

# Tolstoy as a Writer of Life Through his Short Story how much Land does a Man Need

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**Abstract:** ‘Tolstoy is not a work of art but a piece of life’. This research article is one which stands to prove the above statement. Tolstoy, after his service in Crimean War started writing fictions mainly dealing directly or indirectly with death. During his last three decades, Tolstoy interested in making people being moral. His moral and religious ideas were presented to the people through the ‘theme of death’. The reason for using this theme of death was that every immoral activity always led to death. There are also other reasons for using this theme. After his service in Crimean War, Tolstoy began to realize that human life was given no importance. In the name of war, human life was taken just like that. To make people realize this, he started writing short stories stressing the importance of life and for this reason Tolstoy was considered as the ‘embodiment of nature and pure vitality’. This research article is going to deal with the short story ‘How Much Land does a Man Need?’ that emphasizes the meaning and importance of life and through this I’m going to arrive at why he is considered as the ‘piece of life’.

**Keywords:** Writer of life, death, meaning and importance of life

## 1. Introduction

### 1) Themes leading to the death

Leo Tolstoy’s short story How Much Land does a Man Need? written in 1886 centers on a peasant’s life. Pahome is the protagonist of the story, whose insatiable desire for land brings about his downfall. The story begins when Pahome extends a dare to the Devil, claiming that with enough land he would have nothing to fear. “If I had a lot of land, I shouldn’t fear the devil himself”

Unnoticing the devil behind him, Pahome utters this statement. On hearing this, devil behind started testing how strong the man is. The devil decided to give him more land and by doing that it wanted to put Pahome in its power. The devil set about so many situations through which Pahome will get more land and because of this his greed over land was increased gradually. Pahome began to view land as the source of comfort and security.

The corrupting nature of greed and Pride becomes the prominent theme the end up Pahome’s life in death. In the first situation created by the devil, Pahome was able to get 30 acres of land which he find sufficient initially. At first he seems happy with the purchase, but a misunderstanding with his neighbor made his family move to a new village. In the new village, the

second situation was created by the devil through which Pahome was able to get triple the amount of land he had earlier. Even though he has enough land, he was not convinced with the amount of land he have. His increased greed makes Pahome desire more and more amount of land and that it marks the end of his life. In the third situation by the devil, Pahome was exhausted to death. Pahome become more possessive of his land and desire to earn more. So, he approaches the Bashkirs who in turn gives an unusual offer. The offer is that ‘one thousand roubles a day’ which means Pahome can cover as much land as he can but before sunset he should return to the same place. Pahome was very happy on hearing this offer. His greed over the land blinds him from the difficulty the situation holds.

## 2. Reasons why he is considered as the Writer of Life

It is not only his greed that marks his end of life but also his pride. Pahome refuses to mind the warning of death and feel shame to lose the new found land. Death appears in the form of omen in Pahome’s dream the night before his journey in covering the land. Tolstoy suggests that the former, like greed, is a corrupting influence that leads only to ruin and moral decay, but What’s more is that the finality of death becomes the ultimate insult to Pahome’s pride. Pahome realized his greed and pride over land after when he was totally exhausted in the sun. He realized that he has covered so much acres of land. In order to reach the same place before sunset he ran from where he is. When he is about to complete his task he feels so exhausted and die when he reaches the initial point. He fell dying on the feet of the Bashkirs. The Bashkirs make a note that ‘It is only six feet of land that man needs’. The servants bury Pahome in the same place where he died. In this short stories Tolstoy suggests that greed always rob individual from making good and moral decisions. It also stops them from maintaining a good relationship with others and live satisfying life. It is well stressed in the final climatic scene. He used realistic setting and included many details that made this story applicable to everybody. The answer to the title is also provided at the end of the story with specific details and adds to the realism. Ultimately every person will die and their burial requirement will show Universal equality:

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“Six feet from his head to his heel was all he needed”

Throughout the story Tolstoy uses description that shows realism like the life of the peasant. His fictions were both realistic and also didactic. Through his realistic presentation he easily made people understand the meaning of life. For this he was considered as the incarnation of the world’s conscience. He was not just the greatest writer who lived but a living symbol of the search for life’s meaning. The British poet and critic Mathew Arnold says that Tolstoy is not work of art but a piece of life. It was commonplace to describe Tolstoy as godlike in his powers and titanic in his struggles to escape the limitations of the human condition.

Tolstoy wrote this story for another reason also. Henry George, an American whose book *Progress and Poverty* had a strong international influence. Henry George idea is that, nobody should be entitled to own any part of the earth. Like George said, Tolstoy believed that private ownership of land was the source of many social ills.

### 3. Conclusion

I hereby concludes that Tolstoy had been a great writer who realistically presented the meaning of life through various descriptions and that’s why he is considered as the writer of life.

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