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LIFE'S JOURNEY AND THE CONFRONTATION WITH DEATH: MAPPING MEANING IN *SIDDHARTHA* AND *THE DEATH OF IVAN ILYICH*

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Abstract

The study examines how existential meaning emerges from Hermann Hesse's Siddhartha and Leo Tolstoy's The Death of Ivan Ilyich through what this dissertation defines as affective cartography, which measures emotional intensity throughout the distribution of storytelling elements in time and space and through characters' spoken words. The analysis demonstrates that both texts create meaning through their treatment of life's journey and death because these two concepts succeed as thematic elements when they operate together with the story's structural elements. Hesse uses the river as a continuous emotional center which extends existing time through three aspects listening and simultaneity and compassionate inclusion which manifest through directives like "Do you hear?" and the sound transition of "Om." The sickroom/deathbed in Tolstoy serves as a compressive space which forces people to confront their true selves through pain and social denial and temporal distortion, which Gerasim resolves through his simple recognition of their mutual mortality. The study presents its findings through detailed reading, which combines narratology and affect theory and phenomenology to create a node-to-node comparison between river and bedroom, demonstrating how narrative rhythm and silence and proximity develop ethical understanding. The dissertation proves that humans establish meaning through feeling, which develops through human experience that marks the end of existence.

Index Terms - *Affective cartography; Siddhartha; The Death of Ivan Ilyich; temporality; embodiment; mortality.*

INTRODUCTION

Life's journey gains greater urgency through philosophical inquiry because people use narrative to create "affective maps" which show how their identity develops through their cravings and health problems and their encounters with death. The book Siddhartha teaches through the ferryman's minimal speech when he asks his student if he can hear him and then instructs him to listen better because this listening practice helps Siddhartha achieve his moral goals (Hesse 121). Tolstoy begins The Death of Ivan Ilyich with an opposite shock when the character states "Gentlemen he said Ivan Ilyich is dead" because this statement shows office news to be the first mention of death which reveals how social conventions protect people from facing their ultimate existence (Tolstoy 1). The "Indian element" of Hesse and the

deathbed realism of Tolstoy both demonstrate that meaning links to emotional orientation because their texts convey ideas through showing changes in how time body and value get experienced (Brown 191–92; Brungardt 679).

The study demonstrates that both works use the human encounter with death to create meaning through their distinct systems of spatial and temporal expressions. Hesse uses a crisis to create a new beginning because the river combines all his suffering into a continuous life pattern which he later develops into "He had died a new Siddhartha had woken up from the sleep" (Hesse 91). Ivan experiences a life that exists only in the current moment because his illness forces him to live through a medical crisis which he defines as "This is ... a matter of life and ... death" because his statement shows how he lost the ability to focus on anything except his own existence (Tolstoy 15). The combined reading of Siddhartha's "inner journey" and Ivan's "contracting universe" demonstrates how the story's setting creates emotional responses in the audience through two different mental states: the river expands human understanding to perceive all things at once and the hospital room amplifies feelings of shame and fear and the need for honesty which through bodily presence creates ethical distinctions about dying (Rao 223–25; Hibbs and Hallam e476)

LITRATURE REVIEW

Manthripragada (2014) is helpful for positioning *Siddhartha* historically because she tracks how Hesse's reception—especially the countercultural afterlife of the 1960s—often foregrounded spiritual "message" and global appeal, sometimes at the expense of formal analysis of rhythm, silence, and affective modulation (Manthripragada 3–6). For your project, this reception history marks a lacuna: the tendency to read *Siddhartha* as philosophical allegory can obscure how the text produces meaning through affective pacing and sensory attention (especially in river episodes). Reception studies thus indirectly explain why affective-structural readings remain comparatively underdeveloped in standard criticism.

Pasha (2016) (Asian Studies pedagogy) argues that Hesse's "journey to the East" is a Western reconfiguration of Indian spatial-religious concepts such as the *tīrtha*, which Hesse "demythologizes" into a sparse riverbank setting (Pasha, pars. 6–9). Even when not framed as "affect theory," this scholarship supports affective cartography by showing how setting is ideologically and sensorially charged: the riverbank is not neutral backdrop but a formal device for stillness, listening, and transformation. The lacuna here is that pedagogical and cultural readings sometimes stop at symbolism rather than tracing how narrative tempo and focal attention generate affective rhythm.

Raman (2016) represents a common strand of *Siddhartha* scholarship in which the novel is reviewed primarily as spiritual quest narrative; such work is useful for documenting interpretive habits but it often treats emotion as thematic accompaniment rather than as narrative architecture (Raman 1–2). Your project's contribution becomes clearer against this backdrop: "serenity," "emptiness," or "despair" are frequently named as themes, yet the formal mechanisms—how silence, repetition, and pacing produce those affects—receive comparatively limited analytic attention. This gap is precisely where affective cartography can intervene with scene-level precision.

Khan (2024) exemplifies narratology-focused work on *Siddhartha* (mood, voice, tense) that can be leveraged for affect analysis, because it demonstrates how Genette's categories can be operationalized in the text (Khan 1–3). Yet narratological readings sometimes remain methodologically "neutral" about affect; they describe structure without showing how structure generates embodied resonance. Your study can build on narratological groundwork while extending it: tempo and focalization become not only technical descriptors but measures of affective rhythm (expansion/contraction) that shape existential meaning.

Mandelker (2023) (De Gruyter chapter on Hilda Rosner's translation) foregrounds translation as a crucial, under-discussed site of reception and meaning-making, noting that Rosner's 1951 English *Siddhartha* shaped Anglophone perception of Hesse for decades (Mandelker, sec. "Hilda Rosner's Labor of Love"). This scholarship is highly relevant to affective rhythm: cadence, simplicity, and tonal restraint in Rosner's English can recalibrate how serenity and silence "sound." A key lacuna in much *Siddhartha* criticism is precisely this: affective structure is often discussed without accounting for how translation choices reshape rhythm, pacing, and emotional texture.

Lucas (2012) reads Tolstoy's novella through the palliative-care concept of "total pain," arguing that Ivan's suffering integrates physical pain, fear, social alienation, and existential dread (Lucas 1–3). While this is medical-humanities scholarship, it is extremely productive for affect studies because it treats suffering as multi-dimensional and temporally unfolding rather than as a single emotion. The lacuna for literary criticism is that "total pain" readings can risk medicalization; however, Lucas explicitly raises that danger, opening a space for your project to compare conceptual frameworks while keeping close reading central.

Charlton (2009) argues that *Ivan Ilyich* functions as an unusually powerful narrative for understanding clinicians' emotional responses to dying patients, emphasizing the novella's capacity to generate readerly anxiety and ethical discomfort (Charlton 1–2). This perspective supports the claim that Tolstoy's narrative architecture is affectively engineered: the reader is made to inhabit avoidance, irritation, dread, and belated compassion. The lacuna is that such applied readings do not always connect these affective effects to narratological mechanisms like focalization shifts, temporal compression, and the strategic management of narrative distance—precisely what your approach can supply.

Alves (2018) examines illness and meaning in the story, locating the novella's force in how sickness transforms ordinary life into existential interrogation and reorients social relationships (Alves 381–383). This is valuable for affective cartography because it explicitly emphasizes how illness reorganizes lived time and social space (the sickroom becomes a relational field of avoidance, pity, labor, and fear). A lacuna remains at the level of comparative affective grammar: the study is not designed to map expansion vs. compression across texts, so your project can extend such insights into a systematic comparative model.

Traylor (n.d.) (philosophy/stance journal) provides a "being-with" account of death that links Tolstoy's depiction of death to relational phenomenology—how the living relate to the dying and to the dead (Traylor 1–3). Such work is useful because it foregrounds the interpersonal affective field around Ivan, not only Ivan's interior suffering. The lacuna, again, is methodological integration: these accounts often do not connect relational phenomenology to narratological devices (voice, distance, duration), whereas your triangulated framework is built precisely to show how formal narration organizes relational affect.

Pratt (1992) (again) reinforces a key scholarly pathway: Tolstoy's novella becomes a privileged literary text for philosophical reflection on death because it exemplifies how finitude is experienced and narrated, not merely asserted (Pratt 274–276). Yet even Heideggerian readings can drift toward thematic alignment ("authenticity," "finitude") rather than explaining the novella's affective mechanics—how repetition, irritation, banality, and sudden compression of time create embodied dread and belated clarity. Your work can occupy that methodological gap by mapping affect as structural grammar rather than as thematic correspondence alone.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aims

The study will analyze Siddhartha and The Death of Ivan Ilyich to show how both texts use death to create meaning through human experiences of life.

Objectives

1. To establish the affective cartography of each text by tracing important points which include river and bedroom and essential story elements which consist of awakening and deathbed clarity.
2. To investigate how rhythm and silence and dialogue work together to create changes in existential states.
3. To examine how the two texts create different emotional experiences, which show Hesse's expansion and Tolstoy's contraction.
4. To show how narrative structure helps to understand moral values through three elements, which include time, physical presence, and human relationships between Vasudeva and Gerasim.

METHODOLOGY

The research employs a secondary qualitative method which utilizes close reading and comparative textual analysis as its fundamental research approach. The analysis of primary texts (Siddhartha and The Death of Ivan Ilyich) applies an affective-cartographic approach which studies narrative space (river/sickroom) and temporality (cyclical becoming/terminal compression) and the story's characters through their vocal and visual presentation and the moral purpose behind the employment of conversation and quietness and repetitive elements. The argument is supported by secondary sources which include peer-reviewed journal articles and books and respected critical companions that cover affect theory and narratology and phenomenology and literary cartography. The evidence includes integrated quotations and scene-based analysis and node-to-node comparison which together create a unified interpretive map.

AFFECTIVE CARTOGRAPHY IN *SIDDHARTHA*

Hermann Hesse designed Siddhartha to function as a series of experiential "stations" which present knowledge through evolving emotional states that move from certainty to disillusionment and then to receptive understanding. The opening ritual scene which shows confidence through the character's ability to pronounce Om demonstrates inherited harmony. The plot's first hinge arrives through spoken rupture when Govinda declares: "I will no longer seek with the Brahmins," which transforms the narrative into a sequence of tests and breaks instead of continuous belonging [Hesse 9–16]. Hesse uses a spiral structure because similar affects return in altered registers (parting, longing, disgust, grief),

which create recurring patterns that function as his work's formal engine of meaning [Genette 93–95; Genette 114–16]. The statement Siddhartha declares "I can think; I can wait; I can fast" functions as self-programming which establishes early rhythm for the novel through its disciplined time measurement that leads to character development [Hesse 21–22].

The river functions as the main coordinate of the novel's affective mapping because it reappears at the moment when Siddhartha needs to change his direction and his feelings reach their highest point while he must stop using his existing way of life. The river can maintain opposing forces which include movement and stillness together with time and eternal existence without requiring a solution which leads to one specific conclusion [Tally 92–94]. The syllable "Om" stops destructive desire while it changes emotional flow from deadly compression to peaceful absorption [Hesse 96–99; Massumi 27]. The river provides its lesson through dialogue which describes time experience that Siddhartha understands through his belief that "the present only exists" in the river and this knowledge comes from his altered focus which phenomenology defines as a process that changes his experience of time [Hesse 133–134; Merleau-Ponty 104–106]. Vasudeva uses the term "the river is everywhere at the same time" to explain a paradox which serves as a main storyline in the novel because it shows how people discover meaning through their musical connection to others instead of through their intellectual understanding of things [Hesse 115–116].

The primary activity of Vasudeva consists of listening since the novel demonstrates that listening functions as an emotional technology which transforms scene environments through its ability to create moments when people can express themselves yet remain beyond moral evaluation. The invitation which he makes to stay with him serves as a time shelter which enables Siddhartha to experience his transformation through repeated actions which include work and silence instead of heaving sudden knowledge [Hesse 109–110]. Hesse explicitly marks this virtue (“he knew how to listen”), and Siddhartha’s gratitude—“I thank you… for listening so well”—names the novel’s method: affect is allowed to circulate and settle rather than being converted into advice, evaluation, or closure [Hesse 108–110; Ahmed 45–46]. Vasudeva uses his limited speech which he has thought about deeply to create a formal method of silence which uses pauses as formal stops to change the control from speaker to rhythm which now rules the conversation. The climactic instruction is almost whispered—“Let us listen… ‘Listen better!’”—and its force is ethical: to remain with multiplicity until it can be held without exclusion [Hesse 135–139].

The episode "By the River" serves as the emotional core of the novel because it depicts conversion through sound and physical reaction instead of through intellectual debate. Hesse reduces the story's time frame by creating a death-related moment which shows increasing self-hatred through his repeated use of the phrase "this dog of a Siddhartha" until the character's self-talk takes control with the word "Om" which ends his path to death [Hesse 30; Genette 93–95; Massumi 83–88]. The "Om" functions as a hearing-event which originates from historical times because it demonstrates that affect needs to come before any person can understand its effects. At first, people experience emotional changes which create a particular feeling until they reach the stage of permanent understanding, which results in them identifying their physical changes as either "folly" or "crime" [Hesse 30; Wetherell 28–31]. The scene's rhythm then expands through sleep, which acts as a new beginning because time perception transforms into a state where everything feels like ten years have passed. The formal pacing of the scene introduces the new orientation because meaning develops through its current rhythm which shows the present time as it has been retrained. [Hesse 30; Merleau-Ponty 110–112].

AFFECTIVE CARTOGRAPHY IN THE DEATH OF *IVAN ILYICH*

Tolstoy starts his story with a sudden tonal change which first establishes death as a communal experience before it develops into an individual experience. The dialogue that follows—“‘You don’t say!’” and the calculating “‘Had he any property?’”—exposes how bourgeois feeling circulates as propriety and advantage which establishes what your affective-cartographic frame calls an “economy” that controls public emotional expression while people keep their personal anxiety under control (Tolstoy 1–2). Donnelly explains that Tolstoy combines ethical and religious demands with institutional standards when he shows how people face their daily lives because social groups need to maintain their common standards. The novella shows its main theme through satire which reveals that people who live in social zones of acceptable behavior must experience existential emptiness until they face illness (Donnelly 201–203). The early spatial dialogue which contains everything that exists at your location functions as a metaphor because it shows how Ivan stays emotionally disconnected from his true physical self. The space between the two locations creates a path which Ivan chose to live his life through indirect means of convenience and surface-level interactions (Tolstoy 2).

The progression of his illness causes Tolstoy to limit his narrative space until the room and deathbed become his primary points of reference which create a restrictive environment where the room serves as an emotional device that determines who can enter and how people communicate and experience time (Tolstoy 23–25).The room presents its spatial dimensions through the plea which asks "'Gerasim...are you busy now?" because it establishes a space where people must show themselves to others while they depend on others to handle their needs (Tolstoy 23).Lucas's "total pain" concept establishes its significance here because the sickroom contains both physical pain and all forms of

emotional distress and human desires between family members which create an unbreakable bond (Lucas 175–176).Gerasim's direct statement about death and his willingness to do his duties present an emotional release through which he establishes new emotional rules for the space which people enter with their fears about what will happen (Tolstoy 24; Ahmed 45–47).

The novella's meaning relies on Tolstoy's time structure which allows the first chapters to present multiple decades while the subsequent chapters focus on specific time intervals of nights and hours and procedures and repeated sensory experiences that measure existential pressure through their duration (Tolstoy 8–10; Tolstoy 23–26).According to Genette the story moves from summary-dominant life to scene and pause dying which leads to death approaching with denser time (Genette 93–95). Ivan repeatedly asks the question "'Gerasim... are you busy now? which demonstrates his understanding of time because it shows him how time exists between periods of rest and work which people use to decide their duration of stay (Tolstoy 23). The illness creates a time paradox because the story keeps repeating its same falsehoods and aspirations and heartbreaks and suffering (Tolstoy 24–26). The concept of being-toward-death from Heidegger explains how compression develops into an existential problem because people must face their finiteness through their current existence which requires them to confront their previously avoided questions (Heidegger 279–282).

The narrative voice from Tolstoy moves between social observation and the development of Ivan's mental state which creates a feeling of tension that exists between two different modes of human connection (Genette 189–190). The narrative begins in third person but it focuses on the character's experience of smell and nausea and pressure and humiliation which demonstrates how pain exists as a "thing" that creates a collapsing world around the sufferer (Tolstoy 23–26). Gerasim states that "We shall all of us die which shows your framework through its "truth-space" but the narrative shows Ivan's desire to be "petted...as a sick child is pitied because pain language takes away his adult identity and makes him into a person who needs help (Tolstoy 24). The most damaging thing for Ivan exists not in his suffering but in his discovery that his household provides him with false security which transforms all spoken words into aggressive communication because people use words to avoid facing the truth (Tolstoy 24–25). Gerasim's words from "'Don t you worry Ivan Ilyich'" provide comfort through both spoken words and physical presence which includes leg support and continuous companionship to show that extreme situations transmit emotional states through body position and time spent together with opeople who maintain constant contact (Tolstoy 24).

SYNTHESIS

The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Siddhartha both create meaning through threshold events which cause emotional changes that remove all previous physical and mental boundaries from the individual. Hesse uses refusal and re-beginning to show how Wisdom cannot be imparted dialog develops quest plot through actual life patterns which exist beyond normal learning (Hesse 52). Tolstoy presents the question through horrifying retrospection which begins with the statement "Can it be that I have not lived as one ought?" to create ethical pressure about death which shows how all life experiences must lead to ethical behaviour (Tolstoy 28). Both texts show that emotions create structural elements which organize the story because the river-awakening and deathbed clarity scenes function as plot points that change both time and narrative structure (Bal 142-145). Hesse expands perception through his listening method which starts with "Listen!" while Tolstoy uses pain and social denial to create a terrifying experience which restricts awareness to a single moment ("It cannot be...") (Hesse 44-45; Tolstoy 29-30).

The most effective method for comparing two things exists between two opposing states of expansion and contraction which operates through three different time-based rhythms of capacity and attention and human experience. The concept of expansion in Siddhartha links to both patient time and expanded perception through its two main teaching methods, which include the river pedagogy and Vasudeva's statement, which asks the question: "Do you hear?" (Hesse 44). The element of contraction in Ivan Ilyich creates a pattern, which connects to two different conditions, which include bodily restriction and shame and the experience of existential suffocation that shows itself through the character's extreme cry: "Why do you torment me?" (Tolstoy 25–26). The narratological elements of Hesse's listening-scenes with their extended pauses create a time expansion effect whereas Tolstoy's constant repetitive elements develop a time structure that creates a permanent present state (Genette 93–95). The two moral "endpoints" differ because Siddhartha's extended grammar system enables him to express "Everything is good" while preserving his sorrow through its fundamental principle of acceptance (Hesse 51); Ivan's restricted grammar needs to prove its inauthenticity through the inquiry "Can it be...?" because its foundational principle requires immediate action (Tolstoy 28–29). Through his late work, Tolstoy creates a contradictory situation that shows his belief that "Death is finished" through his presentation of a contraction that leads to freedom; Hesse shows essential character reduction through his two critical elements which include the suicidal brink and the son episode that evaluate openness through suffering (Tolstoy 35; Hesse 30; Hesse 47–49).

The study of affective cartography reaches its highest level of precision through the analysis of nodes as intensity points instead of studying their neutral states. The river serves as the primary element in Siddhartha because it appears repeatedly at moments of destruction and restoration which lead to the command "Listen!" that transforms both time

and moral principles (Hesse 44). The bedroom/deathbed functions as the primary element in Ivan Ilyich because it brings together all three elements of suffering and rejection and terror into a space that feels restricted which is interrupted by the request: "Gerasim… are you busy now?" (Tolstoy 23). The research aims to define the main emotional forces which include expansive polyphony and constrictive shame while showing how emotional energy flows through the story from one point to another across the entire timeline (Bal 112–114). The river operates through its power of transformation which enables different sensory experiences to emerge with every return while the bedroom functions through its power of unchanging force which creates greater terror through its unreachable exit points (Hesse 41–45; Tolstoy 24–26). The two parties depend on their connection through relational mediators: Vasudeva's "Do you hear?" sustains hospitable silence; Gerasim's "We shall all of us die" sustains honest care (Hesse 44; Tolstoy 24).

Hesse constructs dual paths through two different ways of expressing time which create the deepest separation between his work and other artworks. Hesse establishes his concept of non-dual cyclic existence through the river which shows how all things exist simultaneously in all locations through its pattern of recurring sounds (Hesse 41; Genette 114–116). Tolstoy shows his characters experience time as an unending cycle of anguish which leads to their refusal of death through their repetition of the phrase "It cannot be" which acts as a time loop that persists until death arrives (Tolstoy 29–30). The duration categories established by Genette indicate that Hesse uses meditation breaks to extend current time while Tolstoy uses pain sequences to develop deeper feelings of dread (Genette 93–95). Hesse uses the invitation "Let us listen" to describe his practice which creates multiple levels of existence while Tolstoy shows his practice through Ivans statement "Can it be...?" which changes existence into financial details when under pressure (Hesse 44; Tolstoy 28). The results of both experiments lead to social change instead of cognitive results: Govinda's request "Show me" aims to transmit knowledge through physical experience while Ivan's statement "Death is finished" brings forth emotional release which creates pity for others (Hesse 51; Tolstoy 35).

CONCLUSION

The combination of *Siddhartha* and *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* shows that literary meaning does not exist as an extractable theme but instead functions as a directional force which authors develop through their works by using specific patterns of sound and word repetition and their choice of when to conclude their pieces (Tally 1–2). The spiritual journey in Hesse receives its first interruption from the dialogue which includes the statement that "Wisdom cannot be imparted" because this statement transforms the quest into an emotional learning experience which requires students to dedicate both their time and their focus on their studies (Hesse 52). The story in Tolstoy starts with an official communication that announces "Ivan Ilyich has died" to present death as a societal reality which people handle emotionally but which demonstrates their inability to live according to proper standards (Tolstoy 1). The research on these texts demonstrates their opening scenes through Hesse's "Indian element" which functions as a structural device that transforms experiential rhythms into theatrical transformations and through Tolstoy's realistic writing which shows death through the collapse of social conventions (Brown 191–92; Brungardt 679–80). The main finding of this dissertation shows that affect serves as the primary component which enables people to comprehend existential meaning through their existence (Tally 1–2).

This research presents a comparative mapping method which shows that each text establishes its ethical values through a main point which defines how people experience time. The sickroom space leads to time constraints. Hesse uses the climactic command "Do you hear? ... Listen!" to explain that enlightenment represents a process which connects people through their practice of paying attention something which enables them to include multiple things at once without denying any part of their experience (Hesse 44). The counter-register of Tolstoy is expressed through his dedication to righteousness with the statement "We shall all of us die" which transforms the room's atmosphere from denial to shared human mortality while making truth more accessible through companionship (Tolstoy 24). The medical-humanities field identifies Gerasim as a key focus because his relationship with others shows how managed speech differs from authentic speech which Tolstoy uses to create his storytelling approach instead of presenting a straightforward moral principle (Micco, Villars, and Smith 872–73; Hibbs and Hallam e476). The river in Hesse's work teaches inclusion through its repetitive nature while Tolstoy's bedroom demonstrates authentic selfhood through its forceful existence which shows how death creates an immediate need for genuine human connections (Danaher 232–33; Brungardt 680).

The two endings converge in their insistence that transformation occurs not as triumphant explanation but as a change in the felt world—an affective re-orientation toward others at the edge of finitude (Cowley 199–201). The novel Siddhartha uses Govinda's plea— "Show me, my friend"—to establish closure through physical expression which demonstrates knowledge while proving that wisdom exists as atmospheric presence which must be experienced through rhythmic patterns (Hesse 156–57). In his final words Ivan Ilyich declares two statements which begin with "It is finished" and end with "Death is finished" to reveal a contradictory state which transforms fear into pity while expanding personal boundaries into clear social connections (Tolstoy 35). Critics read this not as sentimental consolation but as Tolstoy's severe exposure of how a socially "proper" life can still be existentially false until the self-confronts mortality without euphemism (Cowley 205–06; Danaher 238–40). The dissertation maintains its central finding which shows that people develop understanding through their life experiences and their encounters with death

because these processes help them learn about their feelings through listening to others and being close to them while facing time constraints which lead to discovering truth (Tally 1–2; Hibbs and Hallam e476).

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