thus they frequently have fights.

Because of being unfulfilled in her marriage, Addie decides to revenge by making Anse promise to bury her in Jefferson. Thus when she dies, the family plans to bury her there. However, through internal monologues, we learn that all of the characters are going on the journey for their own selfish motives. Cash wants to show off his carpentry skills, Anse intends to buy a set of false teeth, Dewey Dell wants to get medicine to procure an abortion, Vardaman wants to eat bananas and to see a toy train in the shop window, and Jewel wants to show off his horse. Only Darl seems to have no other intention but to bury his mother.

What is interesting about the preparation and actual journey is that, Cash makes the coffin in the presence of the dying Addie and she seems to be happy about it. Nonetheless, despite Cash spending a lot of time keenly making the coffin, Addie does not fit in it so the Bundrens decide to turn the body so that the head faces the side the legs would have been. When they set off on the journey, it proves to be quite treacherous and they almost lose the coffin when they try to cross flooded River Yoknapatawpha.

Very early in the journey, Cash breaks one of his legs. This happens when he goes after his working tools which he loses in the raging waters. After he breaks the leg, Anse, who does not want to spend any money to take him to hospital, decides to set the leg himself using a cement cast. He ends up not setting it right and it develops gangrene. Later Peabody, tries to treat the leg, but indicates that Cash will have to walk with a limp for the rest of his life. The

Bundrens also lose the mules used to pull the cart carrying the coffin and Anse sells Jewel's horse so that he can buy more mules.

When the Bundrens get to one of the towns on the way, they are chased away by the inhabitants because they are carrying a decomposing body. Because Darl does not like what is happening to his mother's body, he decides to burn down a barn where they have been housed for one of the nights because he hopes to burn the coffin and the body in it but he does not succeed. He is arrested and taken to a mad people's house because his family members, especially Dewey Dell, say that he is mad. He is left there as finally the family reaches Jefferson where they bury Addie. In Jefferson Dewey Dell, who is pregnant, tries to procure an abortion but is instead conned by the salesman and is given fake medication even as the salesman takes advantage of her sexually. None of the measures she tries to take help her procure the abortion. Finally, after Addie's burial, Anse buys a new set of teeth and also comes along with a woman, whom he introduces as the new Mrs Bundren.

What then is Faulkner's intention of writing this novel? According to Edward Volpe, "the subject of the novel is death; its central image is the human corpse, generating furious passions and furious activities" (127). Indeed dying and death are the central concern of *As I Lay Dying*. It is centered on the death and interment of Addie Bundren and especially on how the characters respond to life in general and Addie's death, interment journey and the interment.

Life as a Long Period of Dying: A Nihilistic Response

One thing that is noticeable in the presentation of characters in *As I Lay Dying* is that almost all members of the Bundren household are severely influenced by the meaninglessness of their lives or by the desire to overcome the nothingness that surrounds them. Most of these characters also have fragmented pasts upon which their lives are built and which then affects the way they live. Life is presented as if it were one long period of dying. It thus invokes nihilistic feelings as well as a sense of fear in the characters which they try to suppress through all manner of ways. The characters are concerned with how to make meaning out of a meaningless world that makes living a challenge and dying and death an even bigger challenge.

According to Pratt, nihilism refers to a belief that life is meaningless and that there is nothing positive in the established social order. "It is often associated with extreme pessimism and a radical scepticism that condemns existence" ("Nihilism"). Albert Camus and other writers of existentialist persuasion refer to this idea of nihilism as a sense of the absurd. Camus popularised the absurdist ideology in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in which he said:

A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and the setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity (6).

Camus highlights the idea that human beings often find themselves in a constant struggle for meaning in a world that does not offer straight forward answers or solutions to problems. Like many other existentialists before him, Camus concludes that while there is no essential “meaning” in life, the struggle to create that meaning is essential to survival in life.

Life in *As I Lay Dying* is presented as being overwhelming. The present is informed by the past and characters are faced with the challenge of having to deal with these past histories in order to find an often illusive answer to their problems. For example, a close analysis of Addie’s interior monologue reveals that she grew up as an isolated and lonely child. Other than her father, no other member of her family is mentioned in the novel. Whatever is mentioned about her father is not even positive. He appears to have had a negative influence on her. One significant thing that he tells her that, “the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time” (157). These words entail a nihilistic philosophy that the young Addie carries into adulthood. As a result she is brainwashed into thinking that life is a purely total engagement with death. Death is presented to Addie as being the reward for living. The prophetic words make Addie believe that living is no more than an extended preparation for death thus there is really nothing much to be gained from living. This is probably she begins planning for her death very early in her life.

Addie’s negative childhood past informs and shapes her view of life. This negative view of life distorts her mind in such a way that she believes that life is based on negative forces around her. According to Calvin Bedient, life in *As I Lay Dying* is the antagonist as it is seemingly in conflict with Addie. Addie is affected by unconstructive thinking to an extent

that it affects the manner she lives with other people. Because her father plants a negative view of life in her mind, she allows it to control her life. Rood et. al. say that unconstructive thinking often creates emotional disorders. Negative moods, negative self-beliefs and finally psychological and physical withdrawal from contact with other people are some of the responses that Addie exhibits when things do not go her way. For example, as a teacher, she wants her students to have a close relationship with her, yet absurdly, she “kills” any positive relationship that she could have formed with her students because she whips if they do not respond to her. She says:

I would look forward to the times when they faulted so that I could whip them. When the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran, and I would think with each blow of the switch: Now you are aware of me. (157)

Ideally, teachers are thought of as role models to their students. In so doing they are expected to add “life” to their students by adhering to “moral virtues such as fairness” (Lumpkin 45). Addie fails to adhere to the principle of fairness thus her action kills the relationship between her and her students. Instead of trying to create a life sustaining relationship with the children, her only recourse is to physically injure them. Alldredge argues that Addie is merely displaying a teachers’ frustration at the student’s withdrawal from her. However, the beating that Addie subjects the children to is unnecessarily cruel and this isolates her from the students that she wants to connect with.

Addie’s action is an indicator of a character who wants to use her power to force people into relating with her. Unfortunately, her power is thwarted by the students who also display their

own power by isolating her further. Michel Foucault's views concerning how power permeates from all areas of man's social relationships can be seen coming into play here. Both the children and Addie are intent on displaying the power that they feel that they have. The children do it by frustrating Addie's attempts to get close to them and she, on the other hand, opts to whip the children with the hope that they will become aware of her. This in effect kills any emotional and physical relationship that she and the children might have had. In her professional space, Addie kills the companionship from her students that would have added life into a life that had already been marred by words that had destroyed a positive pursuit of life. Addie's nihilistic response to this relationship with her student causes an emotional death to occur in the relationship.

When Addie gets married to Anse, she displays similar sadistic and selfish tendencies. She hopes that with marriage, Anse will meet her physical and emotional needs in the manner she desires. When he does not, she pushes him away and even believes that he is as good as dead. She says that "he [Anse] did not know he was dead" (162). Addie goes to great pains to get a life of fulfilment but on not getting what she wants, she withdraws from the object of her pain. Withdrawal and repression of emotions is symbolic of the emotional death that she experiences in the marriage.

One can compare Addie to the tramps, Estragon and Vladimir, in *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Becket, who are thrust in a meaningless wait for a character known as Godot who fails to turn up. Just like Estragon and Vladimir, Addie engages in an existential absurdity of waiting for Anse or any other man for that matter, to fulfil her physical and emotional needs.

This is demonstrated in what she does next. Because Addie has no human power to change Anse or his treatment of her, she opts to change her circumstances. She believes that she can solve one emotional pain through substitution. She hopes to change her circumstances by getting another man to replace her ineffectual husband. She thus opts for the Reverend Whitfield, with whom she has an adulterous affair. Things seem to be good and she even gets a child, Jewel, with him. Yet, even this relationship goes wrong and she becomes disillusioned once again. Her failed relationships then set her firmly into a kind of depression she does not recover from until she dies.

Addie is a woman trapped in relationships that silences her and represses her desires. She is a woman who longs to find a space to express her emotions and indeed has the power to do so. Unfortunately, she defines this identity by wanting to control people or expecting other people to control and define her place in the relationship. Her position is only definable in relation to the men and the children in her life. As a result of not being able to really consolidate happiness and comfort in her marriage and in her adulterous relationship, she ends up withdrawing into herself. To this end, Addie's emotional death continues to take shape. The waiting for an emotional satisfaction that never comes to fruition is an emotional struggle that deadens her spirit to live.

Loneliness is the one thing that Addie hates the most. Other than getting a husband, Addie believes that bearing children of her own is another way that can assuage her loneliness. However, soon after the birth of her first born son, she finds that she is not as happy as she thought she would be. She becomes even more depressed because she believes that Anse has

betrayed her. She feels that Anse simply makes her pregnant without loving her and she feels violated by this. She says: “He [Anse] had a word too. Love, he called it. But I had been used to words for a long time. I knew that that word was like the others: just a shape to fill the lack” (160). This implies that Addie does not feel the love that Anse claims to have for her. As a result, her marriage does nothing to remove the emptiness and loneliness that she feels. The birth of her children does not also alleviate this loneliness either. Ideally, marriage and giving birth to children should give life to the family and to a woman even more. Yet, in Addie’s case it does the exact opposite. Instead of her enjoying the fruitfulness of her marriage through the birth of her children she feels a sense of fruitlessness and emptiness and emotional death. Life thus becomes meaningless for Addie and extreme pessimism and radical scepticism become part of her existence.

Faulkner seems to be highlighting the idea that no human being is capable of giving another total happiness. It is like waiting for Godot, in Samuel Beckett’s play, *Waiting for Godot*, who never turns up. The power to be happy and to be fulfilled is in the individual. This is what Addie fails to grasp from the very beginning. She allows her father’s nihilistic prophesy to direct her life. These words put her on a track of not only self-destruction but also a destruction of her family.

Listening to Addie’s internal monologue one can discern that Addie has never experienced the power that comes from being part of a family. Her own childhood was devoid of any close contact with family members. In fact she indicates that her family background is built on death as she says that all her family members are dead. When she and Anse first meet, she

tells him that her family lives in Jefferson, “in the cemetery” (159). She seems to have been orphaned at a very early age and always feels the emptiness of not having both parents. She says she is no different from other orphans who people point out faces to in a crowd and are told: “That is your father, your mother” (160). Thus without a positive family history and background, which is further complicated by her adherence to her father’s nihilistic and prophetic words, Addie has nothing positive to pass to her children. Her rejection of most of her children has a negative effect on them. Addie finds it hard to love her children and the children find it hard to love her in return. Addie’s lack of capacity to love even her own children presents her as a symbol of death. She is a woman who creates life but, because she does not know how to nurture it, she ends up killing it. Her dead and empty background ends up creating a life that is empty and dead. Faulkner thus demonstrates that a family can perish as a result of negative philosophies that infect or destroys the whole family. A mother who substitutes love with negative values creates selfish and egocentric family members who are incapable of caring even for a dying wife or mother or be overly concerned about her when she finally dies.

Addie’s nihilistic tendency also makes her not trust words uttered by people even expressing genuine feelings. For example, she does not trust Anse’s use of the word love. She also does not trust the word motherhood because it “was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had children didn’t care whether there was a word for it or not” (159). Her scepticism concerning the ability of language to capture feelings extends to other words too. She says, “I knew that fear was invented by someone that had never had the fear;

pride, who had never had pride” (160). She also uses figurative language to capture the insincerity within the words that people speak. She says:

I knew that it had been, not that they [Addie’s students] had dirty noses, but that we had had to use one another by words like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching, and that only through the blows of my switch could their blood and their blood flow as one stream. (160)

Addie regards words as being limited in expressing the meaning of abstract experiences. Addie’s mantra is that words without accompanying genuine actions are simply dead words. She believes that when people just use words without understanding their implications, they cause others terrible damages. They do not infuse meaning into the words. When she compares the use of words with that of spiders that hang from the roof but do not touch each other, she is expressing her frustration with human relationships. Caroline Slaughter explains this by saying that such words are merely mechanical and cannot be used to arbitrate and bring people together. The implication is that emotional deaths occur in human relationships because people engage in empty rhetoric. Since people do not mean what they say, the relationships become empty and the people become distant from each other. Michel Delville puts more succinctly by suggesting that in *As I Lay Dying*, “words are destructive entities depriving life of substance and motion-fossilising experiences...” (66).

From the foregoing, one can say that Faulkner is making a statement about the absurdity of life by highlighting that death is embedded in human relationships that should ideally hold life. Many times people get into relationships with others with the hope that they will get the comfort and love that they desire. However, such expectations are often not met by these

other people. Edward Volpe reiterates this by saying that there is a danger in the “dependence upon emotional attachment and upon the identity of others for our own sense of identity” (133). This is because, as demonstrated in this novel, people often say one thing at one time but do something entirely different the next moment. Their actions prove that they are not always genuine in what they say. Anse, for example, pursues Addie and she believes that marriage to him will be companionable. However, the marriage becomes frustrating for Addie. She is not just frustrated by her husband’s lack of warmth and intimacy; she is also frustrated by the fact that even when she gives birth to children, she fails to find joy in these children. The reason the birth of the children frustrates her is because it simply reminds her that in her marriage to Anse, she is merely a vessel of creation. When she makes it known to Anse that she is contemplating her death, all that Anse tells her is, “you and me ain’t done chapping yet” (161). Anse only shows interest in Addie because as a sexual and procreation object. He is not even concerned with the fact that she is contemplating death. Anse’s and Addie’s focus of sexuality is quite different. Addie desires intimacy, while Anse is only interested in the sexual act itself. Addie thus finds marriage and motherhood a burden and this is why she takes a swipe at the use of words like “love” and “motherhood.” As a result, Addie simply goes through the motions of living together with her family yet she is dead to them. We can thus regard Addie as being a living dead. Her desires and wishes go unfulfilled and this makes her feel alienated in the marriage. Her frustrations in the marriage make her want to take revenge against the object of her frustration. It is because of her psychological and emotional death that she begins to think about her physical death. It is at this moment of disillusionment that she extracts a promise from Anse to bury her amongst her people in Jefferson when she finally dies. She says:

Then I found that I had Darl. At first I would not believe it. Then I believed that I would kill Anse. It was as though he had tricked me, hidden within a word like within a paper screen and struck me in the back through it. But when I realized that I had been tricked by words older than Anse, and that the same word had tricked Anse too, and that my revenge would be that he would never know that I was taking revenge. And when Darl was born I asked Anse to promise to take me back to Jefferson when I died, because I knew that father had been right, even when he couldn't have known he was right any more than I could have known I was wrong. (160-61)

This monologue demonstrates the irony of life. Faulkner presents radical views concerning marriage and motherhood. Whereas people often think of marriage as an institution in which a couple is bound to have a blissful love connection, Addie's view of life demonstrates this is not always the case. Addie is caught up in a loveless marriage. This is an indication that expecting a man or a woman to completely and perfectly meet one's needs, sexual or otherwise is not always possible. Couples are sometimes so discordant, that their relationships die even before they begin. Addie and Anse is a mismatched couple and this is clear right from the beginning of their relationship. The fact that Addie thinks that a woman can change Anse's way of doing things is the beginning of her problems. Many people get into relationships and marriage believing that they can change the other individuals' character traits. They often get very disappointed when they realise that they cannot. This obviously is a foundation of a dead marriage. Similarly, Faulkner seems to be of the opinion that motherhood (or fatherhood for that matter) is not every person's cup of tea. Therefore creating one's identity based on any of these institutions can easily become a daunting affair for some people. In so doing they end up "dying" in the very institutions that were supposed

to put life into them. Faulkner seems to suggest that life in an unhappy marriage is a struggle and one feels dead within it.

In her monologue, Addie opts not to blame Anse fully for her predicament because she knows that Anse had been tricked by the same words that had tricked her. She believes that many other people have been tricked by words. This is an indication that she believes that people around the world have consciously or unconsciously, lied to others through their words and because Anse allowed the words to trick him, Addie decides to take revenge without him ever getting to know that she was taking revenge. Through Addie's interior monologue, we get to learn that death is not just physical but can be emotional too. Also, a perceived lack of genuineness in communication can destroy a person's zeal for life.

Life is thus presented as being a burden because of the lack of genuine words and action. Because she cannot face the pain of living, Addie withdraws into herself. Jill Bergman concludes that in the end, Addie is better dying because actual death is better than living.

From the foregoing, one can deduce the idea of how power plays out in relationships. All individual feels that they have the power to structure relationships in a manner comfortable to them. Their narcissistic tendencies can be seen in their self-centeredness. Anse wants a wife just because he needs a woman to take care of his physical and sexual needs. He is not bothered with ensuring that his wife's emotional needs are met. In so doing, he disconnects from his wife and makes the marriage a death trap for Addie. Addie on the other hand,

expects her husband to automatically know what she wants. Instead of working on her marriage, she disengages from it and tries to find fulfilment in another relationship. She believes that she has the power to hit back at her husband through this relationship. However, this does not work. Finally, she decides to hit back at her husband by asking him to bury her in Jefferson amongst her people when she dies. By the end of the novel, we realise that her power as a corpse is very limited. She cannot entirely reshape her husband. Thus she isolates herself physically and emotionally. Addie then responds by spending the rest of her life preparing for her physical death. The writer thus suggests that emotional death can lead to physical pain.

Rationalising as a Response to death and dying

In Addie's interior monologue, Faulkner also demonstrates that characters can respond to death through rationalising their actions. As mentioned earlier, Addie tries to find a solution to her emotional death through a physical connection with Reverend Whitfield. She not only has sex with him but also gets a child with him. However, Addie's relationship raises some fundamental questions. Firstly, one wonders why Addie, a woman who strongly believes that her husband has betrayed her, would go out of her way to betray him too and attempt to rationalise it. Secondly, one wonders why a man of the cloth, like Whitfield, would engage in a clandestine and adulterous relationship with a member of his congregation. In this context, Faulkner raises the idea that rationalising wrong behaviour leads to moral death. Addie's affair with Whitfield reinforces the idea that there is a gap between words and deeds.

Addie rationalises her adultery by saying that she had finally found the very thing that she was looking for in a relationship. Even though her father's words were previously resoundingly clear that "the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" (157), in her relationship with Whitfield she changes the mantra and says, "I believed that the reason was the duty to the alive" (sic) (163). She excuses her adultery by suggesting that even though she knew that they were sinning, she needed to do so as a way of staying alive and that she could fight her emotional death through a sexual union with another man. In fact, she believes that the adulterous relationship she and Whitfield engage in is not really sinning because they shed off their sins once they removed their clothes. She says:

I would think of sin as I would think of the clothes that we both wore in the world's face....I would think of sins as garments which we would remove in order to shape and coerce the terrible blood to the forlorn echo of the dead word high in the air.
(163)

Clearly, Addie's actions go against her beliefs concerning betrayal. She seems to believe that she has the power and the right to engage in an extra-marital relationship because in order for her sexual needs should be met. She also believes that she and Whitfield can sidestep sin when they remove their garments. She thus decides to negotiate a space that results in a moment of fulfilment for her and momentarily infuses life in her. One can view this as Addie's attempt to escape the death within her marriage by looking for life outside the marriage. However, adultery also has its shortcomings in that it too may not permanently infuse life in the individuals engaged in it. It leads to moral death. Jeffery Murphy posits that a morally dead individual "shows no sense of shame" (284). Although Addie shows a

semblance of shame by deciding to get other children with Anse so as to “clean up the house” (164), the fact that she loves Jewel, Whitfield’s son, more than the other children shows that she is not fully remorseful.

Whitfield’s actions also depict the extent to which he is dead morally. Obviously, a man of the cloth like Whitfield would have taken an oath to protect members of his flock yet he goes against this oath and has an adulterous relationship with Addie, a member of his flock. He knows that what he did was wrong yet he takes very many years to even confess to God his sin. His decision to finally tell Anse about what is done is informed by his desire to “beg the forgiveness of the man whom [he] had betrayed” (166) before Addie dies. However, this guilt does not last very long. Immediately he learns of Addie’s death he sees no need to apologise. He rationalises this by saying that the fact that he was willing to confess is an indication that God has forgiven him. He also cheekily argues that the fact that “[he] framed the words of [his] confession it was to Anse that [he] spoke them even though he [Anse] was not there” (168). One can clearly see that he is a shameless, two faced pastor who through justifying his action, fails to liberate himself from his moral death.

Interestingly, Addie is aware that Whitfield is a character who is dead morally. Even though earlier on she had justified her adulterous engagement with him, it is his inability to maintain high moral standards that disillusioned Addie. Even though she is part of the sinful act, Addie expects Whitfield to have a greater moral standing than her but he fails to do so. In fact she believes that he contaminates her with sin. She says:

I would think of sin as I would think of the clothes we both wore in the world's space, of the circumspection necessary because he was he and I was I; the sin the more utter and terrible since he was the instrument ordained by God who created the sin, to sanctify that sin that He had created. (163)

The back and forth movement depicted in Addie's thoughts and actions clearly demonstrates William James views concerning human being's thoughts, and consequently their actions as depicted through the stream of consciousness technique. He says "now we are seeing, now hearing, now reasoning, now recollecting, now loving, now hating, and in a hundred other ways we know our minds to be alternatively engaged" (2). In other words, human beings are always engaged in some form of psychological struggle against moral death. In their minds they know what is good for them to engage in so as to sustain their lives, however, their actions normally betray them and this is what leads to emotional, moral deaths and sometimes their physical deaths. These two characters narcissistic behaviour and their misuse of the positions that they hold as evidenced by their endeavours to rationalise their behaviour is an indication of the moral decay and death depicted in this novel.

A Egotistical Response to Death and Dying

Other than Addie, another key character that Faulkner uses to demonstrate that death is inherent in the responses that humans give to life is Anse. Anse's manner of living life is presented as one of the key factors that cause Addie's emotional and moral deaths and her eventual physical death. Anse's peculiarity is presented as a major cause of Addie undue emotional pain and final descent into physical death. Through Addie's and Darl's interior

monologues, Anse is presented as a misshapen character. To begin with, his physical outlook is symbolic of his inside deformation. A physical description of Anse is a good entry point to show how unbalanced he is. Addie describes him as a man with a hump and who looked “like a bird hunched in the cold weather, on a wagon seat” (158). He is also described as being toothless, wearing patched overalls, and having a hangdog expression. Darl describes him as having an “owl-like” look (43) and as being “dangle armed” (47). He also describes him as “a falling steer or an old tall bird” (150). Furthermore, his “feet are badly splayed, his toes cramped and bent and warped, with no toenail at all on his little toes, from working so hard in the wet homemade shoes when he was a boy” (11). All these descriptions of Anse are not flattering. He is presented as a grotesque character. According to Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*, the grotesque refers to a phenomenon in which something or someone is in a state of transformation. The thing or person is “an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming that utilizes the battered grotesque body to represent the constant human state of metamorphosis” (483). Something or someone that is grotesque is one which/who is incomplete, abnormal and malformed. Anse’s malformed or grotesque body is used symbolically by Faulkner to make the reader anticipate that he or she will be dealing with a person who also has malformed behavioural traits which then form the basis of understanding his response to life in general and to Addie’s death in particular.

Through Addie’s monologue, Anse is presented as a man with a split character. For example, we learn that although he pursues Addie fervently and manages to secure her as a wife, he later becomes lethargic and unable to satisfy Addie emotionally and sexually. Secondly, although he had, as a young man, been previously a hard worker who had managed to buy

himself a farm and build a house on it, he later became a very lazy person. It seems that Faulkner's intention is to demonstrate that in relationships, the reason that people cause others a lot of pain is because of the conflicted character. What they display on the surface is not necessarily who they truly are. Stephen Ross says that this is "part of a more pattern implicit in the complex pattern of Faulkner's novel, in which we are presented with not merely varying perceptions of people and events, but perhaps with conflicting ways of interpreting the motives for their actions" (4). I believe that once Anse gets married he opts for a self-centred and lazy man's approach to life. He realises that he does not have to do much in order to enjoy the benefits that accrue from the marriage.

Anse, for example, gives outrageous reasons for not engaging in work. He says that if he works, he will sweat, get sick and die. He also believes that it is unfair to expect people to spend so much time working if the only reward for them will be in heaven and this means that they will have to wait so long before they get this reward. Anse's lazy man's approach to life greatly affects Addie. Faulkner does not say it expressly but it would seem that Anse's laziness does not just affect his physical work output but also his emotional and sexual output. As a result, Addie dismisses him as a "dead" man. This is why she opts to get another sexual partner. Subsequently, his lack of enthusiasm and his inability to meet her emotional needs results in her emotional and even moral death. In other words, Anse, to a large extent, is to blame for what happens to Addie. Addie's depression results in her just lying down and beginning the process of dying physically. Faulkner thus shows the interconnectedness between the physical death, the emotional death and the moral death. Peabody explains this interconnectedness when he goes to visit Addie at her deathbed. He says:

She had been dead these ten days. I suppose it's having been part of Anse for so long that she cannot even make that change, if change it be. I can remember how when I was young I believed death to be a phenomenon of the body; now I know it to be merely a function of the mind-and that of the mind of those who suffer bereavement. (38)

Peabody corroborates my argument that that people who are in bad relationship can be dead even though they are alive. In Addie's case, depression and inability to cope with the empty life that Anse exposes her to, diminishes her desire to live.

It is not just in the manner that he lives his life that Anse has perfected his self-centered approach to doing things. It is also seen in the manner he responds to Addie's dying and death. He has the power to make things better for Addie by seeking medical attention for her but as the doctor, Peabody, indicates Anse is too lazy to do so or he just does not care enough to do this for Addie. On one of the rare days when Anse asks him to come and examine Addie, Peabody argues that "if it had finally occurred to Anse himself that he needed [a doctor] then it was already too late" (36). Anse is too unconcerned to show a strong emotional concern for his wife. Even his calling of Peabody at this time is half-hearted. Anse himself says that he took time because he "jest kept a-thinking" (40). It is strange that a husband just sits around "thinking" as his wife is lying on her death-bed? He treats her dying as a non-issue. If taking care of his wife will make him exert himself, then Anse will have nothing to do with it. The fact that he merely sits around without engaging in finding treatment is an indicator of how people can compromise the lives of others through selfish interests. The fact that his own wife is dying does not even make him change his lifestyle so

that he can be seen to be doing something to alleviate that bad situation. His wife's impending death fails to elicit any change in him.

Anse uses Peabody as his scape goat. He believes that is it Peabody's role as a doctor to tell Addie that she is dying or that she herself should come to her own understanding that she is dying. After Peabody examines Addie, Anse asks him if he has told Addie that she is dying. When Peabody says that he has not, Anse says "She'll know hit. I know that when she see you [Peabody] she would know hit, same as writing. You wouldn't need to tell her" (sic) (40). Probably his way of responding is also a kind of anxiety over death that culminates in a self centred response to Addie's dying.

As Addie is lying on her death bed, Anse focuses more on how he will move her body from Good Hope to Jefferson. She is not even dead yet he engages in planning her journey of interment. In his self-centred approach to this he insists that his children, Darl and Jewel, should go and deliver some wood for Vernon Tull so that he can make three dollars out of this delivery. He is not bothered that his sons are anxious that their mother might die when they are far away. All he needs is the money. He rationalises his decision in an uncaring manner by saying that his wife expects him to get the money so that when she dies they can start the journey to Jefferson soon after. Anse believes that money empowers an individual. However, he gets the money at the expense of his wife's well-being. A money based and materialistic trajectory of life makes him ignore the fact that saving a life is much cheaper and more worthwhile than planning to bury a dead person. He only realises how expensive it

is to inter a dead person when they get on the journey to Jefferson. Getting money and using it to inter somebody is thus presented as being more glorified than saving a life.

It is also clear that Anse is intent on playing the role of a hero in the space of death. He expects other characters to see that he is doing Addie a favour by keeping her promise to ferry her body to Jefferson. Later on we actually see how engaged he is in a selfish exploitation of death to advance his own agenda. Olga Vickery points out that “there is even a sense in which Anse thoroughly enjoys the situation as chief mourner for he is, for once in his life, a person of importance” (52). The space of death is thus seen as a space of self aggrandisement rather than a space of selflessness. It becomes a space where individuals can egoistically try to present themselves as heroes even though they are villains.

Anse demonstrates that his key interest is to get a new set of teeth in Jefferson and not to bury his wife. Freud would argue that Anse is a man fixated at the oral stage where selfish pleasure is what he pursues. His infantile desire to fulfil his needs make him rationalise his selfish actions by claiming that he has suffered a lot from his lack of teeth. He says “in fifteen years I ain’t et the victuals He aimed for man to eat to keep his strength up” (191). Anse is thus a man who uses indirect and deceptive methods to make things work in his favour. He does not even take a moment to mourn his wife even though he all along has pretended that he is concerned with ensuring that he keeps his promise to her. Clearly his grotesque and malformed nature takes centre stage in the manner in which he deals with death. He is ready to dishonour his wife through pretending that he cares.

Although he is the head of the family, Anse fails to render the much needed guidance and leadership. Vickery indicates that, “Anse... is always the bystander, contemplating events [Rather than helping]...” (51). He fails in many ways but he never takes responsibility for his failures. Despite the fact that he is the reason why this journey is instigated in the first place, he does nothing to make the journey a success while the rest of the family and neighbours do all the work. Additionally, he makes others make sacrifices for the journey yet he makes none. For example, he makes Jewel sacrifice his horse so as to buy new mules for the journey and he takes away Jewels and Cash’s money and uses it to buy his new set of teeth. All of Anse’s actions regarding the trip are self-oriented, and a clear indicator of his narcissistic behaviour. He has allowed his ego to grow to an extent that he believes that it is within his rights to expect favours while he gives nothing in return. He uses the power as a father to cause others pain and consternation. He compounds this problem by not even seeming to realise that his actions affect others. It is no wonder that by the time the family leaves Jefferson after Addie’s interment, he not only has a new set of teeth but also a new wife. He does not even give his children an opportunity to mourn their mother nor does he consult them to determine their feelings about his move. He simply imposes a new mother on them and expects them to deal with this new state of affairs. To a great extent he makes a mockery of the mourning process. Death fails to impact on him and as a result he stands out as a man whose emotional part is malformed and self centered.

Another character that portrays a self centered response to death is Dewey Dell, Addie’s daughter. When we first meet her in the story, she is fanning her dying mother and appears to

be concerned about her welfare. However immediately the mother dies, she shows that she is not overly moved by the death. She laments her mother's death in a strange way:

I heard that my mother is dead. I wish I had time to let her die. I wish I had time to wish I had. It is because in the wild and outraged earth too soon too soon too soon. It's not that I wouldn't and will not it's that it is too soon too soon too soon (114).

The reason given for this apathy and don't care attitude is that she is more concerned by the fact that she is pregnant and does not want to keep the pregnancy. She thus spends most of her time thinking about how to get rid of the pregnancy and hopes to use the journey of interment to get rid of the pregnancy. Other than Darl who telepathically knows what Dewey Dell is going through, no other character can see that her immediate concern is not in the fact that her mother is dying or is dead, but in how to procure the abortion. Fundamentally Dewey Dell is connected to Addie in that she is a woman who has been forced to respond to the affront of patriarchy as exemplified in her being mistreated by her boyfriend Laffe who does not want to be bothered about the pregnancy. This treatment is similar to the one that Addie has had to deal with from an insensitive Anse. Laffe has left the entire burden of handling the pregnancy to Dewey Dell. Because of Laffe's don't care attitude, it becomes increasingly clear that the only way that Dewey Dell can genuinely mourn her mother is if she can lose her unborn child. Death thus provides a space for the intention to destroy a life. Dewey Dell's preoccupation with how to get rid of the baby ends up compounding her already bad situation. MacGowan, the salesman in the drugstore in Jefferson ends up taking advantage of her ignorance and desperation and forces her into a sexual act with the guise that he will

give her the drugs. This situation also compounds her inability to mourn her mother. According to Swiggart, “Dewey Dell’s enthusiasm for the trip is a consequence of her being pregnant and hoping to find something in Jefferson to cure her trouble,” rather than to honour or mourn her mother (110). Dewey Dell’s inability to mourn her mother is because of having self-centred interests. Thus in *As I Lay Dying*, the space of death is presented as one that is devoid of empathy and emotional attachment. This is because characters are so engaged in the business of living their self-centered lives that they do not take a moment to mourn the death of a close family member.

Attempts of Ordering the World

Cash is the one character who responds to death in a manner to showing that he is in control of things. He is the most practical of the Bundren’s. Although I find it weird that he makes his mother’s coffin even before she dies and he even does it right before her eyes, however, the fact that he works laboriously on the coffin to ensure that there is a coffin to accommodate his mother once she dies shows that he is in touch with death. He does not deny death’s existence; rather, he accepts that it is part of life. Liam Butchart and Arthur Kinney argue that Cash displays the character of an individual who is well adjusted. However, I beg to differ with them because I do not think crafting a coffin while someone who is dying watches can be regarded as being well adjusted. In fact I think it is an indication of a macabre and distorted view of how to prepare for the death of someone. Despite this macabre action by Cash, one cannot fail to see that Addie indeed has a special place in his heart and this is why he attempts to mourn his mother appropriately through his labour of love for her. Seeking approval from her for the way in which he is crafting the coffin for her is his way of ordering

the world from which his mother is about to exit. He wants to be sure that she is happy with the coffin that she will finally be buried in. This is because he appears to be quite at peace with the world. He takes up his role as a carpenter in the most organised manner and practical manner. On account of the love he has for his mother, Cash seems to show an understanding of her need to die as a way of escaping the pain that she has undergone and crafting a coffin that befits her is his way of showing that he understands his mother and that she also understands him. Hyatt Waggoner reiterates this view, in *William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World*, by describing Cash as "...the artist and craftsman, maker, and... the committed man" (72). His commitment is in ensuring that Addie gets buried decently.

However, as a demonstration that Faulkner is fully intent on showing that life is full of absurdities and man's best attempts at managing it is often futile, Addie body does not fit into the coffin despite Cash having done all the organised structuring of the coffin. Addie has to be put in a reversed position with the legs on the side of the head and vice versa. Also the coffin is finally loaded onto the wagon it does not balance on it. This has various implications. Firstly, it is indicative of the manner in which the Bundren family is unbalanced and dysfunctional. The dysfunction is in the way they live with constant bickering, jealousy, disorganization; it is in the way they care very little that one of their own is dying, and it is in the way they plan for and execute the journey of interment. Secondly, it is an indication that planning and ordering of life is never really in the hands of human beings. Planning and control are merely human being's ego boosters. In the structure of the universe power can emanate from other points, including unseen and unforeseen forces, and this is what renders human planning of aspects of life to be meaningless. Ultimately, human being's plans are

rendered futile by unforeseen forces which put people in absurd and existential situations. Finally, Jessica Baldanzi and Kylie Shlabach present a third explanation that emanates from the happenings around the coffin. They argue that “Cash’s obsession emphasises how a ‘proper’ burial means more to the living than to the dead” (41-42). Darl points out this when says, “Addie Bundren could not want a better one, a better box to lie in. It will give her confidence and comfort” (5). Obviously a dead Addie would care less about the type of the coffin she is buried in. It is no wonder that she is buried even though her body does not fit in the coffin. The living people’s intention is to keep up appearances. Indeed, most of the Bundrens are driven more by self-centred and egotistical reasons than by their desire to give Addie a decent burial. As a result of wanting to keep up appearances, Addie’s funeral and interment journey becomes a powerful force that challenges the Bundren’s ability to deal with death. It also makes a mockery of Cash’s practical skills that he uses to make a coffin and his attempts at ordering the world.

Another attempt at ordering the world, in which dying and death are formidable forces, is demonstrated by a unique focus on the role of God. There are many references to God as giving life. Both Anse and Tulle express this concept when they say, “The Lord giveth (30)”. Cora Tull suggests that Anse and his family will be punished by God for mistreating Addie to her death. However, in the novel, God’s role in death is not particularly ubiquitous. In fact, when discussing the death of Addie, some characters demonstrate a doubt of God’s role. For example, when Vernon Tull talks about Addie’s passing away, he states, “It was her own wish . . . I heard Anse say it was (23)”. This statement can be interpreted as an expression that her desire to die determined her choice of death. Death for Addie comes about because she,

herself, has given up the will to live. The foregoing demonstrates that there is a contradicting concept concerning the place of human being's will versus God's will. It is humorously ironical that the characters in this novel believe that have power to choose their paths concerning when and how to die, but at the same time blame life's hardships and unavoidable outcomes like death on God. They regard God as a formidable power only when it suits them.

Darl is another character that Faulkner uses to demonstrate how the characters try to order the world. He is the one character who is in touch with Addie's feelings and is thus overly affected by the death of his mother. From his own account we learn that he knows that his mother did not particularly like him. We learn from Addie that the reason for this is that he was conceived at a time when she was so depressed about Anse's poor treatment of her that she simply hated the children that she bore after bearing Cash. These children are Darl, Dewey Dell and Vardaman. However, Darl especially feels the pain of his mother's rejection. As a result, he becomes an oversensitive child and develops clairvoyant or telepathic tendencies that make him know and hear things other people cannot hear. Darl's clairvoyant nature makes him know what is on other people's minds. This makes him know more than he should know. Darl thus suffers the pangs of Addie's death much more than any other of the Bundrens. According to Thomas Adamowski Addie's rejection of Darl's makes him "desperately unstable [and]...unsure of selfhood" (213). Freudian psychology explains this reaction. It suggests that people who are rejected in childhood develop inconsistent or "insecure attachment styles [which] continue to influence subsequent relationships even into adulthood..." (DeWolfe 805). In this case, because Darl did not get all the love and attention that he ought to have gotten when he was young, thus he becomes overly attached to his

mother. Olga Vickery argues that Darl's clinging to his mother is because he is obsessed by his own relationship to her. Darl becomes desperately reliant on his mother. He bases his life on trying to seek her attention. He fails when she is alive and this is why he becomes desperate when she is dying and more so when he dies. Martin Jacobi explains this by saying that Darl "cannot turn the liabilities of his suffering into assets" (63). Jacobi captures the idea that Darl has a lot of potential to make life have meaning. He could have used his telepathic abilities to appreciate life in its totality. However, because his ego is bent on controlling others through his abilities, he ends up with a limited view of life.

Darl's next step is thus to destroy the influence that Addie might have had over him. According to Homer Petty, Darl sees himself in a world which "entangles him within a web of absurdity [from which he] wants to disentangle himself from" (39). The journey of interment seems like just the perfect place to do this. He tries to stop the journey by burning the coffin carrying Addie's remains but his plans are thwarted by Jewel who saves the coffin. This is an indication that Darl cannot free himself from his mother even in death because they are connected genetically. The fact that it is Jewel who saves the coffin and Addie's corpse further enhances the idea that there is a genetic connection between Darl, his mother and Jewel whom Darl really despises. Not even death can disentangle him from the two people he loathes the most in the Bundren family.

Darl's desire to order the world by burning the coffin soon makes him appear like a mad man. He is unable to deal with the intense grief and sorrow because he does not understand at what point he should stop trying to control others and the world he is operating and mourn

his mother properly. His mourning is thus depicted in his sinking into a schizophrenic madness. Since his family members do not understand him, they do not protect him from the law enforcement agents who come to arrest him for burning the barn that had housed the coffin. Darl's action of trying to stop the journey of interment can be taken to mean that in the normal scheme of things, interment of dead bodies should not be stopped. When people die, the only best option should be to bury them. It does not matter how absurd the preparations and the processes of interment may appear to be, a dead human being is not a viable one anymore and should be interred. Also giving a dead body a seemingly good burial creates a sense of closure for the family. Thus Darl's desire to burn the body is interpreted as madness by the rest of the family. This is why the family members do not hesitate to have him taken to an asylum. The family members may have their individual shortcomings but Darl's actions display a total disregard for what they consider common decency on this journey of interment. Thus they opt to get rid of him so that they can complete what they set out to do.

Ignorance in the Response to Death

Vardaman the youngest Bundren is presented as having an ignorant and infantile reaction to Addie's death. It seems that Vardaman, a boy who is less than fifteen years, has never seen a dead person. This is why he cannot comprehend his mother's death. It also seems that no one has ever really explained to him how death occurs. Martin Jacobi explains that the Bundren children are the unfortunate "recipients of parental opposition" (68). Because their parents have always had opposing world views, they do not take time to cooperate in an organised upbringing of their children. This has resulted in the children, especially Vardaman, not

having worldly knowledge of how to deal with death. Without such knowledge, Vardaman, when he learns that his mother is dead is thrown into confusion. He believes that his mother is not actually dead, but instead "...is a fish." This is because he caught a fish on the same day on which Addie died. Because of this relationship, Vardaman's connects Addie and a fish. He also connects his mother to the fish "because as a fish his mother is an object to be gauged, cut, cooked and eaten" (Basset 128). No wonder he believes that his mother was "cooked and et" (55).

Vardaman also believes that it is Doctor Peabody who killed his mother. He does not know that the doctor is called in by Anse when Addie's condition is already too bad. Instead of blaming his father, he blames the doctor and in revenge he releases Doctor Peabody horses, beats them and sends them galloping away. Later the fish merges in his mind with Peabody's horses and Jewel's horse. Vardaman's belief that Peabody killed Addie is not vindictive but indicates that he is a young child attempting to make sense of the cruel reality that his mother has ceased to exist. His quickness to reach understanding through blame, points to the human tendency to rationalise feelings and actions over difficult situations. With his mother gone, Vardaman runs desperately to Vernon Tull's and Cora's home in the middle of the night. They shelter him, but what he really but all he wants is the reassurance that his mother is not dead.

Vardaman's reaction to Addie's death indicates the manner in which the death can be very traumatising especially to children who are yet to understand why it has to happen. His actions indicate that he is at what Freud refers to as the oral stage. He objectifies his mother and thinks of her as a fish or horse as a way of clinging to the idea that his mother is still

alive. At this stage, only his id and not his ego or superego has developed. As a result he cannot fathom the idea of loss. His power comes from knowing that he has a mother. He still wants to enjoy the pleasure of having a mother. The fear of separation from his mother is too much for him to bear. Vardaman's ego causes him to regress. Regression is "a reversion to earlier forms in the development of thought, of object-relationships or of the structure of behavior" (Laplanche and Pontalis 332).

His fear is such that he cannot even imagine his mother in a coffin. He goes through some kind of temporary insanity. After Cash finishes Addie's coffin, Vardaman is disturbed that she will be nailed up in it and he believes that Addie needs air to breathe. As a result:

the next morning [after putting Addie in the Coffin] they found him in his shirt tail, laying asleep on the floor... and the top of the box bored clean full of holes and Cash's new augur broke off in the last one. When they taken the lid off they found that two of them had bored on into her face. (73)

At first, his ego cannot allow him to imagine that his mother has ceased to exist and that she cannot even breathe. It is only when Dewey Dell comforts him by telling him that they will get bananas for the trip to Jefferson, and Vardaman thinks about the toy red train-set behind glass in the Jefferson town toy store that he begins to let go of his mother. Here again we see Vardaman's regression and substitution. He continues to regress into his childlike behaviour through being satiated with food. In other words, he still maintains his position at the oral

stage. He also substitutes his mother with Dewey Dell as he tries to work towards accepting that his mother is death. According to Liam Butchart, “Vardaman, whose mind is dealing with the loss of an object-relationship with his mother, is deconstructing that object-relationship, bit by bit – so his ego is forcing him away from the coffin, which is associated with that object (his mother), in order to keep his libido from reconnecting with his mother, as he processes the loss” (n.pag). The coffin which holds his mother is the object of his displeasure therefore throughout the journey to Jefferson, he stays away from the coffin. To empower himself, he now turns to thinking about other objects that give him more pleasure. Unlike Dewey Dell who never gets the opportunity to mourn his mother, Vardaman in his childlike manner, manages to work through his grief. At the end of the journey, like the rest of the Bundren children he accepts the introduction of a new mother without questioning.

Conclusion

Through the Bundrens in *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner explores the complexities of human beings and their relationships with one another. Death and funeral rites have a way of bringing out people’s narcissistic tendencies. This happens in *The Spare Room* by Garner and “Big Mama’s Funeral” by Marquez. In these novels characters like Nicola and Helen as well as Big Mama’s relatives behave in a self-centered manner. In these novels as well as in *As I Lay Dying*, the writers reveal the personal and secret sorrows and intentions of the characters as opposed to their public distress and grieving for a dead person. People who are bereaved also carry their own personal grief, anxieties, and challenges. Just because one of them is dead, it does not mean that they will not try to sort out their own issues. Death and journeys of interment sometimes just offer the perfect opportunity to settle scores or deal with the

challenges. Despite displaying deeply narcissistic tendencies, The Bundrens counter grief with strategies of survival which suggests that they do not allow high levels of emotional grief to overcome them. This is indicative of a pragmatic albeit self-centered view of life that is inherent in many individualistic cultures. Life is presented as being very important and the death of one individual does not stop them from going on with their lives. This, in the final analysis, gives credence to Addie's father's word: "The reason for living was to get ready to stay dead for a long time." This means that people cannot ignore the business of living because any life will finally end up in death.

Through the journey of interment and through the use of interior monologues, Faulkner allows the reader to see varying reactions to Addie's death. Firstly, the characters display aspects of power before and on the journey of interment. Addie's power is the driving force behind the journey. She dictates the conditions for her body disposal and that is what the family members and neighbours struggle to do despite the bizarre nature of the journey. Cash's level of power is seen in his immediate response to build Addie's coffin. Anse, on the other hand, is the dormant one yet ironically he dictates different aspects of the journey. He is not involved in the making of the coffin, when the coffin is drowning he simply waits for his children to save it while he does nothing, and when the mules drown he asks Jewel to sell his horse so that they can buy other mules. By the end of the journey he gains monetarily by taking money from Cash and Dewey Dell. He also gains by buying a new set of teeth and getting a new wife. Darl is on the journey to make sure that Addie's body gets disposed of but when he sees that there is a delay that is making the entire journey a fiasco, he decides to, unsuccessfully, burn Addie's body so as to end the journey.

When psychoanalysed, the characters illustrate Freud's point that humans are innately self-centred. All of the Bundrens have different reactions to Addie's death. Cash is practical but calm. He appears to go through the grieving process normally. Darl, despite appearing to be in control, ends up becoming disturbed mentally and destructive because he cannot handle his mother's death. Dewey Dell cares very little about that journey because her mind is more focused on how to get rid of her unwanted pregnancy. Vardaman reasons in a childish and illogical manner. He is at a loss as to how to handle the death. However, in the same childish manner he stops mourning mother's death when his libidinal energies are directed towards thinking about the goodies that he will get at the end of the journey. Anse displays high levels of egocentrism. He feigns sadness and pretends that he is only interested in fulfilling his promise to Addie. However, he immediately shows that he is only interested in the journey because of his selfish desire to get a set of teeth from Jefferson. His selfishness is further seen when he gets himself a new wife just as soon as he lays his wife in the grave.

The different characters' reactions signify that there is a whole gamut of human emotions and responses to death and dying. However the most central of these reactions is the display of power and the self-centeredness that each character displays. Therefore *As I Lay Dying* is a study of how modernist techniques can be used to unearth what goes on in the human mind and how. This then helps to unearth the different responses to human experiences. Faulkner focuses attention on the human experience of death and dying and uses it to unmask the complicated manner in which the human minds work. In so doing, Faulkner points out that all these reactions to death are often geared towards a self-centered desire to be in control of life experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE: A JOURNEY INTO DYING AND DEATH: AN ANALYSIS OF *THE DEATH OF IVAN ILYCH* BY LEO TOLSTOY

Introduction

In this chapter I examine how Leo Tolstoy in *The Death of Ivan Ilych* demonstrates the manner in which people's responses to death are borne out of the meaning they attach to life. Tolstoy suggests that people who have a distinct overreliance on money, professional positions and the power that accompanies them are more likely to respond to death with anger and bitterness while those who are more oriented towards more spiritual and non-materialistic lives, are more accepting of death. I also examine the various stylistic devices that Tolstoy uses to present the responses to death and dying.

About Lev (Leo) Nikolayevich Tolstoy

According to the *Macmillan Readers*, Lev (Leo) Nikolayevich Tolstoy was born on September 9, 1828, on his family's estate in Yasnaya Polyana, in the Tula Province of Russia. His parents, Count Nikolai Ilyich Tolstoy and Countess Marya Tolstoy, died when Tolstoy and his siblings were very young. They were thus taken care of by their aunts who had them home schooled. Tolstoy joined Kazan University but was unable to post good grades so he left the university without a degree. He returned to his parents' estate, where he tried farming but failed. However he learnt to keep a journal which inspired much of his fiction. He later joined the army and published a number of books while still on active duty. These books were *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, and *Youth*. These are the books in which he focused on his childhood and youth.

Tolstoy married Sofya (Sonya) Andreyevna Bers, and had thirteen children. He wrote the novels *War and Peace* which deals with the history of five upper-class families living during Napoleonic war and *Anna Karenina* which deals with the upper-class society in Russia during 1860's. After finishing *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy faced a profound spiritual crisis.

In his autobiography, *A Confession*, Tolstoy indicates that he became extremely disillusioned with his successful life and believed that he did not deserve his inherited wealth. He thus began working with the peasants, ploughing and making boots. He read the bible extensively and learnt that Christ's true message was that everyone had to be good so as to give meaning to life. Tolstoy's interpretation of the words of Christ resulted in five commandments which encouraged people to avoid anger, lust, fighting or oath taking but instead treat others with kindness

A Confession depicts a man who rejected the notion of privately owned property and wished to dispose of the land he had. Because of his rather radical thoughts about land ownership, he was forced to divide his land among his relatives, rather than dispose of ownership altogether. Also because of his radical spirituality, Tolstoy was excommunicated by the Russian Orthodox Church. Nevertheless, he did not stop this spiritual radicalism. During his later years, Tolstoy wrote books based on religious and spiritual themes. The books included, *A Confession*, *An Examination of Dogmatic Theology*, *What Then Must We Do*, *The Death of Ivan Ilych* and *Resurrection*.

Because of his new beliefs, he stopped drinking and smoking and became a vegetarian. He also went about dressed in peasant garb. He gave up the copyright of his earlier works but his wife went behind his back to obtain sole ownership of family property and the copyrights to his pre-1880 writings so that her family would not suffer from poor living standards. In his later years, Tolstoy just wanted to live in a monastery and be free of possessions so as to devote himself to service to humanity. On November 7th, 1910, at the age of 82, Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy was found dead at a railroad junction in Astopovo, Ryazan Province, Russia. Tolstoy thus died a very troubled and sad man.

Tolstoy's background especially the period after his spiritual crisis informed his later writings, particularly *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. The novel is also informed by what he felt was the ideal way of living and dying which he, himself, tried to practice.

About *The Death of Ivan Ilych*

The Death of Ivan Ilych begins with the announcement and description of the death of Ivan as well as the reaction of his colleagues and family to his death. The story then recounts the circumstances of Ivan's life, from his birth in St. Petersburg, to his comfortable childhood, and graduation with a law degree. We learn that he is overly concerned with acquisition of wealth and power and as he works as prosecutor and eventually to judge, he exceedingly becomes self-centred. His socially acceptable marriage to Praskovya Fyodorovna Mikhel, is an unhappy marriage because the couple is very self-centred and this makes their marriage an unhappy one.

In pursuit of more comforts, Ivan knocks himself as he is decorating his house. The knock results in a severe sickness that leads him towards a confrontation with death. Ivan's as well as other characters' responses to his dying and death are the mainstay of this novel. Tolstoy examines universal questions that transcend time and place. He addresses such questions as: What does it mean to live a good life and why do people have to die? What is the role of wealth and power in determining how people live? What relationship must one have with fellow human beings and what impact does this have in one's life and at the point of dying? What role does religion have in human being's lives? Ultimately, the most fundamental question in this novella is: How do human beings live and how do they respond to dying and death? This is what this chapter endeavours to capture these responses.

Fear and Denial

One of the most profound responses demonstrated by Tolstoy in this novella is the fear death. Tolstoy demonstrates that the most commonplace and horrifying life challenge for humans is to consider their mortality whether it is by disease or an accident or disaster. Although Tolstoy does not give an answer as to why death is an inevitable part of the human condition he nevertheless seems to suggest it is the enigmatic nature of death that makes it so fearful.

One reason that makes people fear death is that it strikes as a time when they least expect it. Sickness and death are presented as being mysterious in the manner they invade people's lives. Ivan for example, is at the prime of his life. He has gone through many hurdles to reach where he is. He has also done all the things that his society has prescribed as the must do things to ensure that he lives a comfortable and secure life. From the time he leaves university

as a lawyer, his upward mobility has been on course. Along the way, he encounters a few hiccups but by the time he is in his middle age he is promoted to a higher job with a better salary. He buys a house and is in the process of decorating it to fit the standards of the people of his class. It is at the time of decorating the house that he falls and injures himself. It is this injury that threatens his life. It is in the middle of Ivan's professional and personal growth that he becomes sick and finally succumbs to the sickness.

One cannot fully understand why traumatic experiences decide to strike at a specific time and why they affect one person and not the other. By presenting Ivan's sickness as coming upon him in his 40s and at the peak of his career, Tolstoy seems to question why death should come into a people's lives in the prime of their lives. It is important to note that Tolstoy does not also give the sickness that affects Ivan a name. The reader can only guess that it is some form of cancer. This is an indication that it is the dying process that is in focus and not the disease. This is because even though diseases that cause death may vary, the fact that sickness strikes at a time when one least expects it makes one that can make one shudder with fear. This fear of death has been captured in *The Spare Room* by Helen Garner. It is the one emotion that sends Nicola shuttling from Sydney to Melbourne in order to get a cure from a doctor who promises one even after other doctors have told her that the colon cancer that she has is incurable. It is also this fear that makes Edufa in *Edufa* by Efua Sutherland visit a diviner who gives him a charm that can make another person die for him. It is bait that his wife Ampoma, unwittingly, takes and ends up dying from an undisclosed illness that comes upon her once she promises to die for Edufa.

What makes death so fearful is that, often, the diseases that precede it transform someone from an energetic and self-sufficient person to one that is helpless and dependent. This sense of weakness can be seen in Nicola, Edufa as well as in Ivan. These character's sicknesses transform them from hitherto vibrant people, into individuals who are weak and have to be exceedingly dependent on others. Instead of engaging in the meaningful ventures that they used to engage in, they now sit around waiting for the death to come.

When death enters Ivan's world, his precious accomplishments are nullified, forcing him to re-evaluate his worth. He is forced to transit from a position of self-importance to one of a humble being. Because his death is not sudden, he is forced into an agonising journey that forces him to become very lonely as he stares death in the face. Tolstoy personifies and gives death a life spirit so as to demonstrate the magnitude of fear that dying people may experience as they see death approaching.

Ivan Ilych would turn his attention to *It* and try to drive the thought of *It* away, but without success. *It* would come and stand before him and look at him, and he would be petrified and the light would die out of his eyes....He would shake himself, try to pull himself together but ..[this] could not deliver him from *It*. *It* drew attention to itself not in order to make him take some action but only that he should look at *It*, look *It* in the face: look at *It* and without doing anything, suffer inexpressibly. (130)

One can clearly sense the fear that this personified death causes Ivan Ilych. Tolstoy highlights this by capitalising and italicising the pronoun *It* so as to draw the attention of the reader to

the fact that the death is a powerful entity that affects Ivan, and indeed any other person who is dying. Death has the power to taunt Ivan and make him feel insignificant. Death scares him because nothing in his life has ever prepared him for this kind of experience. The mystery of death is that there is often nothing that can really prepare one for it.

Another reason that makes Ivan Ilych fear death is that the period before his death is very lonely. In the modern world, people have very many activities that take up their time. They spend a lot of time at their work places and a considerable number of hours pursuing leisure activities. When one is healthy these activities make him meet others and spend a lot of time with them. However, when sickness sets in the dying person may not be as active as he previously was and other people may not always find time to visit. This is more so if the dying person was not very friendly to others when he was still healthy or if the relatives and friends around the dying person are self-centred individuals or if they are too busy to visit. One could argue that King Lear in Shakespeare's *King Lear* goes through a similar fear of the unknown. He is old and nearing his death. To cushion himself against the vulgarities of life, he opts to abdicate his throne, and then divide his lands among whichever of his three daughters, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia would flatter him most. Cordelia refuses to play the flattery game so Lear banishes her. The other two pour the flattery on him, take his lands, and then throw him out. His fear of the unknown makes King Lear hatch a plan that fires back badly and causes the death of many other characters including his loyal daughter Cordelia. Edufa's fear of the unknown also causes a lot of suffering for other characters and culminates in the death of his wife.

Ivan finds himself in such a situation where he is sick and lonely. One of the reasons that makes him lonely is that he never really established sound relationships with his immediate family members. He marries a wife, not because he loves her, but because it is the right thing to do. He also marries her because she comes “from a good family, was not bad looking, and had some little property” (105). His marriage is a marriage of convenience built on frivolous material and non-material fundamentals. Not having established his marriage on sound humane principles, at the first instance of trouble in the marriage he begins to ignore his wife. He had expected the marriage to his wife to be “easy, agreeable, gay and always decorous” (107). Suddenly, he finds that it “disturbs the pleasure and propriety of their life” (107). His challenge is not only from his nagging wife, but also the demands brought about by the physical and emotional needs of the children. His major aim thus becomes to get away from the unpleasantness at home.

He attained this by spending less and less time with his family, and when obliged to be at home he tried to safeguard his position by the presence of outsiders. The chief thing however is that he had his official duties. His whole interest of his life now centred on the official world and that interest absorbed him. (109)

Ivan uses the work place as a kind of defence system to shield him from the challenges on the home front.

Tolstoy in presenting Ivan up as an individual who has the power that society gives to him as a husband. He, nevertheless, uses this power to undermine his wife and to somewhat neglect building up his home life. He marries for convenience. Therefore, immediately day to day pressures begin to appear on the home front, he opts to keep away from home by spending

most of his time at his place of work. Tolstoy questions this choice of life style and insinuates that is Ivan's inability face challenges in a brave manner that makes it hard for him to accept that he is dying. His adult life, just like his childhood does not prepare him for the challenges ahead. This becomes clear when he regresses into his childhood and engages in bouts of crying when he has to deal with his dying. Although Tolstoy seems to suggest that nothing can really prepared anyone to appreciate the reality of death, nevertheless, by running away from challenges, people actually run away from the structures that would toughen them up to face life's eventualities, including death. By hiding in the workplace, Ivan fails to build a relationship with his immediate family members. Thus when he becomes sick and is lying on his death bed, the family finds it difficult to connect with him. Ivan finds himself dying in isolation, save for the company of his servant Gerasim and his young son who comes briefly, at the end of the story, to console him.

In the modern world, there are many people who take solace in the work place. They spend most of their waking hours working so as to make money. They do this at the expense of family unity and togetherness. The irony is that when such people become sick, they expect their family members to look after them. They often forget that they never tried to forge close relationships with their family members. People sometimes make life's decisions that create destructive patterns that estrange them from the community. Thus at that time when they need the help of those significant others, they find that those others are unable to empathise with them or sympathise with their situations. They thus find themselves very lonely when they have to face challenges in life that come their way. According to Temira Pachmuss:

Man's greatest fear of death was the result of sham civilization, which with its poisons affects the human mind and heart. Civilization with its awakening of the individual and his self-assertion against the group, with its strife, division, and falsity, corrupts man's world outlook and nature. It spells moral ruin, universal egotism, spiritual disintegration, and the tormenting feeling of solitude. (75)

Pachmuss's argument is that modern living has a way of making people self-centred. It teaches them to focus only on their individuality and self-gratification. It empowers people into imagining that they have made it and that they have made great strides in life. This illusion of grandeur often estranges them from what is indeed humane. It keeps them away from forging strong relationships with those around him. Then one day they become sick, they find themselves alone and with very few former acquaintances and family members to take care of them and keep them company. They easily find themselves having to face sickness and death all alone. Aloneness when one is dying can create a lot of fear in a dying person. This kind of scenario is what Ivan encounters. Had it not been for his kind worker, Gerasim, Ivan would have died an even more lonely and miserable death.

Regression into Childhood

One major reason that makes Ivan afraid of death is that his upbringing does not prepare him for any traumatic experiences. He, in fact, believes that his idyllic childhood should shield him from death. Tolstoy paints a rosy and idyllic picture of his childhood. In terms of the

structure of the text, Tolstoy situates this idyllic childhood at a time when Ivan is desperately fighting against dying. Ivan actually believes that the childhood is an insurance against death. His belief in his immortality is triggered by a syllogism that he had learnt while in school. The syllogism embedded in Keizwetter's Logic claims that, "Caius is a man, men are mortal therefore Caius is mortal" (129). Nonetheless, ironically, Ivan believes that such a syllogism should not apply to him because he assumes that he is not as abstract a being as Caius. He believes that because he has a "real" background developed right from his childhood, he should never have to face death. He reminisces about this:

He had been little Vanya, with a mamma and a papa, with Mitya and Volodya, with the toys, a coachman and a nurse, afterwards with Katenka and with all the joys, griefs, and delights of childhood, boyhood, and youth. What did Caius know of the smell of that striped leather ball that Vanya had been so fond of? Had Caius kissed his mother's hand like that, and did the silk of dress rustle so for Caius? Had he rioted like that at school when the pastry was bad? Had Caius been in love like that? Could Caius preside at a session as he did? Caius really was mortal, and it was right for him to die; but for me little Vanya, Ivan Ilych, with all my thoughts and emotions, it is altogether a different matter. It cannot be that I ought to die. (129)

Tolstoy presents Ivan as having a bloated ego. He believes that his background empowers him against death. He rationalises rather wrongly that his favourable background should shield him against sickness and death. Here Tolstoy makes an attack on the people who live luxurious and shielded believing that these luxuries can safeguard them against the

vulgarity of life. He mocks them for not realising that these comforts have their limitation. He highlights the tensions and challenges that such people undergo when they realise that they have been living under a façade of their self-importance. Because of living through the façade of this self-importance, their response to death is one of utter fear.

It is strange that at forty years of age, Ivan carries such infantile assumptions that death cannot touch him. In Freudian terms, Ivan has retained his primary narcissistic tendencies that make him fail to see the folly of believing that he is an immortal person. He is self-centred in his belief that bad things only should only happen to other people like Caius and not to someone like him. He has a distorted notion of reality. He believes that his strong background has made him earn a position of power against death. His looming death thus attacks his self esteem and self-importance. To regulate his dented self-image, he begins to question a truth that is embedded in the syllogism. Like the proverbial ostrich that buries its head in the sand, Ivan would rather live a lie. His childish thoughts and outlook to life hinder him from examining his own life. It becomes apparent that Ivan's childhood did not allow him an opportunity to develop the internal resources that would have helped him understand that life is not always predictable. He did not learn that good health is not always assured by a privileged background.

By making reference to Ivan's view of Caius and by allowing the reader an opportunity to hear Ivan's thoughts concerning this syllogism, Tolstoy's intentions seem to be to point out that people have a way of creating emotional screens that make them believe that they are special and invincible. Ivan uses Keizwetter's Logic to bloat his ego, in childlike fashion, into a

belief that he is a more special breed than other people. In showing the deficiency of Ivan's reasoning, Tolstoy highlights the dangers of thinking that death can be understood through logic. Trying to create a logical reason as to why one should not die, makes it hard to appreciate death a force that no one, no matter the status, can overcome. It is also a sign that he has not grown out of his childhood fantasies of an idyllic life that he is entitled to. Thus when Ivan realises that his reasoning does not hold water, it increases his awareness of death and subsequently his understanding of the power of death.

Tolstoy indicates that sometimes adults who are raised in a trouble free childhoods often have very little capacity to appreciate that people undergo challenges and traumatic experiences in life. In adulthood, they still show signs that they failed to grow out of their childhood fantasies of believing in a trouble free life. Therefore they are caught by surprise when they find themselves in challenging situations such as the one Ivan finds himself in. For example, as Ivan progresses into young adulthood, he still does not get clear opportunities to develop the natural inclinations that would help him face as harsh reality of life. Most of his young adult life buoys him into a belief that everything should always work according to plan. Tolstoy indicates that of all Ilya Epimovich Golovin's children, Ivan is the one who seems to have done well in life. He acquires a moderately good education and a moderately good job. He is a stickler for rules set by those in authority and thus ends up living a moderately good life. Tolstoy tells us that this comfortable life makes him "succumb to sensuality, to vanity" (103). He, together with the rest of the family, reject the third born son/brother because he is frivolous and wild. This is an indication that their lifestyles do not accommodate people whom they consider failures. Ivan thus becomes accustomed to a simple and easy life in

which nothing goes wrong. Death therefore comes as a threat to the positive self image that he already formed from his childhood.

Tolstoy further illustrates the fact that because of Ivan's myopic view of life, he fails to recognise important symbolic markers in his life that point towards human vulnerabilities. This could be a major reason as to why he regresses into his idyllic childhood where there were no discernible problems. Tolstoy seems to suggest that had Ivan taken time to examine his adult life, he would have seen that there are pointers within it that death is part of being human. For example, the fact that a number of his own children die very young should be a significant pointer to the fact that no one is immune to death. His children's privileged background does not stop them from dying. Ivan is also referred to as "le phoenix de la famille" French for "the phoenix of the family." Although it refers to the idea that he is the best son in the family, the phoenix is symbolically carries the image of life and death. Although the image of the phoenix is a stark reminder that creatures that live can also die, Ivan does not recognise this. He also has medal on the chain of his watch with the words "respice finem" written on it. These words are Latin for "look to the end." This could be a reference to the fact that he will have a good end but it could also be a reference to death which signifies the end of life. This is the more probable reason they are inscribed on a watch chain. A watch that ticks is often associated with dying. Every second brings Ivan closer to death. Tolstoy seems to be of the view that, despite there being constant markers of death in world around humans, they are often too busy to take a keen interest in them or they are too blinded by the quick pace of life to realise that death is a reality that they will one day have to face. Since people ignore such experiential markers, when death comes calling it becomes a

very fearful phenomenon. In the case of Ivan, even though there are pointers of death all around him, he is unable or unwilling to confront death. Never having internalised the fact that in life, people are vulnerable and often face severe challenges, Ivan regresses into a childlike state when he finally faces sickness and imminent death. He becomes sullen, a complainer, and even engages in bouts of crying. His crying indicates that dying is psychologically and physically painful. It is painful because he knows that he will soon have to exit from the only familiar world that they know and into a world he does not know. It is also fearsome because he realises that he has no power to stop death. For example, before his sickness Ivan had always had a comeback or fall back plan whenever things have gone wrong. For example, when he was bypassed in promotions, he manoeuvred his way so that he got not just a promotion but also a higher salary which then accorded him a superior lifestyle. However, at his death bed he realises that he has no fall back plan. He has to face death alone and with no help. It becomes increasingly clear that Ivan did not pick enough lessons from the world around him to help sustain him through suffering and death. Only when he is forced to confront his mortality does he begin to question the life that he had lived. He realises that the choices that he has made have only taught him how to “live” life but have not taught him how to face suffering that leads to death. Robin Grettz in *Ivan Ilych: The Tragedy of the Unexamined Life*, reminds us that:

The choices that Ivan made for his life acted as a sieve, filtering out thoughts and feelings he considered unimportant in favour of those he supported his pursuit of a powerful career and high social standing. The pin-pricks of conscience he experienced off and on throughout adulthood might have led Ivan to new insights to what might be most important in life had he been ready to listen. Instead, by

ignoring his conscience and avoiding self reflection, Ivan's life was drained of meaning, leaving him devoid of character—that highly individual sets of qualities that act as a moral framework for moral judgement and action. (18-19)

Throughout his journey into adulthood, Ivan fails to discern how his personal judgements and decisions have a bearing on his end of life moments. This is a pointer to the idea that human beings are myopic and cannot see the end from the beginning. Often they fail to make the best choices because of this myopic tendency. The fleeting nature of life is ignored and virtuous actions are not adhered to. Tolstoy is of the view that it is often only at the end of life as one is lying on a death bed that they can possibly see the impact of the choices that they made in life. Ivan's neglect of his fellow human beings leaves him lonely and helpless thus his regression into crying bouts.

A Self-Centeredness and Callous Response

Other than Ivan's response to his own death, other characters also respond to this dying and death. *The Death of Ivan Ilych* looks at modernity from a mirror of life that is dictated by an individualistic sense of self advancement and materialism. The incessant desire for the materialism and advancement dictates the manner in which people relate with one another. Each individual is socialised to believe that power comes from how much one earns and the position that one holds in society. A self-centred approach to life marks the manner in which people respond to life's issues. Tolstoy takes a swipe at the aristocrats whom he presents as being callous, selfish and lacking in compassion. When they hear that Ivan is dead, instead of taking time to think about him or even mourn his passing away, all of them begin to think about how they can benefit from “the changes and promotions [the death] might occasion

among themselves and their acquaintances” (94). They also focus on how they will avoid going to visit the bereaved family because “[Ivan’s family] lives so terribly far away” (94). The death of a colleague and close acquaintance fails to elicit appropriate sympathetic emotions. Their responses suggest that the death of another human being is not an important occurrence. Tolstoy indicts the shallowness of the aristocrats’ view of life. They are engaged in competitions that destroy genuine human interactions. As a result, instead of the death of a fellow human being attracting caring human responses, it instead creates a space for a jostling for power and an upward mobility.

Tolstoy’s intention is to shock the reader into seeing how cold and unfeeling people can be. It is his view that the premium that people put on worldly and materialistic things kills their desire to know other people intimately so that when one of them dies, they could care less that that individual is dead. Ivan’s colleagues are not worried or concerned that he is dead but instead blame him for dying. They say that “it is he who is dead and not I” (95). Tolstoy in this case seems to suggest that people who pursue a materialistic and pleasure seeking view of life, often do not treat death as sensitively as they ought to. For Example, even though Ivan interacted closely with his colleagues, they feel that taking time off to pay homage to him will be an intrusion into their comfortable routines. They would rather pursue other interests than go to the funeral.

Tolstoy indicts the shallowness of the aristocrats’ world view. He illustrates the triviality of the things that occupy their daily lives. They worship success and prosperity; they are too concerned with social climbing and careerism and have a self-centred preoccupation with

material things. The power that these materialistic pursuits afford them is their primary focus. In Tolstoy's view, people spend so much time and energy pursuing things that in the long run do not add any significant meaning to their lives.

The worst part of it is that none of the characters in the aristocrats' social world thinks differently from the other. Their responses to death are the same because they are socially constructed. Richards Jenkins and James Fearon suggest that a social identity is constructed from communal values that one embraces and which end up becoming part of a personal identity. The gaze of the Panopticon as envisaged by Foucault can be seen coming into play here. Characters are depicted as being prisoners of culture. Individual choices, wanting as they are, are determined by group values. When Peter Ivanovich and Schwartz decide to pay Ivan's family a visit, it is not because they want to genuinely condole with the family. They only do it because it is the socially correct thing to do and they want to simply be seen at the venue. Ivanovich and Schwartz are representative of the other aristocrats who would have behaved in a similar manner. Communally, the aristocrats have been socialised to see death as being something that should not overly concern them unless it is providing a space for their professional advancement as Ivan's death. The sadness and deep feelings that should be garnered when one of them dies is simply ignored or done as a mere ritual. Tolstoy demonstrates that this kind of approach to life constricting and creates individuals who have a myopic view of life as demonstrated in the story.

One shocking thing that demonstrates this myopic view of life is seen when Ivan's colleagues in a way blame him for dying. They all have an "I don't care attitude" in which they argue

that his death has nothing to do with them. One of them, Schwartz, believes that “Ivan Ilych has made a mess of things” (95). By faulting Ivan for dying, they clearly show how narrow-minded they are. They are out of touch with the reality that death is an inevitable part of life. Tolstoy is of the opinion that when people are pursuing wealth and power as identity markers, they forget all else about their lives. Their pursuit of such things buoys their egos but it does not buy them life.

Other than being overly concerned with material wealth and power, the aristocrats are also driven by their engagement in pleasurable activities. Playing cards, smoking and drinking are pass times that consume a lot of their free time. The callousness of the aristocrats’ response to death is seen in the fact that they would rather be at a card game than go to condole with Ivan’s family. Of all Ivan’s colleagues, it is only Ivanovich and Schwartz who opt to go to his funeral. Nevertheless, despite their being at the funeral, it is clear that they are not happy to do so since that going this will interfere with their planned card game later that day.

Tolstoy humorously presents the discomfort that accrues from a visit to Ivan’s home. After viewing Ivan’s body, Schwartz easily gets away from the funeral parlour because he was not as close to Ivan as Ivanovich was. Ivanovich is sought out by Ivan’s wife so that they can have a chat about Ivan’s death. Tolstoy dramatises the manner in which Schwartz pities Ivanovich because he cannot leave in order to go for a game of cards. He says that Schwartz looked pityingly at Ivanovich as if to say “That does it for our bridge! Don’t object if we find another partner. Perhaps you can cut in when you do escape” (98). Condoling with

neighbours is thus presented as being like a kind of imprisonment that individuals need to escape from and is an indication of how out of touch they are with suffering and death.

Other than Ivanovich, the other character that Tolstoy puts into close scrutiny at this moment is Ivan's widow Praskovya Fedorovna. Because she is Ivan's wife, one would expect that she would behave in a more decorous manner than his friends. However, it is clear that her mourning is all formally pretentious and very callous. Her interest is not really in mourning her husband. Underlying her mourning is an undercurrent of impatience and insensitivity. When she pulls Ivanovich, aside we realise that her intentions are twofold. Firstly, her intention is to tell him about how Ivan suffered terribly at the end of his life and how this took a toll on her. She says, "For the last three days he screamed incessantly. It was unendurable. I cannot understand how I bore it; you could hear him three rooms off. Oh, what I have suffered!" (99). Secondly, but most importantly, her intention is to ask Ivanovich to direct her on "how she could obtain a grant of money from the government on occasion of her husband's death" (100).

Clearly Tolstoy's intention is to highlight her selfishness when she focuses on her suffering and not Ivan's suffering. It also pinpoints a similar materialistic way of thinking as earlier on displayed by Ivan's colleagues. This is another example of the insensitivity displayed by the aristocrats. There is an obvious presentation of the materialistic tendencies as not only being marked by one's gender. Both sexes act in a selfishly materialistic manner. In the modern world, is not rare to find people wanting to make a financial profit out of someone's death. Praskovya is a telling example of this unashamed desire for money, money that she wants to

get on account of the death of her husband. Before his death, her money minded nature is seen in her ambivalence as to whether she wants her husband to die or not. She wants him dead because he irritates her but she also wishes that he would not die because then “his salary would cease” (118). After Ivan’s death, she comes out clearly as a calculating woman who cannot even wait for her husband to be buried before she can begin to think about how much money she can gain from the death of her husband. It is important to remember that even before Ivan’s sickness she often showed her materialistic tendencies. This materialism was of a reason for the quarrels between her and Ivan. She is depicted as being happy only when her husband is making money. On occasions when Ivan has no job and thus does not have money, she gets into temper tantrums and it is only when he gets a well-paying job that she begins to be good to him. Later when Ivan becomes uncommunicative and grumpy when he becomes very sick, she again shows that all she cares about is her comfort and his money. She indicates that she would want him to die but only wants him to live because he makes money which keeps her comfortable. It is no wonder that in the end when Ivan dies, all she is interested in is what she can gain from his death thus depicting her callousness as a response to Ivan’s death.

From the above, one can deduce that Ivan’s colleagues, friends and wife are cut from the same clothe as Ivan. From the myriad of available responses to suffering, dying and death, they all choose to be self centered and aloof. Just like Ivan, they have opted to pick only how to detach emotion from the physical, the humane from the inhumane. The suffering of another person has no positive impact on them. They are guided by the pleasure and materialism principles. The implication is that there don’t care attitude about others would

most probably result in them facing the same pain and loneliness if they were to find themselves in a situation similar to Ivan.

The other group of people that are presented as being callous in their treatment of the dying Ivan are the doctors. Ivan's suffering as he lies ill and his condition worsening from some unnamed disease and the attention he receives or does not receive from doctors is the focus of this section. In *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, doctors are greatly reprimanded for the role they play in making dying difficult for their patient, Ivan.

When people fall sick they go to or are taken to doctors who have the power to decide the extent of the sickness, what medication they should take and the manner by which the medication should be administered. Patients, in the hands of a doctor are in a very vulnerable position. Society and their profession give them the power of life and death over other human beings. This power is actually recognised in the Hippocratic Oath that all doctors over the ages have sworn to abide by. The Hippocratic Oath expects them to act humanely towards patients as they execute their duties. Nevertheless, in trying to discharge their duties, the doctors may end up causing more challenges to the patient.

Just like what happens with Doctor Theodore and Nicola in *The Spare Room*, *The Death of Ivan Ilych* projects the idea that with or without realising it, doctors often make it hard for the patient to appreciate what they are up against as pertains to their illness. Treating patients is what most doctors are trained to do. Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* reminds us that societies have given them this power over patients. Accepting that they are incapable of getting a correct prognosis for and treating an illness makes them feel

powerless. Ivan's desire to get a favourable prognosis from the doctors that he visits indicates that doctors have an enormous impact on the healing processes of individuals who seek their services. As a result of this mighty power bestowed on a doctor by society and by the medical profession, the determination of whether a person is dead or not is not just a biological phenomenon; it is also to a large extent, a supremacy and control issue because of the kind of power that doctors wield over their patients.

When Ivan falls off a ladder as he is decorating his new home he does not think much about the fall. He tells his wife, "It's a good thing I'm an athlete. Another man might have been killed, but I merely knocked myself, just here; it hurts when it is touched, but it's passing off already.-it's just a bruise." (114). Ivan's dismissal of the implications of his fall is a clear indication that at this time of his life, death is not in mind. It is not in the general nature of man to look at everyday falls and injuries as life threatening. Often, because of tending to everyday affairs and businesses of life, people dismiss such "small" injuries. Going to see a doctor for such small ailments as "just a bruise" is often seen as time wasting and an admission of some sort of weakness. It is only when the ailment recurs or the pain intensifies that many people decide to visit doctors.

Ivan feels secure about his health to the extent that the narrator says: "They were all in good health. It could not be called ill health if Ivan Ilych sometimes said that he had a queer taste in his mouth and felt some discomfort in his left side" (117). The fact that the pain has moved from just affecting his side, to emitting a queer taste in his mouth, should be a signal to Ivan to pay attention to what is going on inside his body. Yet, he ignores this until the formerly intelligent, polished, lively and agreeable man grows depressed and bitter and his bitterness

begins to affect the relationship that he has with his family, friends and colleagues. This, again, is Tolstoy's way of indicating that illnesses are often ignored until things become very bad.

Soon Ivan's journeys to the doctors begin. An ailment that had appeared so small and insignificant suddenly metamorphoses into something big and this calls for the doctors' attention. It is at the time that Ivan begins visiting doctors that Tolstoy presents their callousness. Tolstoy's low opinion of the medical profession is well documented. He was extremely sceptical of the efficacy of the doctors of his day. Not only did he feel that their skills were greatly exaggerated, in his works he repeatedly depicts them as pretty uncaring and even callous. In the book, *The Last Days of Leo Tolstoy*, Vladimir Chertkov, documents Tolstoy's disdain for doctors who would come in to treat him. According to Chertkov, they only treated him because in his weakened state he could not resist them. He says:

Having little faith myself in medications and knowing Leo Tolstoy's negative opinion of them as well, I can't shake off the feeling that it might have been preferable to let him suffer and, if need be, die without resorting to these medical tricks. Had he been conscious at the time, he would no doubt have resisted them. (III, Sec. R)

Chertkov acknowledges that he and Tolstoy (and some of his other contemporaries) believed that doctors behaved like tricksters. This did not inspire much confidence in Tolstoy,

especially. Tolstoy held this view despite having a personal doctor, Dushan Makovisky, whom he really liked.

In *War and Peace*, the Tolstoy says this about one of the characters, Pierre, “fell ill and was laid up for three months. He had what the doctors termed ‘bilious fever’. But despite the fact that the doctors treated him, bled him, and gave him medicines to drink, he recovered” (905). This alludes to the idea that the doctors did not have the competence to make the correct diagnosis of diseases. There is an indication that Pierre gets well not because of but in spite of what the doctors did to him. This to a larger extent also shows Tolstoy’s lack of confidence in doctors.

In *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, Ivan is taken to what is referred to as “a celebrated doctor” (118) at the very beginning of his visits to the doctors. After that he goes to see a number of these celebrity doctors, they too like the doctors depicted in *War and Peace*, are incapable of really telling him what is really wrong with him. Just like Nicola in *The Spare Room*, Ivan’s doctor shopping is an indication that he is desperate and is afraid of dying. Ivan consults a number of doctors but instead of this movement from doctor to doctor making things better for him, it put a lot of fear in him. This is because each subsequent “celebrity” doctor not only gives him a different diagnosis for his ailment they also ignore his personal needs completely. The idea of celebrity doctors seemed to have been very popular among the aristocrats. That is why not just his wife, but also several of his friends each have a doctor that they recommend to Ivan. In *The Spare Room*, we also encounter Nicola doctor shopping or looking for diagnosis and treatment from different doctors. According to psychologist, Kajula Lusajo,

doctor shopping can be beneficial to “patients who may feel less understood by some of their doctors” (qtd. in Buguzi). However, Lusajo believes that it can sometimes lead to irrational behaviour by the patients they hop from one doctor to another. It can also lead to an aggravation of the disease because no one doctor attends to the patient thus clearly understanding the sickness becomes problematic. It seems that Ivan’s illness is not well diagnosed by the doctors because it appears that they are quack doctors claiming to have the ability to treat diseases. It is clear that they have no idea what the illnesses that Ivan is or even how to treat it.

Other than the fact that the doctors do not seem to have the skills to diagnose Ivan’s sickness correctly, the major thing about them that makes Ivan afraid is that they do not treat him humanely. Probably this is because they too are incompetent and do not even know how to diagnose his ailment. They deal with Ivan from a highly leveraged and aloof position. Tolstoy says:

Everything took place as he [Ivan] had expected and as it always does. There was the usual waiting and the important air assumed by the doctor, with which he was so familiar with (resembling what he himself assumed in court), and the sounding and listening, and the questions which called for answers that were foregone conclusions and were evidently unnecessary and the look of importance which implied that “if only you put yourself in our hands we will arrange everything—we know indubitably how it is has to be done, always in the same way for everyone alike.” (118-19)

Although the above is a scenario drawn from one doctor's treatment room, it is clear that this is something that happens in all the treatment rooms in this story. Throughout this excerpt it is sadly noticeable that the doctor trivialises Ivan's sickness. He is disdainful to him, and sees him simply as part of a routine. The doctor does not seem moved by the fact that he's dealing with a life, Ivan's life, and is totally unaware of how his insensitive treatment negatively impacts on his emotional wellbeing. The doctor is so wrapped up in his own leveraged superiority that his priorities and thought processes are out of line. He treats him with a sense of detachment and ignores the fact that Ivan is not a biological specimen but a human being with feelings. Instead of talking with him, he talks at him. This is what makes appreciating the magnitude of the illness very difficult for Ivan. Because of this he keeps on hoping from one doctor to another but is given the same uncomfortable treatment.

What is even sadder about this treatment is that Ivan anticipates such a reaction since he argues that he himself as a judge, used to behave in similar fashion. In other words judges and doctors are juxtaposed and presented in negative light in this novella. They are people whom society has given the power to handle important aspects of people's wellbeing, yet they fail to do so appropriately. The doctors and judges are two groups of people who deal with two very crucial parts of people's well-being: The physical and legal/emotional sides of individuals. They can thus make or break the resilience of those who go to them for help. All Ivan wants to know is how serious his condition is, but all the doctor wants to give him is some incomprehensible technical babble about whether it is a problem with his kidney or appendix. When Ivan asks him directly whether it is serious, he does not get a straight answer.

When people go to see either lawyers/judges or doctors they are in desperate need. Something is out of place either outside their bodies or in their inside respectively. In other words, they are in need of help in their legal and health statuses. They believe that these professionals have what Michel Foucault refers to as “technologies of power” or implements in modern civilization that can help manage situations. So when the professionals do not show that they can use these technologies of power adequately enough to deal with situations, then it leaves the people in a quandary.

There are few things more important to the individuals than their health and legal statuses. These aspects of a person need a gentle hearing, devoid of biasness and haughtiness. One may argue that it is very hard for most professionals, and more so doctors or even judges, to be very close and personal to all the people who come to them for their services if they are to do a good job. I agree with such an argument to the extent that the professional should not divulge information that is not pertinent to a case. However, what would be more pertinent to a patient than to know the extent of his or her illness? The overbearing, unsympathetic and callous approaches used by some professionals, make it hard for such them to understand what is happening to their clients so as to prepare them effectively for any eventuality. Doctors, who deal with their patients in an aloof and arrogant manner, make it hard for their patients to understand and prepare for any eventualities, including their deaths. Through the experience of Ivan with his doctors, Tolstoy suggests that modern medicine is dehumanising and reflects false society's refusal to come to terms with death and, by extension, with life.

According to Deborah Corker, how doctors communicate with their patients is often based on their personal beliefs about the patients' right to know their medical statuses. In the case of Ivan, the doctors use what David Field and Gina Copp refer to as a "closed awareness approach" of treatment (461). In this mode of treatment, patients are kept ignorant of their health statuses. The patients merely suspect the extent of their illness but no one confirms this. In Paulo Coelho's *Veronica Decides to Die*, Veronica decides to commit suicide by taking pills but survives the attempt. She finds herself in a mental hospital where the psychiatrist, Doctor Igor, lies to her that the drugs that she had taken had compromised her health and that she was going to die in five days' time. The lie is used to shock her into appreciating the importance of being alive. Doctor Igor uses the closed awareness approach deliberately to make Veronica see value of life. This method works well and the fear of death makes Veronica appreciate that there is a lot to gain from being alive. Ivan, on the other hand is uncomfortable with the closed awareness approach to treatment. He had hoped to get the "open awareness approach", which allows for the patient and the doctor to talk openly about an illness and impending death, if necessary but fails to get it. Ivan's fear of dying is thus magnified when the doctors fail to be open with him. When he does not receive the kind of treatment he expects, he becomes bitter and confused.

Ivan's condition is made worse by the fact that he reads medical books hoping to find answers to questions that the doctors do not provide. When he fails to get the answers that he desires it increases his anxiety and fear. All that Ivan wants to know is what his state really is. Not only do the doctors fail to give him medication that works, they actually worsen his

condition. Yet he keeps seeking out the doctors and reading the books anyway, because he does not know what else to do.

What is important here is that doctors are endowed with power given by their profession to use “the technologies of power” at their disposal to treat people. Patients expect their doctors to have the knowledge of all diseases. When they are unable to even diagnose the sickness it leaves the patient at a loss as to what to do. When the doctor fails to use this power to simply comfort and put patient at ease, then that doctor creates a fear in the patient.

The lack of medical expertise on the part of the doctor, makes Ivan a weakened individual who can only engage in guessing about the extent of his sickness and using a trial and error method in order to try and alleviate his condition. For example:

He remembered his medicine, rose, took it, and lay down on his back watching for the beneficent action of the medicine and for it to lessen the pain. "I need only take it regularly and avoid all injurious influences. I am already feeling better, much better." He began touching his side: it was not painful to the touch. "There, I really don't feel it. It's much better already." He put out the light and turned on his side ... "The appendix is getting better, absorption is occurring." Suddenly he felt the old, familiar, dull, gnawing pain, stubborn and serious. There was the same familiar loathsome taste in his mouth. His heart sank and he felt dazed. "My God! My God!" he muttered. "Again, again! And it will never cease." And suddenly the matter presented

itself in a quite different aspect. "Vermiform appendix! Kidney!" he said to himself.
"It's not a question of appendix or kidney, but of life and...death. (127)

Because the doctors do not make Ivan understand his condition, he makes his own diagnosis of his illness. He concludes that he is on the verge of dying so he lives in mounting anguish and fear of death. But death is not a subject that his doctors, friends or family want to talk to him about. That is what causes him his most profound pain.

When Tolstoy focuses on the ineptness and incompetence of the doctors and the inadequacy of either the medical books or the medicines to manage sickness, he is in essence attacking the ability of modern science to consistently and effectively deal with matters of life and death. In modern societies science and the people that advance it are believed to have answers to all questions dealing with human and non-human issues. However, Tolstoy indicates that he has very little faith in science since it cannot be used to explain what life truly entails. If it could, then doctors and the medicines that they use to try and cure people would always work. He believes that science is a sham aspect of civilisation that makes people believe in its illusionary power. He says that "[Science] perverts the conception of life by supposing itself to be studying life when it is studying merely the phenomena that accompany it. The longer it studies its phenomena, the further it diverges from the conception of life it wishes to study" (qtd in Pachmuss63).

Tolstoy here implies that science can never truly give answers concerning man's existence. It only pretends to but it has no capacity to do so. Science only gives man false hopes that make

him run in circles hoping to get solutions to many of the challenges in life especially when he is faced with life threatening situations.

Because Ivan and most of humanity in the modern world have been made to believe that science has all the solutions to their problems, they end up putting too much hope in things or people that really have no power to make their lives better. In this case Ivan puts a lot of hope in doctors, the medical books and in medicine but none of them are able ensure that he does not die. Probably this is why Christians have the common saying, “Doctors treat but God heals.” Many of such Christians believe that it is only through the intervention of God that doctors’ get the power to administer medicine that treats people. It also means that doctors are simply mediums through which God works and that the patient’s strong faith usually improves prognostic outcome. There are other people who question this mode of thinking believing that if God truly heals, why should people then die? Tolstoy’s answer to this question seems to be that people should view medicine from a mostly Christian outlook on life. Ivan provides a measure for this Christian outlook and indicates that it is not about following Christian doctrines but about loving and caring for others. Putting faith and attention completely into medicine or Christian doctrines would be a waste of time since doctors and doctrines cannot always fix illnesses. Since death is something that man cannot evade either through belief in science or belief in God, the best way to deal with death, is to create meaningful relationships that ensure that when one’s time for dying comes, he has people around him who can help him through the dying process.

Responding with Kindness, Compassion and Empathy

The character that Tolstoy presents as the one that understands how to live and how to respond adequately to matters pertaining to life and death is Gerasim a young peasant boy. Tolstoy creates him as a foil character to most of the characters in the novella.

Gerasim is deeply rooted in the peasant culture. A peasant culture is built on kindness and genuine motivation. In Tolstoy's worldview, the peasants were the only people who were capable of genuine feelings. Their poverty and simple life imposed on them by serfdom did not allow them to be contaminated with morally degrading vices like individualism and self-centeredness. Tolstoy believed that they genuinely cared for each other at all times but especially during sickness and death. They also accepted sickness and death as part of life. No wonder that Ivan Turgenev in *A Sportsman's Sketches* says this about them: "How wonderfully, the Russian peasant dies! His condition before death can be called neither indifference nor insensitivity; he dies as if performing a ritual: coolly and simply" (Chap.16). This means that the Russian peasants were not afraid of death and quickly and easily embraced death and dying.

By looking at Tolstoy's depiction of Gerasim one can see the truthfulness of Turgenev's assertion. Gerasim is kind to Ivan. He is the first to tackle head on the fact that Ivan is dying. He does not skirt around the issue like Ivan's family members and the doctors. He tells Ivan, "If you weren't sick it would be another matter, but as it is, why should I grudge a little trouble?"....We shall all of us die, so why should I grudge a little trouble?" In these words, Gerasim moves from the individual, "You" to the collective "We". The Russian peasant's

collective culture has socialised him to operate in the knowledge that what one person's experiences can be experienced by anyone in the group. Unlike Ivan and the rest of the aristocrats who are socialised to believe in advancing individual interests, Gerasim's peasant life expects him to look out for others. The Peasant appreciates the power that comes from the collective endeavour especially when faced with challenges in life. No wonder Gerasim effortlessly takes care of Ivan's toilet needs and even carries his legs throughout the night so as to make him comfortable. He believes that people should share each other's burdens. He portrays a psychological maturity and wholesomeness. Morally he is expected to subdue his own needs and desires in order to reach out to a fellow human being. That is what group identity as opposed to individual identity entails. Gerasim easily accepts a world that carries the good and the bad and is emotionally and physically equipped to handle it. Feldman explains Gerasim's behaviour quite aptly. He says:

Gerasim's superego imposes limits on how much he can express his own desires. Gerasim's superego brings his whole personality into harmony with the moral vision inherent in the cultural and religious traditions of which he is a part. He is able to give so much of himself with strength, sensitivity, and kindness because he accepts the limits of life and expects others to help him when his time comes. He has no need to deny death because his superego has modified his ego ideal, redirecting his narcissistic self-love towards the love of others. (322)

Gerasim's experiences in life have made him grow beyond his youthful years. He probably would have been as narcissistic as Ivan and other aristocrats are. However, his humble upbringing has trained him to be kind and gentle to others. Despite being a young man, he acts like a grown up man who quietly and gently nurses Ivan. This is because he understands and empathises with what Ivan is going through. He accommodates and nurses a grown up man who cries and complains incessantly and who wants to be carried even late into the night. Tolstoy thus reminds people that genuine power does not come from material pursuits that estrange people from others especially when those individuals need help in times of need. He argues for people to have peasant like and not aristocratic like hearts if they hope to help others overcome the pangs and pains of dying. It is therefore no wonder that he gives Gerasim such a powerfully distinct role to play in this story.

When Tolstoy presents Gerasim, a simple peasant, as a foil character to the more "sophisticated" celebrity doctors, Tolstoy ensures that he gives direct meaning to the importance of his message regarding the effectiveness of human love and selflessness. Unlike the doctors who are aloof and unconcerned about Ivan even as they look for scientific and modern solutions to try and explain the sickness that he has, Gerasim does exactly the opposite. He is available, selfless and understanding. He takes care of Ivan in a way none of the doctors do.

Gerasim is the only character capable of confronting death with equanimity and courage. In an ideal situation, the doctors and their nurses as well as his immediate family, should have dealt with all aspects of Ivan's condition. However, it is only Gerasim who does so. He

accepts death, and dirt, and illness as inevitable parts of life. He cleans Ivan's excretions and comforts him at night. He sees his duties as aid to a dying man. While on the one hand, the doctors and his family because of pursuing their self-interests end up exacerbating Ivan's condition, Gerasim acts as both comforter and "healer" to the dying Ivan. When he supports Ivan's legs all through the night, Gerasim engages in an activity that would have been better handled in a hospital using the technological implements there. Gerasim thus exemplifies the right way to treat a dying person. In contrast to the doctors in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, in *Veronica Decides to Die*, Doctor Igor uses hospital implements and the people therein to help his patients overcome their physical and mental maladies. He understands his patients and uses all means at his disposal to ensure that they get better. Gerasim realises the challenge that Ivan has in accepting that he is dying and uses his experience with death and dying to help him accept death's eventuality. By using Gerasim to aid Ivan, Tolstoy indicates that death is not something that someone should go through alone. The physical and psychological pains are often so much that having the helping hand of someone who can selflessly help a dying person is very important.

Self-evaluation, Spirituality, and Acceptance

The *Death of Ivan Ilych* is a novella that also carries religious undertones. It was written after Tolstoy's spiritual crisis. A reading of the novella reveals that there is a parallel between Ivan's views of life and what Tolstoy says about himself in *A Confessions*, Tolstoy's autobiography. In *A Confession* he reveals the piety he had as a child as well as how he abandoned this piousness as young man. He says that he was encouraged by the adults around him to pursue, "ambition, love of power, greed, sensuality, pride, anger, and

vindictiveness” (qtd. in Matual 124). Later in life he began to question what he had gained in life by pursuing all these things and of what relevance they would be to him when he died. Tolstoy by writing *The Death of Ivan Ilych* found an outlet to creatively present this dilemma which had been the source of his spiritual malaise.

In *The Death of Ivan Ilych* Tolstoy calls for people to engage in honest evaluations of themselves in order to determine what values drive them and whether these values make them good people or not. According to Tolstoy, what happens to Ivan can happen to any other person. He says, “Ivan Ilych’s life had been most simple and most ordinary and therefore most terrible” (102). This is an indication that he lived a life like any other person of his social milieu and engaged in activities that others also engaged in. What was terrible about this is that he did not take time to examine and evaluate the importance and impact of what he was doing to or with his own life.

A reading of *The Death of Ivan Ilych* indicates that the social setting of his time encouraged all kinds of moral and immoral pursuits in life. The aristocrats were especially engaged in wanton sexual escapades, endless pursuit of money and power, excessive desire for upward mobility, endless parties and playing of cards. They used whatever means to acquire anything their hearts’ desired. This included backstabbing, undercutting each other and appealing for favours from their superiors. As a result of these pursuits the aristocrats became arrogant and vindictive. They became exceedingly happy when one of them failed to attain anything. For example, Ivan undercuts his colleagues in order to get promotions and advancements and his colleagues are very excited when they learn that he has died because they know that his death

will open out a space for their own or relatives' advancements. Generally they all display a lack of concern for each other. They are only interested in a selfish pursuit of their own happiness.

Ivan is thus used as a symbolic character in this novel. He not only represents the rest of the aristocrats in the novella, he also represents the "aristocracy" in human beings. Tolstoy uses him to castigate the selfishness and egocentric in pursuit of "happiness" that the characters display and warns humanity in general against such pursuits. Tolstoy demonstrates the imprudence of pursuing worldly pleasures and power over others because they make humans arrogant and heartless. He argues that these pleasures and notions of power would be useful if only there was no death. Death thus reminds people that it has power over humans who think that by gaining the worldly things they have the ultimate power. The humans' folly in believing that they have power is revealed when death comes calling. Tolstoy's presentation of Ivan's world as crumbling when he is in his prime of life is indicative of man's folly and death's power. The phenomenal experience of facing death soon after his promotion and acquisition of more money and better living standards is indicative of the absurdity of human endeavour.

The question that begs to be answered is: Is it wrong for man to pursue things like promotions, money and other comforts? Tolstoy in *The Death of Ivan Ilych* seems to believe so and that is why he calls for a spiritual regeneration of humans. Tolstoy refers to the manner in which Ivan lives his life as being simple. Generally, there is nothing wrong with leading a simple life. In fact many people would consider this a virtue. However, Tolstoy

demonstrates that Ivan's life is simple refers to a wrong way of living. The major problem in the manner that Ivan goes through life is that he is an unquestioning conformist. He conforms even to those values that he himself knows are wrong. He says, "Maybe I did not live as I ought to have done...But how could that be when I did everything properly" (145). He uses the word properly here to indicate that he has never examined what it was that he was aping.

He has pitched his behaviour, his values and his desires, solely on the opinions and expectations of those that he considers socially superior to him. As a young man, he:

succumbs to sensuality, to vanity, [and does things] which formally seemed to him very horrid and made him feel disgusted with himself when he did them; but when later on he saw that such actions were done by people of good positions and that they did not regard them as wrong, he was able not to regard them as right, but to forget them entirely or not be at all troubled at remembering them. (103)

He marries, not because he loves or cares for his wife but because he thinks it is the right thing to do. He also sires children that simply become appendages to his marriage. The people he chooses to be his friends are those with whom he shares a social position. He endeavours to exhibit the correct manner of dress, and the correct manner of decor in his home. Ivan's behaviour can be explained using the Freudian moral psychology. In this concept, Freud argues that an individual's choices in life are determined by the past. The past becomes so institutionalised that it becomes the basis for both conscious and unconscious

decision making. Ivan fails to develop his ego into an ego ideal that would help him formulate his own ways of living life and doing things. He is unable to develop his own unique content that would have helped him shape his life in a unique manner. Stephen Feldman argues that Ivan's idealisation of those in authority "resembles the infant idealisation of parents. The parents care for and benefit the infant, so the infant idealises them" (313). However, the adults that Ivan idealises have poor moral groundings and thus have led him into living by values that are unexamined spiritually. As a result of the spiritual disconnection, even though he believes that he has made it to the top, his life is terrible because his is guided by negative moral values that encourage greed, excessive pride and egocentrism, and generally a lack of a humane way of treating other people.

By the end of his life, Ivan soon realises the uselessness of the power, money and leisure that he has clamoured for all his adult life. He realises how useless they are in helping him deal with the fact that he is dying. He soon realises that pursuing worldly pleasures disconnected him from what is truly human. For example while he is healthy, he engages in relationships built on an ideology of exclusion of those the aristocrats consider low class. His circle of friends includes only "the best people...[and keep at arm's length] the various shabby friends and relations" (117). When he is dying, none of the "best people" are really concerned about him. Only the "shabby" ones, symbolised by Gerasim, relate with Ivan Ilych's "with much show of affection" (117). It is on his deathbed that he recognises the folly of shunning others because of class differences. Divisions such as these are in opposition "to human life as created by God and nature (Pachmuss 76). People who live in cultures where individuals are only focused on achieving personal comforts and self-aggrandisement and are not bothered

with others end up dying very lonely lives. Indeed, Ivan would have died a lonely life too had it not been for Gerasim who had had a different kind of socialisation. The comfort that Ivan gets from Gerasim is based on what Ivan soon realises is the true religion.

The impact of embracing this true religion can be seen in the manner Tolstoy ends up leading his life. To Tolstoy, a true religion is one that values all human beings without favouring any one group. This view of life is in keeping with Tolstoy's personal experience when he lived amongst peasants. Roman Krzenaric reminds us that Tolstoy elected to live with the peasants immediately after their emancipation in 1861. He:

Adopted a traditional peasant dress, [and] worked alongside the labourers in the estate, ploughing the fields and repairing their homes....Tolstoy enjoyed the company of the peasants consciously began to shun the literary and aristocratic elites in the city (Para, 4)

Tolstoy's experiences made him rethink the relationships he kept as an aristocrat and found out that he was losing out on some wholesome relationship with those of the peasant class.

Similarly, Ivan while on his death bed recognises that he had spent many years "not living" yet he believed that he was "living."

Tolstoy's descriptions of death in many of his works recognise that people's perverted way of living their lives is their greatest undoing. In the short story "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" Tolstoy warns against the dangers inherent in being greedy. In this story, Pahom, a

Russian peasant dies trying to get as much land as he can but ends up collapsing and dying before he can get the land. He ends up with just enough land for his grave. Tolstoy in this story augments what he has already established in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. In both stories, Tolstoy demonstrates that too much desire for wealth and comforts precedes the protagonists' deaths. In other words, the very things that people desire so badly can end up killing them. In another short story entitled "Three Deaths", Tolstoy presents the life trajectory of one of the three characters, the spoilt noble woman, who dies a tragic death because of her selfishness despite claiming that she was a civilized Christian. In *Anna Karenina*, Anna dies immediately she realises that her life has been empty because of her selfish desire for personal happiness at the expense of other people. These stories are thus indicative of Tolstoy's negative view concerning people's incessant pursuance of wealth and power. In these works, characters realise, sometimes on their death-beds, that they have lived empty lives and have approached life the wrong way. In *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, Ivan Ilych is presented as struggling with death even as he re-examines his lived life. Tolstoy presents death as a "reorganiser rather than a destroyer" (Olney 104). "It shows man the essence of his soul and teaches him to understand it [and] compels man to review his life and grasp its meaning" (Pachmuss 80). The process of dying together with all its accompanying suffering, allow Ivan Ilych to take time to look at how he has lived his life and determine whether he has lived a good life or not. Tolstoy personifies death and makes Ivan undergo a form of purification. Tolstoy writes:

Suddenly some force struck him in the chest and side, making it still harder to breathe, and he fell through the hole and there at the bottom was a light... Just then his schoolboy son had crept softly in and gone up to the bedside. The dying man was still

screaming desperately and waving his arms. His hand fell on the boy's head, and the boy caught it, pressed it to his lips, and began to cry. At that very moment, Ivan Ilych fell through and caught sight of the light and it was revealed to him that though his life should not have been what it should have been, this could still be rectified. Then he felt that someone was kissing his hand. He opened his eyes, looked at his son, and felt sorry for him. His wife came up to him and he glanced at her....He felt sorry for her too. (151)

Ivan at this stage undergoes a spiritual rebirth. Despite going through the pain of dying, he perceives a moment that makes him believe that he has been forgiven for living a terrible life. It is not an accident that Ivan's epiphany coincides with his touching his son's head as well as opening of his eyes and looking keenly at his son and wife. For the first time in the novel, he expresses deep pity for other people other than himself. This spiritual intimacy, coupled with the physical closeness represented by being touched by his son, breaks down the screens he had for a long time erected between himself and others. As he bridges the gap, his isolation disappears, the meaning of life is revealed to him, and true joy fills his heart. This is an indication that death and life always go hand in hand. The animated death reminds him about this truth about life. In accepting that he has not lived a good life and that there was need to have done so by treating other people humanely, he symbolically rediscovers life. Tolstoy thus demonstrates that Ivan thus begins to truly live his life on his death-bed. In this way, he has a similar response to life as Nicola in *The Spare Room*, who recognises that accepting that death is an eventuality that one must go through, allows her to die more peacefully.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined how Tolstoy uses a 19th century example of the suffering of a solitary man, Ivan Ilych in the *Death of Ivan Ilych*, to demonstrate how people respond to death and dying. The study captures fear as one of the key responses to death. Tolstoy seems to suggest that because death mysteriously invades people's lives, they often become excessively shocked by its presence. In the novel, the fear of death is fuelled by the way people live their lives. He indicates that the things that empower people are the very things that make them powerless. Their incessant pursuit of worldly comforts and power leaves no room for them to think about end of life matters. Thus the power and comfort that these things bring make it hard for them to accept the finitude of life. Thus the fear of death and dying are presented as emanating from the fact that people do not take time to examine their lives.

Characters are also presented as responding to death in a callous manner. According to Tolstoy, modernity tends to create people who lack genuine and compassionate feelings towards others. It also destroys the genuine communal spirit that makes people thrive in the world. People are so intent on acquiring more and more wealth and power that they become estranged from one another. Thus when others die, they lack any genuine compassion for them. Tolstoy condemns Ivan's aristocratic family, friends and colleagues at work for not caring enough for the dying Ivan. Ironically, in as much as he condemns Ivan's acquaintances he also indicates that Ivan is no better than them. He would have done the same had it been anyone else dying.

Tolstoy juxtaposes these aristocrats with the peasant, Gerasim whose response to death is different. Tolstoy believes that Gerasim's humble background makes him have a more compassionate and humane response to death. Through Gerasim's, Tolstoy demonstrates that true religion encourages care and love for one another. It also teaches humans how to appreciate life holistically, with both the good and the bad. Through Gerasim Tolstoy also demonstrates that the humble life is more empowering than the aristocratic life. It creates individuals who are emotionally strong and ready to face the world with its good and bad. This is unlike the aristocratic Ivan, who at the onset of sickness loses all the power he believed he held and becomes a cowering man who regresses to attention seeking childlike behaviour.

Using an emotional journey motif, Tolstoy shows that in order for Ivan to accept that he is dying, he undergoes a spiritual regeneration. Tolstoy suggests that an individual, who has lived a tainted life, such as Ivan has done, needs to re-examine his life and see what is wrong with it. It is only at the point that he can forgive himself that he can then die peacefully. Because of this, Tolstoy advocates for wholesome living that encourages people to relate genuinely and compassionately with other people so that when one finally finds himself at the point of death, he does not have to deal with an agonizing sense of guilt.

CHAPTER SIX: DYING WITH EASE: AN ANALYSIS OF DYING AND DEATH IN *PLACE OF DESTINY* BY MARGARET OGOLA

Introduction

In this chapter, I demonstrate how Margaret Ogola, in *Place of destiny*, has used a variety of techniques to present her views on how death is experienced within a family set up. I argue that *Place of Destiny* is a novel in which Ogola uses the home setting to present various responses that are elicited because of the dying and death of a wife and mother. The chapter especially explores the gravity of having to accept the inevitability of death. I argue that despite the challenges that sickness and dying bring into a family set-up, flexibility in perception allows for the people concerned to make healthy responses to this traumatic situation. The chapter highlights the manner in which power is performed in homes and how it affects the growth of family members towards an acceptance (or rejection) of death. I argue that the writer makes a conscious effort to highlight how high-handedness in the family set-up impinges on family relation and can be a source of emotional and physical death.

About Margaret Ogola

Margaret Atieno Ogola, a Kenyan woman of Luo descent, was born on 12th June 1958 and died on 21 September 2011 of cancer. She was married to Dr. George Ogola and was also a mother of both biological and adopted children. After high school, she went to the University of Nairobi, Kenya where she pursued a course in medicine and surgery and later obtained a Master of Medicine degree. She worked as a consultant Paediatrician then became the Medical Director of Cottolengo Hospice for AIDS and HIV orphans. She also helped in establishing the SOS HIV/AIDS Clinic in Nairobi.

Ogola was also a prolific writer who penned *The River and the Source*, its sequel, *I Swear by Apollo*, and *Mandate of the people*, a book that was released posthumously in 2013. She also teamed up with Margaret Roche to write *Cardinal Otunga: A Gift of Grace*, a biography of the late Cardinal Maurice Otunga, an Archbishop of the Roman Catholic in Kenya. She also co-authored with her husband, George Ogola, *Educating in Human Love*, a handbook on sex education.

Ogola was also an adherent of the Opus Dei. In an interview in a documentary by Jeff Ogola entitled *Atieno: Place of Destiny*, she says that Opus Dei helped her know that it is her role as a human being to help others. This is because all human beings are called to perfection which can be discerned in the way people use their day to day activities to help others in society. She also says that being an adherent of Opus Dei taught her to appreciate the reality of death and be grateful for the life that God had given her. One important thing that Ogola says in this documentary is that working with the HIV/AIDS infected children meant dealing with death all the time, thus she learnt to appreciate life and deal with each day as it came.

It is obvious from the above that Ogola was closely in touch with the health, religious and social welfare of people. She obviously had opportunity to see the challenges patients face in accessing medical attention as well as the ravages of terminal illness on patients, especially those with HIV/AIDS or any other illness. At the same time she recognised the human desire to be strong and find hope in difficult situations as presented in *Place of Destiny*. This positive attitude towards life is captured in the words of Jairus Omuteche who says that, “Margaret Ogola has shaped herself a niche as a writer with a mission to use her writing to

redefine the image of the woman. She has deployed her art to re-create the woman's identities in the postcolonial Kenyan society" (123). The mood of hope thus permeates Ogola's novels despite the characters facing a myriad life challenges including death and dying as is depicted in *Place of Destiny*.

About *Place of Destiny*

Place of Destiny is a novel that continues the gender debate that Ogola began in *The River and the Source*, and in *I Swear by Apollo*. Whereas in her first two novels she focuses on how the two sexes carry out their business of living, in *Place of Destiny* she focuses on how the characters conduct the business of death and dying. In *The River and the Source* and *I Swear by Apollo* she details the manner in which patriarchy forces women to uncover ways of finding a voice to articulate their issues. They do this within the axle of imbalance of power in which men have an upper hand in all major facets of the traditional African world. However, *Place of Destiny* is set in a modern world where women like Amor have managed to establish their own independence. Nevertheless, Ogola acknowledges that there are still a great many women still struggling under the shackles of patriarchy and this affects their quality of life.

While acknowledging that the challenges that face women in patriarchal societies are far from over, Ogola also focuses on another issue that people have to deal with within the family set up. The issue is one concerning the dying and death of a family member. The dying and death of a mother and wife is, more specifically, what is what is in focus in *Place*

of Destiny. Whereas in her other novels we see many of the characters dying without the writer taking time to explain their feelings in the face of death, in *Place of Destiny*, she uses the idea of the main characters dying not only as a stylistic choice but also as a way of making an ideological statement about the responses to dying and death. Considering that Ogola wrote this novel at almost the same time as she was facing imminent death from cancer, I can safely say that she was using her own experiences with the dying process to make a definitive statement about how she believed people should live and how they should handle dying and death.

Rationalising and Acceptance

Ogola presents Amor's and other characters' responses to death through a journey motif. The journey motif in *Place of Destiny* is a psychological journey. To a large extent, Ogola presents death as part of the natural cycle of the journey of life. However, she acknowledges that death often catches people unawares. She develops her story from a common trajectory in which people are forced to confront life threatening diseases that suddenly cut lives short. Amor the protagonist in *Place of Destiny*, just like Nicola in *The Spare Room* and Ivan in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, is dying of cancer of the liver.

Ogola presents Amor as a progressive protagonist who is not afraid of facing any challenges that life brings her way. She is a woman who has managed to conquer many challenges in life. She has exploited the democratic space within the post-colonial society that she lives in order to create a niche for herself in her matrimonial home and in the business sector. She has

managed to overcome the ill feelings that that emanated from realising right from childhood that girls and women in Africa have always received the short end of the stick.

While growing up in a traditional Kenyan home, she felt the negative and deadening impact of gendered roles that girls are forced to live under. While the boys, her brothers, are given less demanding chores, the girls are given heavy duties to perform. However, in an emotional journey through that part of her life, Amor manages to overcome the unfairness of the patriarchal system by using the value of hard work engrained in her at a young age in order to climb up the educational, social and economic ladder. Through hard work she has earned a “Master’s degree in Business Administration and a post-graduate Diploma in Human Psychology” (17), both of which she gets while working and raising a family. She also manages to set up a flourishing business enterprise without the help of her husband. Amor thus manages to beat the patriarchal structures that have always regarded women as inferior to men. She does this by ensuring that she runs her business independently from her husband and makes a substantial amount of money in the process. Amor is thus an empowered woman with a great future ahead of her.

Suddenly, all this promise of a great future is cut short abruptly by the knowledge that she will be dead from cancer in about six months. When we first meet Amor she is in her office thinking about her achievements on the marital and career world. She then says, “Today is not really a day for thinking about ambitious dreams and business matters, and this for the simple reason that I am having to deal with the problem of my imminent demise” (17). The writer draws the reader into the initial confusion that Amor is faced with. The journey that

Amor has been on has been one of upward mobility. It is a journey in which she had already conquered a myriad of challenges that would have derailed her progress in life. She is thus at a point in life when ideally she should be enjoying the fruits of her labour. Nevertheless, it is at this inopportune moment that a terminal illness decides to strike. Just like Ivan in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, the terminal illness presents itself at the peak of her career growth and at a prime age.

This is an indication of the ironies inherent in life. Incapacitating illnesses can attack any time in a person's life. Illnesses are humbling in the sense that they do not respect time or the position of an individual. They do not even respect statistical data that is used to define people's life spans. For example, Amor has all along assumed that as a woman she would live a long life. She says: "World statistics say that women are living longer, seventy or eighty at least. [Thus], I erroneously expected to be one of them-that I would have plenty of time to synthesise a philosophy of life, and therefore of death-and thus resolve the two faces of the coinage of life" (21). It is clear that she lives under the illusion that her husband would die before her only to suddenly realise that this is not to be. Death is presented as being a power that does not follow prescribed societal notions of how people view life. Through what Foucault calls bio-power, people are socialised into a body of knowledge that defines what is normal or acceptable and what is not. In this case, Amor has been socialised into a belief that the time of dying is determined by gender and that men die before women. Thus it comes as a shock to her when death overrules what is considered the norm. Scientifically researched facts and statistics about the longevity of women's lives are interrogated at this point and found wanting. When death suddenly comes knocking, people start groping in the dark for

answers. Statistical data appear as myths and offer no comfort to a woman who is dying early. To some extent it appears that Amor's belief in the truthfulness of this data causes her initial shock and brief difficulty of accepting of her condition.

In Freudian terms, there is a struggle between the conscious part of her, the superego, that knows that she is dying and the unconscious part, the ego ideal, which does not want to accept that her days on earth are numbered and that as a woman she is not going to enjoy a long life as suggested by scientific data. One can understand the high levels of confusion at this turn of event. One moment she is living her life of upward mobility, and the next moment she has to contend with the fact that she will be dead in less than six months. Ogola, creates tension through presenting Amor as a character at cross roads, a character whose mind is fragmented. Her fragmented mind makes her grope around for a human connection to help her think through her confusion. Whereas previously she prided in her independence, at the moment she finds out that she is dying she reaches out to her husband who is abroad on a trip. Ogola at this moment points out a salient concern for people caught up in similar moments of confusion. In their fragmented states they ponder whether they should plan for their lives or plan for their deaths. Ogola throws Amor at the deep end, so to speak, in order to remind her readers that death has a way of creeping on people and it forces them to look for a way out. The journey of life is thus presented as one that is unpredictable. There is no knowing at what point it will end. Although people know that a life's journey has to end one day, the time of this end is often hidden from them. It is no wonder that Amor is utterly confused at the unexpected turn of event. Big Mama in "Big Mama's Funeral," Nicola in *The Spare Room* and Ivan in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, go through similar levels of confusion as

they find themselves having to, unexpectedly, deal with the challenges brought about by terminal illnesses and the knowledge that they are soon dying.

Whereas Big Mama, Ivan and Nicola resort to denial and regression respectively, for Amor her way out is through rationalisation and then acceptance. Rationalisation refers to constructing a seemingly good or logical reason, as an attempt to justify an action or something. It is a kind of defence mechanism that forces an individual into accepting something that is a dilemma. Amor after realising that her end is inevitable, begins to justify why it is alright for her to die. She says that her dying is justified because she has lived a good life and has very little reason to complain. She says that she has had a “deep and fulfilling relationships...money from a successful though stressful career [and] joys and the occasional anguish of motherhood...[and] having known happiness” (17-18). Ogburn presents Amor as an open minded character who is able to achieve a high level of flexibility that enables her to appreciate that life has both good and the bad. Rationalising enables Amor to transfer her libidinal energies from the pain of knowing that she is dying to recognition of the advantages that life has allowed her to enjoy. Through her rationalisation she is able to become the strongest member of the family even though she, ideally, should be the weakest. Thus rationalisation gives her the power to control the people around her and the dying process. At this point in her emotional journey, rationalisation strengthens her into an acceptance of aspects of her life that she has no control of.

She recognises that in her previously well life, she could control her academic pursuits, her career growth and the management of her family members and staff members. In her dying

state she realises that she has to shift control to the dying process so as to ensure that she dies with ease. Accepting that her death is inevitable is the first step towards achieving this goal. This acceptance thus gives her the courage to think of death not as a form of imprisonment but as a form of freedom. She says, “I suddenly experience an impatience, a powerful yearning that it might be over and quickly. One moment alive. The next, gone. Free (32).

Another thing that makes Amor rationalise her dying is that she takes the blame for having allowed the cancer to have grown to unmanageable levels. Amor is a progressive and practical oriented woman who understands that one of the challenges that people face is finding time to visit doctors in order to get treated for what they consider minor ailments. They only visit doctors when “the pain is so persistent” (24). Unfortunately, many people often realise that they have cancer, or any other terminal illness, when it is too late. As in Amor’s case, the liver cancer is “advanced and inoperable” (31). The cancer is detected at such an advanced state that no meaningful treatment can take place. Another reason that makes her fail to have her cancer detected early is that she believes that doctors only want to enrich themselves with people’s hard earned money. Amor says that doctors’ primary concern is to “do practically anything to keep one alive. At one’s own cost of course” (20-21). Amor thus accepts her death by rationalising that if she had not ignored the doctors then she probably would not have suffered her present fate.

Through Amor journey of life, Ogola also appreciates the fact that life by its nature is “compelling and exhilarating...[and] even bugs and viruses feel compelled to hang on grimly to whatever version of life they happen to possess” (21). This is indicative of the fact that

people are so caught up in the exciting business of living that they never take a moment to reflect on where the business of living ends. Even if they do, they believe that they can overcome death. That is, the ontological nature of humans is to believe that they are invincible and immortal. Oscar Maina puts it clearly by saying that “a careful exploration of human activities surrounding the issues of death and immortality reveals an obsession with the expression with of the possibility of defeating death” (187). Freud also argues that humans unconsciously do not accept death because they feel that it devalues them.

When Amor compares human’s quest for immortality with that of bugs and viruses, the underlying message is that human’s immortality desire emanates from their base animal instinct. It is in their genetic makeup and this is probably why they unconsciously refrain from thinking about their own deaths or planning for their demise. Nonetheless, through Amor, Ogola urges her readers to never “leave such a question- [the question of dying], perhaps the most important and meaningful question in this life, to the very end” (21). By presenting this view of life, Ogola is calling upon people to consciously interrogate what having life means. She expects them to take time out to realise that life does not go on forever. Her argument seems to be that when death is on people’s conscious minds, they can plan for and live their lives in such a way that when death does come, for it will come, they will be better prepared for it. Amor’s ability to overcome her initial consternation and eventual acceptance is because she has had time to think about her end. In the end she is able to rally her family around her death comfortably because of the deep awareness that no one has an entitlement to remain on the life’s journey forever.

Non Acceptance of Death

Whereas Ogola seems to advocate for death awareness among people, she is also significantly aware that not all human beings respond to death in the same way. Whereas Amor is quite accepting of the fact that she is dying and uses this acceptance to rally her family members into accepting it, her husband Mwaghera's response is the opposite. He finds it hard to reconcile himself to the fact that his wife is dying. Human beings generally create relationships with others and even though they know that these relationships will not be permanent, they are hardly prepared for the changes that come into these relationships. Death is a major factor that destabilises human relationships and many people are never prepared for separation from their loved ones especially through death. According to Earnest Becker, human beings are always in a state of denial over their mortality. This denial of death is, according to Becker, one of the most basic drives in individuals' behaviour. As a result of this when people are faced with mortality they become anxious and are even terrified of it.

Because of their anxiety and fear of death, the human psyche has devised all sorts of strategies to escape awareness the vulnerability of the human form as well the anxiety that comes with it. Two of the strategies are crying and the inability to address matters pertaining to the death of the individual. Of all the characters, Mwaghera spends the most time crying and avoiding discussions concerning his wife's impending death. Even by the end of the novel, he is still not reconciled to the fact that she is dead.

Ogola juxtaposes Mwaghera with his wife, Amor, so that she can make definitive statements concerning how people react to dying and death. What is interesting about the Mwaghera and

Amor responses to death, is that the person who is dying is much stronger emotionally than the one who is not dying. From the very onset of her illness, Amor takes time to contemplate what dying means to her and how it will impact of her family. She quickly comes up with a plan of how to deal with her dying and her death. In other words she takes control of her family members as well as her dying process. She quickly thinks about her will and how she will want done about her wealth, she thinks about how she will tell her children that she is dying. She calls in her husband and plans an impromptu holiday so that she can consolidate her energies before having to break the news of her death to her children. She expects her husband to be as strong as she is. She expects him to take control but it is clear that he cannot handle it. At first, “words fail him completely” (50). However, when he does speak he clearly tells Amor about his anguish and inability to accept that she is dying. He says, “for us humans, this world with all its problems is the only world we really know and feel safe in....But for me, the simple truth is that I cannot believe that after you die I would never see you again”(54).

From what Mwachera says above, it is clear that he addresses a key aspect of human socialisation. Although many religions and philosophies teach people that there is another better form of life and existence outside of the earthly realm, the human mind cannot fathom this. What empowers humans and what makes them comfortable is the life that they live in the tangible world that they occupy. People are unable to truly comprehend the other non-tangible world that dead people, presumably, move into. In the tangible world, the relationships people make and keep go a long way in stabilising them in their existence. Consequently, thinking about a world that is devoid of the very people that they has chosen

or is forced by circumstances to relate with, becomes a major challenge. For Mwaghera, and many other people who are forced to deal with the dying or death of loved ones, the situation becomes quite untenable and challenging. They are unable to face it and spend a lot of time either crying or simply refusing to deal with issues to do with the traumatising situation. Mwaghera cannot just handle the idea that a woman that he has had the most intimate relationship with for many years will soon be out of his life in four to six months. Because he cannot handle the pain he resorts to crying. When Amor tells him that she is sorry that she has to die and leave him alone, he “falls down on his knees beside the bed and buries his face in the people [and] terrible heaving sobs rack his body” (45).

At this juncture Mwaghera has been used to deconstruct the view that men are always the strong ones when challenges face families. Mwaghera proves that this is not necessarily true. In Freudian terms, his crying shows his regression. As a grown up man he is expected to be the one in charge and the one with the power to control not just others in the family set up but also his emotions. In most African communities, men are expected to handle calamities with fortitude. Mwaghera’s regression into a cry baby makes him appear like an emasculated man who is devoid of the power that should accompany a man in a patriarchal society. However, Ogola provides reasons that give credence to the fact that people’s genders should not necessarily be the determining factor of how they relate to death. Despite expecting a better response from Mwaghera, Amor says:

I feel sorry for [Mwaghera], but the truth is-I really would like to discuss the subject closest to my heart with another adult. That subject just happens to be “dying”. Part

of his job description as my husband is to be that other understanding adult whenever necessary (51-52).

She, nevertheless, concedes that people grieve differently. She says, “I cannot fully fathom the depth of his anguish and loss, and even the inevitable survivor’s guilt. Each person must descend these hells alone even as each person must face the moment of their death essentially alone” (45). The ideal situation would be that everyone should be strong enough to accept the inevitability of dying and be prepared for it. However, Ogola, by juxtaposing Mwaghera’s and Amor’s responses demonstrates that no two people are similar. Even if they have been in a relationship for many years, they cannot respond to death in the same way. Whereas in many patriarchal societies a man who cries in the face of calamity is weak, Ogola demonstrates that the differences in responses cannot be determined by gender. Although Freud would see this is a sign of regression, to Ogola, crying is a form of therapy. It is presented as the therapy that Mwaghera needs in order to somewhat deal with his wife’s sickness, death, interment and life after her burial. Amor says, “For the next few weeks, I expect that I would have to be the stronger one. But I expect that when the time comes he will be there for me-strong enough to let me go” (45).Indeed, by the time Amor dies, Mwaghera has become a little stronger to let his wife go because he really has no other option. However, the events of his life after Amor dies shows that he has not fully accepted her demise.

Planning and Will Writing

Ogola sees life as a journey which requires planning and open-mindedness to the fact that life is not permanent. Opening out one's mind to writing a will is a way of showing one's acceptance of the inevitability of death. People must plan, not just for the life that they are living, but also plan for life after their deaths. Writing of wills is one way of planning for this uncertain future. Amor is presented as an individual who has taken time to think about her end of life situation thus immediately she began to acquire wealth, she writes a will. According to Ogola, people should not keep off the idea of writing wills till it is too late. Amor says that she wrote her will "sometime ago when death was still very remote and of merely theoretical interest" because she is a fastidious person (32). Having acquired quite some wealth in her journey of life, she realises quite early in life that she needs to write a will. She did that and now at the time she is facing imminent death, she only pulls it out to simply update it.

As she brushes up on her will, Amor highlights key aspects of life and will making. First, she argues against traditions that prohibit people from thinking about death. Such traditions obviously, discourage the writing of wills. She says:

I wanted to prove that I was not only an enlightened woman, but also in charge of my life and by inference not afraid of death. Tribal lore has it that if one deliberately thinks of, speaks of, to say nothing of writes of, an evil, it would surely become incarnate and therefore harm so intrepid and foolish a person. (32)

In many traditional patriarchal societies it is men who make wills because it is believed that the property in the homes belongs to them. In the modern world, however, both men and women draw up wills sometimes independently. Even though Amor has a husband she does not open out the space to allow him to help her make her will. From the onset we have noted that Amor has charted her journey of life by pursuing wealth creation independently from her husband. This is something she had determined to do this right from the beginning of her marriage. In terms of economic pursuit she abandons a collective approach and sees the world as place where individual efforts and freedom has to be respected. This includes how to distribute the wealth that accrues from this individual enterprise. Nonetheless, she warns against lust for money as well as excessive materialistic tendencies that make people overspend on luxuries. She says:

I will not dwell on the great evils that have been committed by people who lusted over money above all else, above reason and about life itself. Nor, for that matter, about those close cousins of theirs who could have struggled for their fair share but were simply too lazy to commit themselves to the discipline of making and retaining money. I will not even whisper a word about those idiots who spend their hard-earned cash to prop up an expensive and ostentatious lifestyle even if it gets them into eternal debt. (33-34)

According to Amor, indolence, greed and unaffordable and expensive lifestyles result in debt ridden lives that are not family friendly. Thus in order to ensure the growth of family, the journey of life requires that a consistent policy of wealth creation and wise spending should

be adhered to so that at the end of one's life, one can have a significant amount of wealth to bequeath his or her next of kin. Wealth creation, therefore, empowers individuals and families because it cushions them when death strikes.

In many African setups, wills are presented orally. The written will is a western conception. People who are old or people who are sick, often make wills in order to control the social universe that they are leaving behind. Becker in *Denial of Death* argues that most human action is often taken so as to repudiate the terror they have of dying or to avoid the inevitability of death. The terror of annihilation creates such a profound, albeit, subconscious anxiety in people that they spend their lives attempting to make sense of life in its totality. As a result, societies build symbols: laws, religious meaning systems, cultures, and belief systems to alleviate the terror of knowing that they will soon lose control of the universe that they have controlled all along. Wills thus give people the opportunity to put their minds at rest. Obviously, Ogola is of the opinion that old fashioned notions about believing that if one plans for their death then one is courting evil are a relic of the past and not part of the modern lifestyle. Will writing is an indication of an enlightened mind even as it is a tool of empowerment.

It is also Amor's opinion that people in modern times in Africa should endeavour to be creators of wealth "to which one might rightly affix the word estate" (33). It is this estate that they can then bequeath their children who should also continue with the process of generating more wealth. In *Place of Destiny*, wealth creation is not a gendered activity. Both men and women are engaged in it. Amor is a manager of her firm while her husband,

Mwaghera, is a college professor. Although Ogola does not indicate whether or not Mwaghera writes a will, the resounding message is that wills written early in life when one gets onto the path of wealth creation, makes it easier for the individual to quickly chart a way forward when dying become imminent.

Ogola argues that writing wills make people give reality a second look. It makes them consciously accept that they will be absent from a future that they are charting out. However, this does not mean that others will not be around to advance that future that the individual is charting out in the present. Wills are thus written by people to ensure that they have a semblance of control over a future that they may not be present in. In other words, wills are, to a great extent, recognisable power control tools. Yet, because wills require the good will of other people for them to be successfully implemented, dying people have to respect those significant others that they expect to handle the will. In “Big Mama’s Funeral” the challenges of ensuring a proper execution of Big Mama’s will is that that she does not have the good will of her family. In *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen, Henry Dashwood dies, leaving all his money to his first wife's son John Dashwood. Although Henry leaves very little money to his second wife and her three daughters, he asks his son John to take care of them. John promises to do so, but immediately Henry dies, John’s mother moves into the home and they ignore the request made by Henry to take care of the rest of the family. In this case too there is lack of goodwill on the part of John.

It is different in *Place of Destiny*. Amor, while accepting that she is dying, still hopes that the firm which she has painstakingly taken time to build up will continue to thrive even when she

dies. She believes that this is only possible if she empowers those people that she will leave behind. Although she wills the firm to her only son, Pala she realises that he cannot handle the company at all because he is still very young. Thus, she ensures that the firm is left in the hands of her faithful employees. She hopes that the positive relationship that she has had with her employees, will ensure a smooth running of the company when she finally dies. She gives her employees an opportunity to buy into the company so that as part owners they can feel an obligation to run the company effectively. She tells her employees that with the help of her lawyers, she has had to make a few adjustments to her will “which will put the company in more hands than while leaving the slight majority in the hands of [her] family (99). She then gives them the opportunity to buy into the company so as to “take it where [they] want it to be” (99-100). In so doing, Amor recognises that in the journey of life, the power of the collective in advancement of enterprises that are created by individuals is very important. It also shows an acceptance of the limitations of what humans can do as individuals. If a company or enterprise is run by one person, when that person dies, it might spell the downfall of the organisation. Although there are situations where many organisations have crumbled when a person dies and leaves it to a group of people, Ogola seems to be of the opinion that if such enterprises are left to handpicked individuals who understand the worth of the organisation then the possibility of the company crumbling is very low. This is probably why Amor carefully selects Ithoth Kela and Lanoi Sompesha, her two trusted employees, as the people to run her firm when she is gone. Her decision to allow other people to run her organisation shows that she has accepted the fact that she dying.

Although Amor indicates that her desire is to leave her company to Pala, interestingly she does not just want him to get the company in an easy way. She expects him to work hard to get the position. She tells her employees, “I have a son to whom I had hoped to leave the reigns, but he is only fourteen....I know that in less than ten years he will be clamouring at the door to be let into the action...Let him find you where you are and if you find him worthy, do let him in” (100). For Amor, getting the benefits of a will is not automatic. Her son and daughters have to work hard and show good reasons as to why they should benefit from her wealth. In this respect, Amor underscores the value of hard work as a part of life and as a response to death. Amor views power over death as emanating, not from money, but from the hard work that goes into wealth creation. The wealth that is then bequeathed to individuals can only be beneficial to the individuals if they continually work hard in order to create more wealth.

In “Big Mama’s Funeral”, Marquez indicates that one of the issues that make people unable to accept death easily is because they fear that the people they are leaving behind will plunder their wealth. Marquez demonstrates this by showing how Big Mama’s relatives hang around her home and when she dies, they pilferage all the wealth that she had tried to safeguard all her life. It is clear that a major reason why these family members do not respect her will is because they have never felt that the wealth belongs to them. This is because Big Mama has never encouraged them to engage in independent wealth creation that would benefit them when she dies. Amor, on the other hand, encourages her children to be independent minded so that they can do things for themselves instead of being overly dependent on anyone for economic uplifting. Because she knows that her employees and her

children are individually hardworking and honest people, she does not have to worry about the future of her firm when she is gone. This makes her acceptance of her death easy.

The Power of the Collective in the Family Set-up

It is obvious from reading Ogola's books that she believes that the family is a dominant social organisation in human life. She establishes this in *The River and the Source* and in *I Swear by Apollo*. In the journey of life and into death the family is the key strength giving unit. She advocates for individual growth and pursuit in educational and professional pursuit. For example, when her daughter Imani is posted to teach in a far flung school in a remote part of Kenya, Amor does not try to stop the posting even though she is influential enough to do so with "one phone call to a friend in the Ministry of Education" (66). Instead she allows her daughter an opportunity to empower herself through making an individual choice of whether to go or not. She does the same with her other children and says: "My children must make their way from the bottom where other Kenyans are. If they prove tough enough to work their way from there then they will get my assistance" (66). However, she still recognises the importance of family and friends as she journeys through life and more importantly, when she journeys into death. She stands true to what Davis and Harre explain is the nature of personhood when he posits that:

An individual emerges through the processes of social interactions not as a relatively fixed end product but one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate. Accordingly, who one is, is always an

open question with a shifting answer depending upon the positions made available within one's own and others discursive practices and within those practices, the stories through which we make sense of our own and others lives (14).

This means that human beings are dynamic. Their responses to issues can change depending on how they perceive a situation. Amor shifts her perspective of issues depending on situations.

Ogola seems to be of the opinion that when life is not being threatened in any way, then individual pursuit of goals should be encouraged. The individual is empowered enough to control most aspects of their lives. Conversely, at the point at which one's life is being threatened, then family and friends are the people to turn to. For example, when she is told by the doctor that she is dying her first reaction is to call her husband who is out of the country. Because of his unavailability she says "why is that man never there when I need him" ((26). She clamours for the collective warmth of family because she believes that the family can empower her and shield her from the terror of dying. When her husband jets back into the country, she realises that all she needs at this time is her husband's strength. She says, "Mwaghera opens his arms wordlessly and I go to him. I allow myself the momentary solace of resting completely in his love" (43). The collective trajectory of life is further enhanced when she opts to call her daughter Imani who teaches in a far flung school in the rural part of Kenya.

The dying process and death itself can create moment of great confusion for the family. In many family set ups in collective societies, people fall back on the immediate and extended family members for supports during different situations in life, but more especially, when having to deal with traumatic situations. Dying people, especially, are buoyed by the knowledge that in their time of weakness they will have people around them to support the. They also feel that family and friends will also assist each other to overcome the pain of seeing a loved one dying or even overcome the pain when the loved one finally dies. In *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, Ivan's family members fail to support him effectively. They abandon him as they pursue individual selfish interest. This makes dying very difficult for him.

To present her view that families that live in collective harmony are able to withstand challenges in life better than those that do not, Ogola contrasts Amor's family with that of Magu Igana's family [differentiate this name with Igana Mago, the doctor]. Whereas Amor and Mwaghera encourage their children to be independent yet be accommodating of others when there is the need to do so, Magu Igana is the destructive force of the collective element in his family. Magu Igana is a character who is so obsessed with ensuring that those of his household run their lives according to his dictates as the head of the home. He is so cruel that he is regarded as "the ultimate despot, the absolute and unquestionable monarch. "He was not only above the law, he was the law itself" (12). Power in his house is mediated along sexual and age differences. His children and his wives serve merely as appendages to a family set up where the father runs the house with an iron fist. His imposing position of power affirms the idea that men and women, children and parents constitute opposing compartments. The compartments that have been created in Magu Igana's homestead are created by arrogance,

pride, and cruelty. He believes that he is better than the rest of his family. Unlike Amor and Mwachera who respect each other as well as other family members, Magu Igana operates from a socio-cultural context in which many men believe that because they are the heads of their homes, then they have the power to relate with other members of their family in any way they want. Immaculate Frodwa explains this by saying that, “Magu senior handles his children defectively out of ignorance of his importance in their development. Had he been aware of the dividends of positive parenting, he would have behaved differently to the benefit of the entire family” (33). This is in agreement with Jeffrey Rosenberg and Wilcox Bradford in *The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children* who are of the opinion that helping men understand the invaluable and irreplaceable role they play in the healthy development of their children may motivate them to make a greater commitment and investment in their families.

The dangers of poor socialisation in terms of how to relate with family members especially children is depicted in Igana Magu’s despotic nature, especially as seen in his treatment of Warigia, his daughter, when she gets pregnant. Because Warigia does not conform to what her father considers to be the correct behaviour of a daughter, she suffers physical and emotional abuse from him. She ends up running away from home and into the slums where she ends up dying. Anzette Were explains Magu Igana’s behaviour by saying that disempowered men often enforce their authority in their home by becoming fearsome and unapproachable parents. These men, he points out are normally want to prove their masculinity through forceful interactions because they are threatened by the fear of losing control over their families. Forceful masculinity, they believe, makes them remain relevant.

Unfortunately, their high handedness can result in very grave results like what happens to Warigia.

Ogola thus makes an attack on the overly aggressive patriarchal structures prevalent in many societies. In such structures men, who are the heads of homes often assert themselves as social superiors and use high handed means to ensure that people in their homesteads conform to their dictates. Such structures do not auger well for the development of family unity. They separate family members who would have been useful to each. It is no wonder that in his old age, Magu Igana becomes very lonely because he has estranged himself from his wives and children because of his cruelty towards them. Magu Igana is juxtaposed with Amor, who because of the much softer maternalistic approach to living life, is able to get all the support she needs from her family when she becomes very sick. In a Freudian sense, Magu Igana has selfish narcissistic tendencies that destroy the family unity that he is supposed to nurture. Amor who is thus juxtaposed with Magu Igana, displays the characteristics of a rational being who understands that treating others well, fosters a unity that is often useful in end of life situations.

Since Amor has always encouraged family unity, she uses the promise of the collective to comfort her children when she breaks the news that she is soon dying to them. She tells her youngest daughter that her dad, sisters, aunts and uncles will be on hand to see her through the various stages of her life. She also calls upon all members of her immediate family including her house help, Karimi, who is described as “an omnipresent angel” (134) who

watches over the family, to rally together as a way of empowering themselves against the challenges that dying and death are bound to bring their way.

Ogola acknowledges the power inherent in the assurances that people in a cohesive and collectively structured family give to one another. Such assurances enable people to have a positive view of the future even if that future that is uncertain. Amor for example tells her children that despite her absence, she will always be part of the family. She tells them that, “a mother never goes very far away from her children” (95). In this way, she focuses on the collective to create a myth as a means of reassuring her children. This myth is about the ever present nature of a mother. She still falls back onto the collective aspects of family life to remind her children that her formidable presence of a mother can never be erased. Amor thus cushions the blow for her family members by making death appear as natural as possible. She knows that she has to do this so as to empower them with the spirit of resilience. Probably Amor creates this myth from the fact that she, herself, has experienced the invisible powerful presence of her mother in her time of in need in a not so distant past. This can be seen through the use of a dream. Even though her mother lives “several hundred miles away” (60). She comes to Amor in a dream to console her and to show her the way forward. Amor says that she values the fact that she has “a mother in charge of [her] life” (60). Thus repositioning of a mother helps calm the family members into a quick acceptance of the fact that she is dying. Ogola thus positions family cohesion as a centre of power as a way of fighting off the anxieties that come about as a result of the fear of the unknown. This is unlike in *The Death of Ivan Ilych* or in *As I Lay Dying*, where lack of family cohesion and genuine concern for each other, makes death and dying very hard for the characters.

Amor indicates that shifting of identities that is part of the dying process is easily worked out if people work together cohesively. The shifting of roles allows for a very easy transition from one state of being to the other. This makes it easy for the dying individual and for the family members themselves to accept death. For example, as the days go by and as Amor becomes quite weak, all the members of the family members take turns at taking care of her. The reconfigured nature of the family takes centre stage. Amor's eldest daughters, Imani and Malaika, take up their mother's position as nurturers. They take their mother to the hospice and wheel her around when she needs to move. Nearing her end, Amor becomes like a baby. This is symbolised by her being shifted from the master bedroom to the baby room. A mother, because she is dying, is reconfigured into a child requiring around the clock help. The power that she once had as a mother is now gone and her children become a reconfigured centre of power. They take care of their mother as one would a baby. Because the family members understand that death reconfigures individuals as well as institutions, they easily take up the roles that their mother would otherwise have been in charge of. Because they all work together, the power of the collective makes taking care of Amor easier than it would otherwise have been. The journey of life and into death is thus made easier through collective synergies.

The advantage of working collectively is that it helps secure the future. The younger members of the family learn to grow up very fast under the older ones. It makes working through the traumatic situation much faster than it would have been if the members of the family were working individually. The creation of a secure future is especially seen after Amor dies. Imani's and Doctor Igana Mago's identities change from simply being Amor and

Mwaghera's daughter and son in law respectively, to playing parenting roles to the youngest Mwaghera children, Hawi and Pala. Hawi says this about their life in the Doctor Igana Mago household, "many things have changed of course, but fortunately not for the worse-they are simply different. Pala and I live with my sister Imani and her husband Igana." (162). It is clear from this that because of the emphasised collective, the transition after the death of Amor produces a sense of security in the family and it does not cause unnecessary upheavals in the re-structuring of the family. This makes it easy for Amor's family members to accept and live with the fact that their mother and wife will no longer be physically present in their lives. Hawi puts it quite succinctly by saying, "In such a short space of time our lives turned completely upside down, but the most important thing is that the upheaval has not destroyed us as a family" (163). Thus for Ogola, a collective response to death and dying has a positive impact on people despite the challenges brought about by death and dying.

Amor also indicates that she values the relationship that she has with her friends. Although Ogola does not give these friends names or even present them in an elaborate manner, Amor mentions them in passing and indicates how their presence makes dying easier. She says:

I, myself, have been moved by the number of good friends who have turned up to sit by my side in these days. Most say very little, for what after all is there to say? A little pressure on the hand, a gentle touch on the cheek, some tears of commiseration for the misfortune of having to disembark before a journey's logical end. (115)

She then concludes by saying, “And so today, I raise my heart to anyone dying now, today, alone, unloved, uncared for-with no friendly hand to hold on to” (117). Amor obviously indicates that a dying person is strengthened by being surrounded by people. Dying can be very lonely. In *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, Ivan suffers this fate. He is hardly visited by friends and most of his family members are too engaged in selfish leisure pursuits to be concerned with livening up his life. In fact, were it not for his servant Gerasim and his son who offer him a semblance of human companionship, Ivan would surely have died a more lonely death.

Ogola therefore suggests that the love, care and companionship availed to dying people can ease the bitterness and sadness of dying. Even so, offering a dying person companionship is only possible if the dying person is friendly enough. Ivan in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, is a bitter man who pushes away his friends and relatives because of his negative attitude towards them. As a result, his family members end up keeping away from him. Similarly, it is also easy for friends to be close friends to commiserate with a dying person if he or she does not expect too much from the friends. Amor, because of her friendliness to her family and friends, creates physical and emotional spaces that make it easy for them to be at her side throughout her journey into death. Ogola thus seems to suggest that human companionship and the collective on the journey towards death is what lessens the pain of dying and the sadness of one knowing that the end is near.

The power of the collective as a response towards death is also enhanced by the participation of the doctors in the life of the dying person and the family members. Before she becomes

sick Amor has a very low opinion of doctors. Yet, immediately she becomes sick, her views of them changes. Amor while she is healthy reflects upon the negative professional and moral conduct displayed by doctors. She believes that they are excessively money minded and all they want to do is fleece patients out of their hard earned money. The negative view that Amor initially has of doctors is common with many people. They have an aversion for doctors and only go to them when they cannot avoid it. Ironically, however, despite Amor's dislike for them, she finally realises that she needs them for the rest of the remaining time on earth. In other words, she recognises importance of doctors in end of life situations.

It is important to note that Margaret Ogola, having been a doctor herself, seems to be keen to make a statement about the role of doctors in their patients' lives. She acknowledges that there are some rogue doctors that play around with patients by wanting to extract as much money from them as possible. She expects her readers to be wary of such doctors. Nevertheless, she emphasises the positive role that doctors play in enriching the lives of their patients and their relatives even as the patients advance towards their deaths.

Amor realises the extent of her illness with the help of her consultant doctor, Dr. Yego Bargirei. However, his presence in Amor's life is very brief. Later she moves to a palliative doctor, Doctor Igana Mago. Ogola seems to be suggesting that if one has been diagnosed with an advanced cancer or chronic disease, then it is foolhardy for him or her to continually visit a general or consultant doctor. The best doctor to visit when one is dying is a palliative doctor. Her argument seems to be that the non-palliative doctors or general doctors are not

trained to deal with death and dying. Amor, says that non palliative doctors are trained to do “practically anything to keep one alive but at one’s own cost” (21). They do this even if they know that the person is dying. Palliative doctors on the other hand, are trained to guide people into accepting death. The general focus of palliative care is, according to Ira Byock, Arthur Caplan and Lois Snyder an “alleviation of suffering, symptom management, good communication, and supportive counselling related to illness, disability” (57). This is an indication that the care that palliative doctors give goes beyond merely giving medication to the patient. It is a more holistic response to dealing with patients. An encounter with Doctor Igana Mago provides evidence for this view.

Doctor Igana is presented as a man who understands the place of dying and death in life. He says that he was a physician before coming to work in a hospice as a palliative doctor. He changed his professional status so as to “try and ameliorate a little, the suffering of the dying” (69). He believes that people should not fear dying because “it’s part of life as we know it” (73). Dying should be regarded as a difficult, but normal, stage in the life and that people can die peacefully and beautifully if they consciously prepare for it. The role of a palliative doctor is to aid patients to accept death in order to die in dignity. This is something that Doctor Igana Mago does with a lot of care for his patients.

Cicely Saunders, on writing about the role of palliative doctors has stated that, ‘there has always been a human as well as a professional basis that is fundamental to the work that [palliative doctors] do’ (qtd. in Steffen et al.). This is an indication that a good palliative doctor should be as humane as he is professional. In *Place of Destiny* being humane includes

engaging a collective principle towards working with patients. Doctor Igana Mago fits this bill.

Even though everyone will face death, there are some professions that are structured around an intimacy with dying and death. Doctors belong to such professions. Individuals will turn to these professionals for guidance, support, assistance, with the expectation that they have been trained and are skilled in end-of-life matters. Ideally, their professional training should prepare them for such engagements with their patients and the family members and care givers. However, Ogola seems to add another “qualification” that could make a palliative doctor better equipped to deal with end of life situations. She suggests that a doctor who has gone through challenges in life or who has lived closely with people who have faced different life’s challenges is more sensitive and empathetic to the needs of those facing traumatic situations.

Ogola has presented Doctor Igana Mago as a man who has lived through a harsh life and is that sensitive to the needs of people living through painful circumstances. He grew up in a slum and would have died of hunger and neglect after his mother died, had his friends and the owners of the children home he grew up in, not come to his aid. In fact, it is the education that he receives while at the children home that empowers him to study medicine and become a doctor in the centre. The challenges of life that he experiences in his formative years make him responsive towards other people’s suffering and challenges. The experiences help form the basis of his thoughts and actions. He is thus a doctor who is mindful of others and it is no wonder that he who forms deep relationships with his patients and other people who need his

help. It is no wonder that when Amor meets Doctor Igana Mago the two connect immediately. After interacting with him for a while, she feels confident enough to allow him to take her through the dying process. The aversion that Amor previously had for doctors disappears. She accepts Doctor Igana Mago enough for her to allow even her own daughter to have a romantic relationship with him.

Doctor Igana Mago's lived experiences have taught him to be selfless. He does not allow his position as a doctor to make him ignore the need to care and be compassionate towards others. In a Freudian sense, his experiences have made him into a rational and well-adjusted person who reaches out to other people in their time of need. He is a doctor who understands the challenges that people go through on a day to day living and this makes him a very compassionate doctor. Ogola believes that if a patient gets a good doctor who can guide him or her into accepting the inevitability of his or her death, it makes dying easier. Ogola thus puts a lot of premium on the positive role played by palliative doctors in the journey towards death. She believes that they have the power to help patients to learn how to let go. Doctor Igana Mago teaches Amor to relinquish her hold on life.

Doctors have the power to help dying people rethink their approach to life and to death. They can do this by creating a close relationship with their patients so that they can guide them into accepting the new situations of their lives. In her previously well life Amor loved the power that she had over situations. She says "I realise that what I will find most difficult is the inevitable loss of control. I'm a control freak. I like to be in charge" (75). However, her sickness forces her to redefine her life. From being a control freak, she has to learn to let

her family members at home and her employees at her workplace to take over from her. As she slowly succumbs to her illness, she inevitably has to let go. As she lets go, Doctor Igana Mago becomes the pillar that she leans on. He practically becomes a member of the family.

Doctor Igana Mago plays a combined role of doctor, friend and family members. Through these combined roles, he administers medication, especially pain killers, to Amor in order to alleviate her pain. He is a good listener and Amor's adviser concerning her condition and how to let go. He encourages her to unburden herself to others close to her. His argument is that people should reveal their "buried hurts and secret unresolved sorrows [because] dying is journey, one needs to be lightly clad to undertake" (77). He also helps prop the family members and guides them into accepting that their mother and wife is dying. When Amor finally dies, Doctor Igana Mago is the first person on the scene where he, "checks her vital signs-the pulse, the heartbeat, the respiration-all of which are absent" (149). Finally after the families have paid homage to her while she is still on her deathbed, it is he who ensures that the death notification forms are in order, friends are informed and the people from funeral parlour come to pick the body. Mwaghera sums up the role that Igana Mago has played by saying, "Thank you for being there with us and for us" (149).

It may seem here that Ogola is romanticising the whole idea of sickness by indicating that it would be good for a doctor to become so close to the family that he should become like a member of the family. The truth is that not all doctors can become close to the patients that they are treating. However, Ogola seems to suggest that doctors who are close to such families are best placed to help alleviate the challenges that dying people and their families

face. Doctors have the powers to help patients through the fear they may have of death. Doctors know how to tell when someone has died, and they very easily relate to the protocols concerning how to deal with a dead body. Because of having experienced death very many times, they can easily work the family members through grief and mourning. This is what Doctor Igana Mago does. For example, when Imani asks the question, “Why is death always so sudden even when you have been expecting it for months?”, his answer is, “When you turn off a light yourself, expecting darkness, the darkness still somewhat surprises you. Death is an absence, the departure of a force...it would be odd if one did not feel the initial absence keenly” (150). With such words Doctor Igana Mago softens the pain of death for the family members. His presence in the family underscores the importance of the collective especially one that includes a doctor, in giving a grieving family the power to accept death and to move on with life. In *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, the doctors do not make attempts of ameliorating the challenges brought about by sickness and the imminent death for Ivan. They are not socialised to know how to calm down a dying person thus they contribute towards making the dying process for Ivan very difficult. Doctor Igana Mago, on the other hand, has through his lived experiences and palliative care training, known how to deal with dying people and is able to make dying considerably easy for Amor and her family.

Seeking Solace in Religion

The idea of mortality and the realisation by the dying as well as their families and friends that death is about to kick in, normally elicits feelings of anxiety, despair, sadness, and uncertainty in them. Irvin Yalom and Paul Tillich have indicated that it is normal for

individual to be anxious about death. However, religious belief systems seem to play an important role in providing a framework to cope with end of life matters. Religion is often seen as a way of coping with the unpredictable. Ralph Hood, Peter Hill and Bernard Spilka argue that death is such an unpredictable phenomenon that the great religions make it a central part of their belief system. One response to this anxiety over end of life issues is thus to seek solace and hope through private and formal religious activities. Ogola is rather deeply philosophical about the place of religion in dying. She is of the opinion that a dying person should seriously consider receiving spiritual guidance. This view is presented, first, by Doctor Igana Mago. He says:

I have found that people who have at least consciously attempted to work out their beliefs for themselves-and then tried to live their lives according to their beliefs- are better placed to address the questions automatically posed by living, and more urgently, by dying....If there has been no such attempt, the likeliest death bed occurrences I have seen are irrational fears, unreasonable hopes, utter depression or a pathetic clinging to life that has thus to be torn away from the grasping, bleeding hands-a rather horrible sight. (77)

The argument expressed here is that a dying person's religious or spiritual commitment is very crucial to coping with the prospect of death and dying. This is because it provides a sense of meaning for suffering and loss. Moreover, religion helps address the anxieties that people have about dying. This is because people who have a religious inclination often believe that they will be rewarded in the afterlife for their religious behaviour. Carl Jung supports this view by positing that most religions can be considered "systems of preparation

for death” (408). Doctor Igana Mago argues that being religious does not necessarily mean that one must be an adherent of any of the mainstream religions. He believes that “even the incantations of any religiously understood religious formula; a mantra...can serve as a powerful tool for reducing the stress and existential suffering of bodily dissolution” (77).

It is quite clear that Ogola is redefining notions of religion. She points out that people need not have strong religious grounding for them to benefit from the healing power of a religion. To cement this idea that any religion can be beneficial to man, Doctor Igana Mago says that he himself is not affiliated to any specific religion. He has “a working relationship with a Catholic priest, a Protestant pastor, a guru and an imam, all chosen because of strictly having a reputation for both erudition and sanctity” (70). He then goes on further to explain how different religions approach death. He believes that Catholicism and Oriental religions especially Buddhism, have the best approaches of dealing with matters pertaining to death. Although he seems to look down upon Islam and the African traditional religions because they encourage a fatalistic approach death, he is of the opinion that in order for people to live and die well, they should be open to different world religions. Nonetheless, he says that religion should be engaged in an intelligent manner and not in a “dim witted” way (70).

The liberal minded views to religion are not limited to Doctor Igana Mago. Amor too is presented in similar light. While she was growing up she became agnostic after rejecting her parents’ religious persuasions because she considered the church members overzealous in their approach to issues of life. She pursues her agnostic tendencies even in marriage but her husband and children take up the Catholic religion. However, to show that she is always wary

of religious fanaticism, she occasionally goes along with her family to mass once in a while to check that they do not become “a bunch of wild-eyed fanatics” (171).

From the above, one can see that Ogola seems to be calling for an opening out of the religious spaces. She believes that people must not be confined to any one religion if they can learn something good from another religion. Also one need not even be confined to any religion if they chose not to. She believes that one can live a decent life even without a religion. This is because being spiritual does not require one to have any religious affiliation. In the final analysis, she believes that it is spirituality and not religion that determines and empowers the manner in which people live and even die.

Amor is presented as a woman whose desire is to shape her own spiritual destiny. She is wary of religious fanaticism because she believes that it makes people narrow minded. She believes that pursuing religion in a fanatical way kills openness to other religions and ways of living that would otherwise be beneficial to an individual. Although she believes that everyone should be free to choose to be affiliated to religion if they so wish, children should be guided to ensure that they do not become fanatics. Fanaticism, in her opinion, creates closed minded people who end up with fatalistic tendencies.

Ogola also believes that religious tenets and beliefs should be questioned. Even God should be questioned about the things that happen to people. This is why she is happy that her family members are angry with God for allowing her to die so early in life. When she tells them that God knows why bad things happen to people, her husband and her son do not hide their

anger with God. When her son, Pala, says, “I no longer believe in God” (96). Amor’s response to this is, “ I’m sure God can understand why” (96).

Clearly the question concerning why God allows bad things to happen to people is an existential question that no one can have an adequate answer to. Amor cannot thus answer it adequately. However, to soften the blow for her family members, Amor brings God close to them so that they can question and even become angry with him. Explaining to anyone why sickness and death occur is quite a challenging matter. There is no easy and satisfying response. What also comes out of this conversation is that being a member of a religious organisation does not easily makes one understand the ways of God especially pertaining to death. It is ironical that it is the agnostic Amor, who seems to understand death much more than her Catholic husband. This is why he, just like his son, is angry with God.

To also indicate that matters pertaining to religion, living and dying can be rather confusing, Amor totters between agnosticism and embracing of a religion. When she is well, she shuns all religious affiliations, however immediately she becomes terminally ill, she quickly changes her religious worldview and seeks out God. She says, “I have chosen to renew my spirit, make peace with myself, with a world I will soon be leaving, and if at all possible with my God” (49).

The message here is that when people are alive and well, the world is an expansive arena where one can experiment with all kinds of ideas even those pertaining to God, religion and spirituality. This is because such experimentations allow one to grow spiritually. However,

once death beckons there is no time for such experimentations. Accommodating death and dying in one's life trajectory can be very confusing. To answer some of the existential questions that one may have, there is need to take recourse in a higher and more powerful and supernatural being. For example, in order to make sense of dying and death, Amor at first, tentatively, believes in God because she is trying to understand why people have to die. She uses a series of rhetorical questions to illustrate the consternation at having to deal with such grave existential and philosophical questions pertaining to the role of God, religion and spirituality in man's life. She poses a series of questions:

It is said that the life-giving force is the spirit. What is this human spirit which loves and knows and vivifies, yet has no tangible form? Does it really endure the dissolution of the body? How does it express itself without its customary external force? I look at my body disintegrating from within. My spirit where is it? What is religion? Is it merely a grasping at a straw-a denial of the bitter reality of the meaninglessness of life? What is truth? Is it merely relative or is it transcendental? Where does one turn for understanding? Why is religious sentiment pervasive reality and motives of almost all cultures? (160)

From the above quotation, one can easily see that when people are faced with end of life situation, the place they seek answers is in religion. Amor knows that she is at a point of no return, yet, she wants to understand why she has to die. The rhetorical questions are an indicator that she has no answers to the questions.

Some of the answers to Amor's questions lie in Doctor Igana Mago's approach to dealing with death. Every day, he spends about half an hour meditating. In his experience he says that "the first great lesson one learns when dealing with death and dying on a regular basis, is that death is a matter of the spirit That in order not to treat the dying as the ultimate losers, the most expendable of mortals," (69) there is need for him to pray and "subject himself to the infinite, not just for accountability, but also to draw much needed strength". He believes that human bodies are connected to divine because they carry the spirit. Thus in order to appreciate why people have to die then it is important to find answers in the divine. This is the approach that Amor finally takes in order to explain to herself why she had to die.

The issues of religion and the centrality of a divine power in ordering the lives people, are in focus here. Many people have wondered if God really exists or if he is just an illusion or a dream. Many have wondered as to why a God who creates humanity, a God who is presented as loving and caring can senselessly and mindlessly take away the life of a person that he created. Malaika, Amor's daughter questions the validity and genuine nature of such a God. She wonders whether "a good God exists and if his plans for [people] are for good and not for evil" She also wonders whether "being good and honest and industrious are dependable foundations for happiness" (127). She begs God to heal her mother so that their lives can go back to normal. However, she finally realises that nothing will change she say "But I am only a silly child railing against deaf heaven" (127). The concept of God being a benevolent father is very confusing. What one believes are truths about life, for example, God loves people so much and that being good brings rewards is soon shattered when loved ones die. This confusing state of affairs makes God appear inconsistent and insincere.

Sigmund Freud and anthropologist Ludwig Feuerbach suggest that the reason for the inconsistencies in God's character is because the idea of God is simply a human wish fulfilment. In Freudian terms Malaika projects an infantile behaviour on realising her helplessness concerning the fact that she is losing her mother expects God to be the benevolent father who protects controls and dispenses only good things to his children. In his book the *Future of an Illusion*, Freud sees such thoughts about God and religion as being wishful thinking. However from a Judeo-Christian point of view, God is an enigma but also very approachable. Although humans cannot fully understand how He thinks and works, they can understand that the universe is governed by natural laws. God has made it is possible for the universe to operate using these laws and there is no reason for him to change these laws because it will upset the natural order of things. Because we live in a cause and effect world, when one thing happens, the other has to happen. For example, when people are born, the general outcome is that they shall die regardless of who we are. The causes of deaths are varied, but people have to die nevertheless. People suffer and face major challenges whether they are good or bad. Job in the Bible, suffered major calamities despite even God himself, noting that he was a good man. Just as God "sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45), so also natural disasters affect the innocent and guilty alike. God does not change the natural laws to favour anyone. This is why Ogola seems to call for people to have a deep spiritual understanding of such aspects of life so that they do not become overly disillusioned when things that occur naturally in the environment occur. Sometimes it is just easier to believe that God knows best. Amor puts it more succinctly by saying:

I'm not trying to explain why all the things that go wrong in the world do, neither am I trying to justify a God who appears to do nothing to stop all the bad things that

happen in the world from happening. If God knows all things and is truly and good, then I'm sure he allows only those things to happen which are for our own good and softens the impact of those apparently unbearable things which happen to us-even if because of our fault. As any other father would. (96)

The very last statement in this excerpt raises another important issue. Unlike Freud who believes that God is an imaginary father figure, Amor decides to make him a tangible father or parent who makes decisions that are appropriate for all his children. Parents are often under no obligation to explain to their children why they make certain decisions concerning them even though the children may not be happy with the decisions. It is assumed that the parents know best. In this way, the author seems to suggest that a well thought out relationship with God or spirituality that accepts the supremacy of the supernatural, can alleviate the pain and fear of any suffering, including dying. To add onto this, Doctor IganaMago's words, "there are few atheists in this place of destiny" underscore the idea that many people who go through the dying process and have time to think about what life after death means to them often embrace a form of religion or divine power which helps them accept that they are dying.

Ogola, nevertheless, calls for people to embrace religion in a way that is not threatening. For people to really appreciate the power of religion in strengthening them to accept what life brings to them, people must avoid overzealous and fanatical approaches to religion as done by Amor's father, and other faithful of New Israel Church of the Nazarene in Africa. She

advocates for a rethinking of the role of religion. It is no wonder that she uses Father Isidore Gaya, a Catholic priest, to help Amor through her dying process. Father Gaya opts to recreate notions of religion in a way that is simple to relate to. He says:

Religion is mistakenly thought to be about rules and regulations rather than about living and loving. I rather suspect that there is an especially boring corner set aside for such rule and regulation bound characters. The room is brown and lined from top to bottom with dusty files containing all the rules and regulations ever invented to straight jacket religion into a purely exclusive affair Religion is about living life creatively, loving creatively, and knowing creatively. Uncreative living is the surest path to hell. Heaven is not for the sterile. (116)

Religion and a belief in a supernatural being can be quite uplifting and comforting when dealing with a frightening situation. Many non-believers have been known to go down on their knees to pray when faced with life threatening situation. Freud and other similar minded scholars might see this as a flight into fantasy, but it is a move that creates a buffer against forces like death. Moore and Williams say that “underlying religion is power, and the foundation of all power is that of life over death” (5). Robert Lifton says that religion means “life-power and power over death” (20-21). It is clear from this that religion and people in religious positions like priests have the power that those religions afford them. They can use those religions to teach people to accept death. Thus religion and belief in higher powers can help alleviate the fear of death in the manner that Father Gaya does with Amor. To Amor and to Ogola, religion and God if embraced by an individual in a rational manner have power to make dying and acceptance of death easy.

Conclusion

In this chapter Margaret Ogola has used a journey motif as the major style to present the journey that Amor, the dying protagonist in the story, and her family members and friends make as they deal with the fact that Amor is dying. Using the backdrop of a family set-up, Ogola presents the challenges that the family members undergo as they come to terms with the fact that their wife and mother is soon going to die. She also deals with the different responses to death and dying that are clearly evident in the story.

Amor, despite being the one who is dying, is presented as being quite stoical in her response to death. In a rather philosophical manner, she rationalises that all living things must die and because she is a living thing then it follows that she too cannot escape death. Even though she goes through moments in which she questions why she has to die at the time she does, she nevertheless does not take too long in questioning the irrationality of this existential issue. Her acceptance of her death is demonstrated by the fact that she herself has the courage to tell her children that she is dying and psychologically prepares them to accept the fact. She also organises her will so that she can leave her affairs in order when she dies. She even has intimate talks with her husband and encourages him to get married when she dies. Amor thus presents herself as an organised and proactive person who understands that her place in the society is only temporary.

Another response to death and dying is presented through an appreciation that the collective and communal response to traumatic situations can help alleviate the pain of dying. The journey into death can be lonely if one is not backed up by key people in life. Ogola

recognises three groups of people in this collective walk. She identifies family and friends, doctors and spiritual leaders. Ogola seems to suggest that a close partnership with all these parties makes dying easy. Family and friends bring emotional comfort and physical aid to the dying, the doctor ensures that the physical and emotional pains are handled at both a professional and personal level while the spiritual leader prepares a dying person for the afterlife. Despite Amor having been previously agnostic, she realizes the need for a spiritual connection in end of life matters.

Ogola uses juxtaposition to compare and contrast two opposing parenting skills that she believes can make or break families to the extent of causing pain and even death in the home front. IganaMagu is presented as a despotic father who uses hard power over his family. This results in family separation and causes not only emotional pain and emotional death, it also results in the physical death of his daughter. In contrast, Amor and Mwaghera have a more maternalistic approach to life that brings families together. Ultimately, Amor finds it easy to bring her family together when she is dying because her soft approach to life encourages love and unity. As for IganaMagu, he becomes a lonely and bitter man because of his cruel mannerism. It is clear that as he ages and approaches death, he will most probably not get the kind of love and attention that Amor receives.

Finally, Ogola captures another response to death and dying. Not everyone can respond to death with rationality and acceptance. Amor's husband finds it difficult to accept that his wife is dying. He engages in bouts of crying and becomes excessively sad. The pain of losing his wife becomes so hard that he becomes almost dysfunctional as a father and his daughter and

son in law end up becoming surrogate parents to his youngest children. He also immerses himself in his work and has no time for other women even though his children want him to. Amor is presented as being the stronger one than her husband thus Ogola overturns the stereotype propagated by many patriarchal societies that men are stronger than women when handling traumatic situation.

All in all, Ogola uses a metaphorical journey motif and juxtaposition to presents a story in which death and dying opens out a space where characters are empowered to accept death as part of life. Each character realises that he or she has a part to play to alleviate the pain that comes with such traumatic a circumstance as having a family member dying.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter is a review of my findings and conclusions are derived from the hypotheses and objectives stated earlier in the study. The chapter provides a synthesis of ideas derived from how the various writers of fiction chosen for this study have conceptualised the theme of death and dying especially in the manner in which characters respond to it. I have ascertained that death and dying is not just physical. Emotional and moral deaths are also discernible in the texts.

This study has revealed that having to face death is difficult and dying is a painful experience for both the dying individuals and for family and friends. Nevertheless, the responses to death and dying are many and varied. For example, in *Place of Destiny*, Amor responds with total acceptance. She thus becomes symbolic of people who appreciate that death is part of living. Ogola, demonstrates that one's acceptance of the inevitability of one's death can be helpful for a quick formulation of an exit plan and clear planning for the forging ahead and future growth of the family unit. Acceptance empowers the dying individual as well as the family members and results in the person dying a somewhat peaceful death. In *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, Ivan is presented as an individual who finds it hard to accept that he is dying. His inability to accept that he is dying contributes to narcissistic behaviour. He comes out as an egocentric and self-centred individual who easily regresses into child-like crying bouts because he cannot believe he is dying. This behaviour results in a lot of unhappiness in his home. He believes that his wealth and family background should cushion him against death.

Little does he realise that death is a force that does not respect power, wealth and family backgrounds. Because of his self centeredness, Ivan ends up dying a sad and lonely man.

The study also argues that in some instances, inability to accept one's death is displayed by a character's stoic quest to for self-preservation. Nicola, in *The Spare Room*, does not accept that she is dying and ends up spending a lot of time and money looking for treatment regimes that she feels will cure her. She ends up embracing bizarre treatments emanating from the alternative medicine treatment regimes. While being a stoic may be a sign of a person's resilience, Garner seems to suggest that when this search for a cure becomes an obsession that clouds the patients' ability to make sound judgments, then it begins to hurt not just the patient but also the family members and friends who have to care for such an individual. It ends up putting a strain on the relationships that have been built over the years. An analysis of *The Spare Room* also revealed that not being physically and emotionally prepared to nurse a dying person can be quite straining, even for the well-meaning friends of relatives who open out spaces in their hearts and homes to nurse terminally ill patients. This is because patients sometimes respond to dying in ways that exhaust these well-meaning care-givers. This is what happens to Helen, Nicola's friend and caregiver.

This study also examined "Big Mama's Funeral" which is a text that focuses on the way individuals who occupy powerful political spaces, sometimes respond to death and dying. Marquez demonstrates that political elites might hard to accept that they are dying because they believe that their money and power can buy them a lifetime of health. For example,

despite her old age, Big Mama believes that she can live longer. This is because she has the economical power to have the best doctor all to herself. However, they soon find out that there is no one immune to death. This is in the same way that Ivan in *The Death of Ivan Ilych* also realises that his money and professional status cannot warrant him immortality. The story also highlights the idea that political power is only viable when the person is alive. Once Big Mama dies, her body is not given the respect in the same manner as she was given when she was still alive. Marquez's intention seems to be to tell people that a political leader is just a human being whose life on earth comes to an end. No amount of power can stop their deaths and that they are only influential when they are alive. Once they die, their influence and power is cut short.

The study also notes that total control of personal property by a dead person can never be achieved, if those left decide to adhere to the will. In "Big Mama's Funeral," her relatives plunder all the property she leaves behind. This is because they do not respect her. However, in *Place of Destiny*, there are all indications that her relatives and employees respect her enough to keep to the dictates of Amor's will.

The theories that I chose as instruments of analysis of the texts, have revealed that the question of dying and death is indeed a question of power. Foucault argues that power can be traced from many different sources. In this study, those not dying and those that are dying have been presented as using power to control others. I have noted that the wrong use of power by people, be they professional, non-professional, the politicians, the citizens of a

nation, parents and so on, can result in the metaphorical and emotional deaths of others. I have also shown that in many cases, the way people live is the way they die. If they live by molesting others and pushing them away, then they can also die very lonely lives.

The study has also noted that power is a very temporary and that the very things that cultures create to empower people can and very often do fail people. People often believe that money, material wealth they have and professions and other high positions they hold in homes, at work places and in politics are all they need to make them happy and secure in life. Such things often give people a false sense of invincibility as they feel protected against the vulgarities of life including deaths. Thus they find it quite hard to accept that they are dying. They are shocked to find that death is a reality that they must face and that it is the one power that can disconnect them from the worldly things that they have held so dear to themselves. This means that no amount of money or power can benefit a person when they finally confront death. These are what Foucault refers to as the technologies of power within the modern world. More significantly what he refers to as technologies of production which “permit us to produce, transform or manipulate things” (63). These technologies of power often fail man since they often fail to cure him thus he ends up dying.

The self-centered approach to living life and denial of death is what Freud calls narcissistic behaviour. According to Freud, this is triggered by pleasure instinct which he says people acquire right from their childhood. People’s inflated egos tend to make them believe that they should always enjoy life and that they should be protected from anything that reduces their

pleasure on earth. Such people fail to recognise that life does not offer anyone, no matter their standing in life, the privilege of escaping suffering or even death. The study took note of the fact that some of the characters for example, Ivan in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, Big Mama in “Big Mama’s Funeral” and Nicola in *The Spare Room* are characters who display narcissistic behaviour like regression and self-centeredness as the fight against the fear of facing death. Nonetheless, they soon find out that no amount of resistance can keep death away.

Using the formalism theory, the study revealed how writers are able to use different writing techniques at their disposal to unearth the feelings of characters towards death and towards each other. The stylistic devices that stand out include: The journey motif which is both metaphorical and physical. This technique presents life as a journey that culminates in death and that the responses to dying and death on this journey are numerous. Juxtaposition, irony, and symbolism are also significant in demonstrating the various responses to death. Interior monologue has unearthed the thoughts of various characters and even has revealed the thoughts of a dead character. This enables the reader to get into the world of the dead and the dying. This theory thus ties together form and content to the outside social world. This is the mainstay is of any work of fiction.

This study, I believe, will make a significant mark contribution to literary studies. Although the subject of death and dying is in often in the domain of studies in the areas of medicine, sociology, philosophy and religion, this study has revealed that literature is a particularly

prolific field capable of yielding multiple representations of any phenomena. Freud in “Uncanny” says that literature contains “something that cannot be found in real life” (950) and this study has demonstrated that literature is an exceptionally fertile ground with material that inspires endless explorations and explanations in the area of death and dying. The study has revealed that writers have many tools at their disposal to interrogate both the observable and unobservable responses to death. This is because writers have the licence to imagine and document even that which cannot be seen in normal circumstances. The other fields of study do not provide such licences.

Because of this licence, the writers have been able to reveal that responses to death and dying are varied. Different cultures and individuals respond to death in ways determined by socialisation within cultures or because of personal choices. Similarly, writers writing from different writing traditions and ideological inclinations have revealed that there is a range of responses to death and dying inherent within people in different historical and time periods. An examination of the characters has thus revealed this array of responses to death and dying. This is a significant contribution to knowledge because ideally, literature allows for easy access to experiences, events and emotions that would take a lifetime to encounter. Literature thus gives people a chance to see things from other people's point of view. Consumers of literature are then able to pick out the good and the bad from the array of experiences presented. In so doing they are able to empathise with that they consider good and ridicule that which they consider bad. Literature thus becomes pivotal in shaping of a people and societies. This study has that obvious advantage. It has shown some of the good

and bad responses to death and dying. The study can then be used in shaping the worldviews of those who will read this work.

Recommendations for Further Studies

This study has also recommended other areas that can be examined in relation to death and dying. Generally, this study has focused on literary texts that present death and dying with familiar parameters. However, there are literatures that carry uncanny, unfamiliar, discomfoting and strange messages of death and mortality. Terry Eagleton reiterates this when he points out that "death is both alien and intimate to us, neither wholly strange nor purely one's own" (211). Freud in his essay "The 'Uncanny'" also recognises that there life is strangely familiar yet mysterious. Because the uncanny and the unfamiliar form part of an intriguing collection of literary text, it would be an interesting area to study. For example, peculiar portrayals of characters dying strange deaths as a result of murders, suicides and sacrificial rituals are rife in many works of fiction. *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone* by Sophocles, *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare, *The Virgin Suicides* by Jeffery Eugenides, *Veronica Decides to Die* by Paolo Coelho and *Suicide Notes* by Michael Ford, form a gamut of Western plays and novels that carry this message. Writings by African writers include such works as *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi and *Edufa* by Efua Sutherland. A study of these and many similar works can reveal a lot more on how people handle death and dying in such unfamiliar situations.

From some of the texts mentioned above, for example, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Antigone* and *Edufa*, the idea that love and death are intricately connected is very clear. One can seek to

analyse how literature deals with these different forces that seem to have a symbiotic relationship, especially in the manner in which these forces lead to death and vice versa as well as how love and death challenge an established order of things.

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