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Comparative Analysis of Victor Hugo's *The Last Day of a Condemned Man* and Leonid Andreev's *The Seven Who Were Hanged:* A Thanatological Study

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Abstract: As the world modernizes, expectations for the enhanced enjoyment of basic rights often contrast with the reality of their contestation or reinterpretation. The right to life, one of the most fundamental rights, has increasingly been interpreted merely as the right not to be killed. Literature, as a reflection of societal values, offers a unique lens to explore this evolving interpretation of the right to life. This study examines Victor Hugo's *The Last Day of a Condemned Man* and Leonid Andreev's *The Seven Who Were Hanged* through comparative literature and thanatology, focusing on death and the defense of the right to life. Employing a comparative-thematic approach guided by thematology, it incorporates René Wellek and Austin Warren's humanist perspective, Susan Bassnett's interdisciplinary lens, and Sigmund Freud's Eros-Thanatos psychoanalytic framework. The analysis systematically explores key motifs, such as nature, time, and psychological states, and themes of execution and freedom, unveiling death's biological, psychological, and sociological layers. The findings reveal that both authors critiqued the death penalty and upheld life's sanctity within a thanatological context, bridging their unique cultural settings. The study demonstrates how the right to life serves as a unifying force across disciplines, geographies, and cultures, highlighting literature's role in understanding this fundamental right.

Keywords: Comparative literature; thanatology; death penalty; Victor Hugo; Leonid Andreev

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Сравнительный анализ произведений Виктора Гюго «Последний день приговоренного к смерти» и Леонида Андреева «Рассказ о семи повешенных»: танатологическое исследование

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Аннотация: По мере модернизации мира ожидания, связанные с более полной реализацией основных прав, часто вступают в противоречие с реальностью, где эти права оспариваются или переосмысливаются. Право на жизнь – одно из самых фундаментальных прав – всё чаще интерпретируется лишь как право не быть убитым. Литература, как отражение общественных ценностей, предлагает уникальную призму для изучения этой эволюционирующей интерпретации. В данном исследовании анализируются произведения Виктора Гюго «Последний день приговорённого к смерти» и Леонида Андреева «Рассказ о семи повешенных» с точки зрения сравнительного литературоведения и танатологии, сосредоточиваясь на вопросах смерти и защиты права на жизнь. Используя сравнительно-тематический подход, основанный на тематологии, исследование интегрирует гуманистическую перспективу Рене Уэллека и Остина Уоррена, междисциплинарный подход Сьюзен Басснетт и психоаналитическую концепцию Эроса и Танатоса Зигмунда Фрейда. В ходе анализа систематически исследуются ключевые мотивы, такие как природа, время и психологические состояния, а также темы казни и свободы, раскрывая биологические, психологические и социологические аспекты смерти. Результаты показали, что оба автора критиковали смертную казнь и отстаивали святость жизни в танатологическом контексте, отражая при этом свои уникальные культурные контексты. Исследование демонстрирует, как право на жизнь служит силой, преодолевающей дисциплинарные, географические и культурные границы, подчёркивая роль литературы в осмыслении этого фундаментального права.

Ключевые слова: Сравнительная литературоведение; Танатология; Смертная казнь; Виктор Гюго; Леонид Андреев

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Introduction

The right to life is the most natural right of human beings. Although the concept of natural rights dates back to Ancient Greece, the seventeenth century saw the renewal and modernization of this idea begin to develop. Natural rights are divided into two categories: classical and modern. According to the

classical theory of natural rights, the existence of the state is natural and necessary, and individual lives can be satisfied by fulfilling the duties assigned to them. In accordance with the modern theory of natural rights, the state is artificial, its existence is not absolute, and rights come before duties for individuals (Kaya, 2017: 177). Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), and John Locke (1632–1704), who were sixteenth-seventeenth century philosophers, were prominent defenders of modern natural rights. The modern state is also identified as a particular structure that originated in north Western Europe during the same period (Çapar and Yıldırım, 2012: 78). The reason why both natural rights and a modern understanding of the state emerged at the same time was the advancement and emphasis on reason and science. Free thought became a widespread phenomenon, making people more aware of their individual rights.

While the right to life is a legal and philosophical concept, its intersection with death, examined through the lens of thanatology, offers a multidimensional perspective uniquely captured in literature. The subject of death may seem more relevant to the fields of biology and medicine. However, when considered alongside its causes and consequences, the concept is connected to many branches of science, as it includes biological, psychological, psychiatric, and sociological elements (Duday, 2011: 3).

The word thanatology is derived from Greek. It is formed by an amalgamation of the words *thanatos* (θάνατος means death) and *-logy* (-λογια means speaking, discourse, science). Thanatos is the son of Nyx (the Goddess of Night) and the brother of Hypnos (the God of Sleep). As the personification of death, Thanatos represents all destructive, murderous impulses in man. This is the opposite of Eros, who represented creativity and love. In the 1930s, under the leadership of Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud's (1856–1939) psychoanalytic studies, the word Thanatos was explained in English as an unconscious self-destructive instinct. Influenced by ancient Greek mythology, Freud claims that the id is driven by two basic drives: Eros (life) and Thanatos (death) (2014: 74). He states that the first is effective in maintaining the life and generation of the organism, and the second drives the human being towards death and destruction. They are constantly at war and the first war in history started between these two drives. But this war is not limited to the human body or mind. It also carries over to societies and states of which humans are members. The main question here is: Who will win the war, Eros or Thanatos? While the idealized answer seems clear, reality often differs from ideals. Therefore, since this internal conflict is inherent to humanity, its outcome, even if not its origin, can potentially be influenced. As a result of the focus on the sporting, cultural, and artistic fields, and the pleasure to be gained from these, it may be possible to reduce the annihilative and destructive effects of Thanatos. This process serves the unifying and constructive power of Eros. Because cultural activities generally involve creating bonds, creativity, and construction, they reinforce the foundations of civilization (Freud, 1962: 68-69). By means of sublimation[1], the energy of Thanatos is thus channeled into creation instead of destruction.

Although medical dictionaries may provide insight into the biological implications of thanatology, a deeper and broader analysis of the term's meaning is necessary. Thanatology is defined in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* as "the description or study of the phenomena of somatic death" (Gove, 1981: 2367), in *The Comprehensive Dictionary of Russian Language* as "scientific discipline that studies death, its causes, mechanisms and signs" (Kuznetsov et al., 2000: 1305), and in *The Dictionary of French Le Petit Robert* as

[1] Sublimation is one of Freud's defense mechanisms. By using this mechanism a person can channel unpleasurable drives and urges into more useful, productive and socially acceptable behaviours (Gemes, 2009: 38).

"1-study of the different biological and sociological aspects of death, 2- the medico-legal study of the circumstances leading to the death" (Robert, 1985: 1955). Consequently, the word does not deal merely with the concept of death. As seen from the examples, it examines the conditions that cause death and its signs. In short, thanatology encompasses the entire process and mechanism of death

Rather than directly investigating the meaning of life and death, thanatology explores their mechanisms of action and people in action-reaction domains (Narayanan, 2021: 581). Thanatology is a relatively new science and interacts with the economic, political, and social aspects of life, especially medicine. It truly gained a place in psychology after the release of the book *The Meaning of Death* by American psychologist Herman Feifel (1915-2003). According to Feifel (1959: 123), death cannot be ignored because its abstract state in the mind is more tiring and frightening than the realization of the phenomenon. However, what human beings need to do is to realize the value of life while thinking about death and to raise the consciousness of living. Robert Kastenbaum (1932-2013) and Christopher M. Moreman's approach to death is a game-changer. According to this approach, death should not be rejected, but rather accepted. In *Death, Society, and Human Experience*, they use social and behavioral sciences, especially religion, literature, philosophy, art, and history, to better understand the construct of death (Kastenbaum and Moreman, 2018).

In thanatology, death is examined in three ways: biological, social, and psychological. Whereas biological death is defined as the "termination of vital functions in the living body", sociological death is "the termination of the communication of the living being with its surroundings, independent of the mentioned functions". This type of death is based on Aristotle's thesis that man is a social being and the acceptance by others that the person is alive. The third way is psychological death, which deals with how people cope with the concept of death in their minds. Cultural thanatology is born from the coming together of these three types of death. Religious beliefs, cultural patterns, traditions and customs, material and spiritual elements of the soul constitute the components of cultural thanatology. In short, thanatology is everything related to death, the interdisciplinary study of death (Singaram and Saradaprabhananda, 2020: 313).

The phenomenon of death shows existential resemblance to the concept of time. Both exist on the linear plane. They are abstract and resist all attempts to be concretized. The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) read death and time through the idea of abstraction and absence. The famous philosopher believed it was unnecessary to constantly worry about a case and moment that does not exist, and added: "If what makes death seem so terrible to us were the thought of non-existence, we should necessarily think with equal horror of the time when as yet we did not exist. For it is irrefutably certain that non-existence after death cannot be different from non-existence before birth. An entire infinity ran its course when we did not yet exist, but this in no way disturbs us" (Schopenhauer, 2012: 466).

The death penalty is found in *The Code of Hammurabi*, which is considered the beginning of written law in history. Until the Age of Enlightenment, it was executed as the legitimate right of the state to punish criminals. Cesare Beccaria (1738-1794) made serious criticisms of the death penalty in his book *On Crimes and Punishments* (*Dei delitti e delle pene*), which eventually led him to be considered the founder of the modern legal system (see Beccaria, 1995). On the other hand, the death penalty has been constantly debated since its emergence. Today, in many countries around the world, especially in America, whether the death penalty is deterrent, what its criteria should be, and whether there are laws that can prevent the execution of an innocent person have become topics of debate. In addition, extra-legal elements such as religion, politics, and

ideology also sometimes influence death penalty decisions to impose the death penalty (Trejbalova et al., 2024: 449).

In the process of developing some common criteria reflecting the changing standards of universal human values in Europe after the First World War, 19th century Russian literature played an important role. From Russian literature, the names of Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Gorky and Leonid Andreev (*The Seven Who Were Hanged* (*Рассказ о семи повешенных*) was reprinted many times) came to the fore (Obolenskaya, 2022: 112). Similarly, from French literature, Victor Hugo was included in this context due to his humanist perspective, exemplified in works like *The Last Day of a Condemned Man* (*Le Dernier Jour D'un Condamne*), which anticipated the ethical concerns later echoed by Russian writers in their critique of dehumanization and the death penalty. Hugo, who liked to see his works as works that emerged from his own mind, waged a serious struggle against terrorism and the death penalty, especially after the 1820s (Lunn-Rockliffe, 2024: 1-2). The abolition of the death penalty, as well as its reintroduction, are still hotly debated by many states in the modern world. Therefore, this study will examine the subject of execution, a shared thematic element in both literary works, with a particular emphasis on the value accorded to human beings and the right to life.

Theoretical Framework

This study is situated within the theoretical and methodological framework of comparative literature. Establishing the foundation for the subsequent analysis of Victor Hugo and Leonid Andreev necessitates a review of key theoretical works within the field. Comparative literature fundamentally involves the study of literature beyond the confines of a single nation or language, examining relationships between literatures across national, linguistic, and cultural boundaries (Remak, 1961: 3; Wellek & Warren, 1949: 46-49). Its origins are often traced to the Enlightenment ideal of ‘world literature’ (weltliteratur), as articulated by Goethe, which envisioned a global network of literary exchange and understanding.

Early developments in the discipline, particularly associated with the French school, often focused on empirical studies of influence and reception, meticulously tracing historical connections between authors and texts across borders. However, subsequent theoretical discussions, particularly prominent within the American school, considerably broadened the discipline's scope. René Wellek and Austin Warren, in their seminal work *Theory of Literature* (1949: 48, 73, 139), argued against a narrow focus solely on extrinsic factors. They advocated for the intrinsic study of literature, emphasizing the analysis of literary works themselves – including universal themes and aesthetic qualities – while still maintaining a comparative perspective. This paved the way for approaches comparing works based on analogy rather than solely on direct influence.

Currently, comparative studies are most commonly conducted through shared subject, theme, and motif (Aytaç, 2016: 93), and thematology provides a framework for these studies. Thematology, the study of themes and motifs across different literary works and traditions, is central to many comparative analyses and particularly relevant to this study. Scholars such as Paul Van Tieghem, Raymond Trousson, Elisabeth Frenzel Raymond and Harry Levin have explored the methodologies and challenges of tracing how recurring subjects—like the theme of death and common motifs examined in this research—are treated across diverse cultural and historical contexts, revealing both shared human preoccupations and culturally specific nuances. Analyzing the portrayal of the death penalty and the right to life in Hugo and Andreev through a thematic lens facilitates such a cross-cultural investigation.

Furthermore, contemporary comparative literature emphasizes interdisciplinarity, recognizing that literary understanding can be enriched through engagement with other fields of knowledge. Susan Bassnett, in *Comparative Literature: A*

Critical Introduction (1993: 1, 4-6, 10, 31), advocates for this approach, arguing that literature should be integrated with its historical, cultural, and theoretical contexts. Wellek and Warren's humanist approach enables this study to explore how Hugo and Andreev universalize the experience of facing death, while Bassnett's interdisciplinary lens integrates thanatological insights into the literary analysis. This often requires insights from disciplines such as history, philosophy, sociology, psychoanalysis, and thanatology (the latter being employed in this study). This interdisciplinary dimension enables a multi-faceted analysis that moves beyond purely formal literary criticism to explore the complex interplay between literature and broader human experiences and knowledge.

Therefore, this study draws upon these core tenets of comparative literature. It utilizes a comparative-thematic approach, informed by the principles of thematology, to examine the treatment of death and the right to life in the works of Hugo and Andreev. Simultaneously, it adopts an interdisciplinary perspective, integrating insights from thanatology, psychoanalysis, and humanist philosophy. This aligns with the contemporary understanding of comparative literature as a field enriched by dialogue across disciplines. This theoretical grounding provides a robust framework for exploring how these two authors, from different national contexts, engaged with universal questions of life, death, and justice.

Research Model

This study adopts a comparative-thematic and interdisciplinary analysis model to examine *Hugo's The Last Day of a Condemned Man* and *Andreev's The Seven Who Were Hanged* in the context of the theme of death and the right to life. The fact that both works are shaped around the theme of death, their critical approach to the death penalty, and their humanist stance defending the right to life play a role in the selection of these works. The model is grounded in comparative literature, drawing on Wellek and Warren's humanist approach and Bassnett's interdisciplinary perspective, while enriched by a thanatological framework. The analysis integrates humanist and psychoanalytic methods, addressing the literary portrayal of death through its biological, psychological, and sociological dimensions. Death-related motifs in both works (season, sun, light, sky, flower, color, fat man, clock, mental confusion, unconsciousness, drunkenness, sleep, compressed time) are systematically identified and compared. The handling of the themes of death and the right to life in each work is analyzed. Findings from comparative literature are integrated with a thanatological perspective to present a multi-dimensional portrayal of death. This model aims to illuminate literature's capacity to advocate for the right to life and represent death in a multidimensional manner.

Comparative Literature and Thanatology: Literary Representations of Death in Hugo and Andreev

Since the writers cannot remain indifferent to issues such as death and one's right to life, they frequently include the subject of execution in their works. One such noteworthy writer is Victor Hugo (1802-1885) and another is Leonid Andreev (1871-1919). Hugo wrote *The Last Day of a Condemned Man* in 1829, and Andreev wrote *The Seven Who Were Hanged* in 1908. Hugo's novel tragically describes the last day in the life of a convict sentenced to death by guillotine[2]. The work holds a special place because it is the first story by Victor Hugo written in the first person singular, and the definition of 'miserable', a term frequently used in his novels, first appears in this work. Andreev's work was dedicated to Lev N. Tolstoy, and depicts the last days of seven convicts. The work influenced many writers and revolutionaries during its period. Andreev was also influenced religiously, philosophically, and literarily by Hugo, who left his mark on

[2] The guillotine is a kind of execution device designed to decapitate the prisoner to be executed. It was first used in 1792 to execute a thief. Considered a 'humane' method of execution, the guillotine continued to be used until 1977 (Clapham, 2010: 210).

the literature of the nineteenth century. He takes the theoretical basis of his book, *The Seven Who Were Hanged*, from *The Last Day of a Condemned Man*. Andreev further diversifies the themes of execution, death, life, and humanity he took from Hugo and carries them to the twentieth century (Iezuitova, 1996: 54).

According to Hugo, both the power to create and the power to destroy belong to God, and so, there is no place for the death penalty in the civilized world that he created. Writing this book was essentially an act of rebellion against the death penalty, and a manifesto for its abolition. This matter of life and death should be decided in the courtroom, not enacted on the gallows. In front of the judge, not the executioner. Hugo gives the prisoner a pen, hoping this act will enable decision-makers to be more conscientious and thoughtful (Hugo, 2016: 72). This was the will of the author himself, rather than that of the protagonist. Hugo could not stand the pain he felt on the topic of execution and wrote his work hoping that it would begin to address the issue. Andreev also rebelled against the death penalty, which the tsarist courts turned into an ordinary event between 1907-1914. The author wrote so skillfully that many people who were alive during those dark years wrote something to Andreev before they died (Bozkaya, 2006: 7). Evidently, writing relieved the psychological pain experienced by both writers. Because the subconscious wants to express feelings such as love, hatred, conflict, anxiety, anger (Holloway, 2023: 814-815). The main reason why both writers wrote their works was their own struggle for existence.

Both works were inspired by real stories, observations, and documents. There was a failed revolution in 1905 which led to a horrific stretch of executions in Russia. In fact, between 1907 and 1914, someone was put to death almost every single day, making the job of the executioner quite tiring. A similar event had taken place in France during Hugo's day, forcing prisoners to wait in line for their own executions. One day, while walking around the streets of Paris with a friend, Hugo witnessed the execution of a prisoner in Greve Square and immediately fled. This dramatic event deeply affected Hugo, and later spurred him on to write the book.

In Russia, in 1907, Vsevolod V. Lebedintsev (1881-1908), Lev S. Sinegub (1887-1908), Sergey G. Baranov (1885-1908), Aleksandr F. Smirnov (1886-1908), Lidiya A. Sture (1884-1908), Anna M. Rasputina (1874-1908) and Elizaveta N. Lebedeva (1887-1908) socialist-revolutionaries planned to assassinate Ivan G. Shheglovitov (1861-1918), who served as minister of justice between 1906-1915, and Prince Nikolay Nikolaevich (1856-1929), but they were betrayed by the provocateur-revolutionary Yevno F. Azef (1869-1918). They were all captured and executed on the night of February 17th to 18th, 1908. Despite being executed, they would later be declared 'heroes' of the cause (Gerasimov, 1985: 122-123). These people are given the names Sergey Golovin, Musya, Vasily Kashirin, Tanya Kovalchuk, Verner, Ivan Yanson, and Mishka in the work.

Both works begin by contrasting the general social panorama with the past lives of the heroes, initially portrayed in a way meant to evoke positive remembrance. Hugo's hero is free, has dreams, and is happy. However, after entering the prison, he begins to see the phrase 'condemned to death' everywhere: on the guard's face, on the floor, and on the wall. He even hears it in his ears. In *The Seven Who Were Hanged*, little information is given about the lives of five young assassins, the peasant Ivan Janson, and the gypsy Mishka. Mishka is a murderer and robber because no one gives him a job. He ultimately commits a crime because he is hungry, and is offered the role of an executioner in prison even though he himself killed a person. However, he rejects this job, which could have spared him from his own death sentence. Ivan Yanson is mistreated on the landlord's farm, so he then turns into a thief, rapist, and murderer. All five assassins are young, decent people, but they take such action to counter the

oppressive regime of the time. Both authors seemed to want their audience to understand that their heroes lived ordinary lives before being convicted.

According to Hugo, all of us, without exception, have envisioned or imagined what the last day of a death row inmate might be like. Although we do not express them out loud, fears and thoughts regarding this scene always exist in our subconscious. The starting point of the author in writing his work was his subconscious. Hugo found himself unable to forget the death of the prisoner being beheaded (Hugo, 2009: 4). His agony, the blood pool behind him, and the red color in Greve Square would always be with him. Hugo's main purpose in writing the story is the driven by the psychological need to purge these painful memories that suffocated his soul, as he claimed to feel relieved when he started to write the story (Hugo, 2009: 5). After learning about his death sentence, the prisoner asks for pen and paper as he sees this as a means of reducing his suffering. Andreev, too, was deeply shaken by the executions that began after the 1905 revolution in Russia. Andreev had a strong character of sensitivity to others, often seeking to aid them materially and spiritually as best he could. Their suffering and despair were too much for him to handle. The Russian writer, like Hugo, wrote his work to reduce this inner turmoil and help people. However, to understand why he chose the theme of death while giving this message, it is necessary to look at the author's life. Death is a common subject or motif in many of his other stories as well, including *Once upon a Time* (*Жили-были*), *In Spring* (*Весной*), *Thought* (*Мысль*), *The story of Sergey Petrovich* (*Рассказ о Сергее Петровиче*), *Peace* (*Покой*). Psychological reasons such as sadness over the death of his father, several suicide attempts, and the loss of his wife later in life likely contributed to his persistent focus on death (Krasilnikov, 2006: 92-94).

In 1822, Hugo married Adele Foucher (1803–1868), who was a writer just like him. Having a more refined perspective on the concept of family, Hugo argued that to kill a prisoner is to shed the blood of his family, and that the prisoner does not die alone (Hugo, 2009: 18). In the words of his hero on this subject: "And after I die, three women who will remain sonless, husbandless and fatherless; there would be three different kinds of orphans, the three widows created by the law" (Hugo, 2016: 75). Such a statement highlights the significance of the family institution. Andreev wrote very highly of his own wife. In one letter, he related his life on Capri Island to his friend Vikentiy V. Veresaev (1867–1945), with the following words: "Until now, there is only one question for me, 'Will I be able to endure the death of my wife?' Of course, I am not talking about suicide, but much more deeply. There are some bonds that you can never break without an irreparable loss to the heart" (1985: 398). The author, who was left alone when he finally became a nuclear family, puts Golovin's farewell to his family at the peak of lyricism in his work. That farewell scene signifies the author's past life, his love for his wife, father, and child.

Two years after their marriage, Hugo had a daughter named Leopoldine (1824–1843). However, she ended up drowning less than two decades later during a trip celebrating their wedding anniversary. The event shook Hugo so deeply that he gave up writing for some time. Likewise, what hurts the heart of Hugo's imaginary prisoner the most is the difficulties his daughter will experience after he dies. Another peak of lyricism in the work comes with the scene on the morning of the execution day, where the prisoner hugs and kisses his daughter and the daughter does not know her father. Because of his changing face, her daughter does not know him, asked about her father, she says, "he died, sir". The prisoner breaks down at these words: "I am not a father anymore!" "Dad! I was condemned not to hear that word" (Hugo, 2016: 140). When the prisoner asks his daughter to pray for him, the girl answers: "I can't, sir. It is not possible to pray in the daytime. Come to my house tonight, I

will pray for you there" (ibid.: 141). Finally, the prisoner asks his daughter if she can read, the girl answers, “I know” and proceeds to read something like “v.e.r. ve. r.d.i.c…” she reads something. The text that the little girl reads is the sentence of her father’s execution. At last, the prisoner is ready for anything, including the death penalty. Considering the writing date of the work, it is not a coincidence that the Hugo, who was the father of a daughter himself, chose this scene as the most emotionally intense moment.

In *The Seven Who Were Hanged*, Andreev took Golovin one step further among his heroes and placed him at the peak of the lyricism of the story, an observation that requires further analysis. Daniil L. Andreev (1906-1959) was born to Leonid and his wife on November 2, 1906. However, this joy would be a temporary one as Aleksandra A. Mikhaylovna (1881-1906), beloved wife of the author, succumbed to malaria just three weeks later on November 28. Andreev was devastated and felt as if he was losing his mind. It was so bad that he did not want to see his newborn son. In the work, this event is embodied in the scene of Golovin’s meeting with his family while in prison. The colonel’s father maintains his composure throughout the interview, but at the moment of separation experienced a viscerally emotional release: “And suddenly his head fell on his son’s shoulder, as if he had been severed, broken by the handle. Before, he was taller than his son, now he was short next to him. His white, downy head laying on his shoulder like a white ball. They were kissing each other non-stop. They kissed each other without speaking. The son his father’s soft white hair and the father his prisoner’s garb were stroking” (Andreev, 1909: 46).

At this point in the work, the author was likely reliving the emotional release of not seeing his child until then and trying to stay strong. With a bit of guilt, he does what he was unable to do for their real son: kisses, and hugs him. The author chose not to describe the ending of this scene, so he concludes with this remark: “And what happened next cannot and should not be told…” (ibid.: 46). He left it unfinished, just as his own life had been left unfinished after the death of his wife and separation from his son.

In addition, when creating the character Golovin, Andreev was inspired by his own son Daniil. Golovin is healthy, strong, agile, and happy. He enjoys life to the fullest, loves the sun, is pure, clean, naive, romantic, and popular amongst his friends. These positive stem from Andreev’s perception of his own son. In real life, Andreev’s son Daniil was taken from Berlin by his sister Aleksandra Elizaveta to Moscow, when the writer did not want to see him. Another person who met with his family before execution was Vasiliy Kashirin. As in the previous cases, Kashirin’s father did not want to see him either, so only his mother came to visit. Although the author presents the father-son conflict here, the presence of his son is felt in the background. With Kashirin’s words “My God, my God! What is this? Even beasts do not act like this. Am I your son or a stranger?” (ibid.: 48). The writer, who seemingly fell once again into the psychology of guilt, demonstrates that his son was in the right. Kashirin feels alone on earth, like a motherless child. He is also the person who fears execution as much as a child, even the most afraid. The expression "staying in limbo" means a dream world, a life of puppets for Kashirin, and a dream, unconsciousness and fainting state for other heroes. As a child, he sees everyone as a toy, a puppet in his imagination. On the morning of the execution, when the people come to his cell to collect him, he is frightened like a child. And when he is told that he must leave, he says: “I will not do it again! I will not do it again!” (ibid.: 71) and retreats to the corner of his cell as if escaping from his father, who would raise his hand and walked towards the boy when he was little.

In recalling this event, he exhibits his suppressed subconscious feelings and reverts to a childlike demeanor to escape the situation. Freud describes this return as the immature defense mechanism known as

regression[3]. It would not be wrong to say that Andreev attributed his son's childhood to Kashirin and his own youth to Golovin. The fact that Andreev gave only two of the seven prisoners the chance to meet with their families (with a significantly detailed depiction of the interaction) is certainly more than a coincidence, considering what the author had experienced in his own life.

In both works, the first target of criticism is the regime, kingdom/tsardom, and official authority. While they have the opportunity and authority to eliminate these systems, decision-makers want this suffering to continue. Another criticism is directed towards the clergy, as they are always depicted speaking nonsense and reading the same cliché text. Andreev's prisoners do not want to see the clergyman before they are hanged, and Hugo's prisoner does not even want to listen. They are a part of the same corrupt system, and are portrayed as useless because they do not attempt to improve it. The motif of the fat man appears in both works as a type representing the bourgeoisie, the establishment, and the overall brokenness of the system. While Madame de Blinval, the philosopher and the knight represent the bourgeois class in Hugo's work, they cannot even bear to hear the name of the book *The Last Day of a Condemned Man*. In Andreev's work, the target of the assassination is a negative stock character, the fat minister, who represents the regime's ideology.

Before the execution, Hugo's prisoner hears strange voices, which he believes may come from a clock. On the day of the execution, every gong of the clock makes the prisoner shudder. As part of the plot, Andreev builds a clock tower opposite the prison, in which the clock chimes every fifteen minutes. These clocks announce death, not time, and make the reader a partner in this countdown. The death-time relationship has the opposite vector here. The departure of time heralds the arrival of death. As an abstract concept, time symbolizes a concrete step towards death.

The contrasts of morning and evening and light and dark emphasize the dichotomy of good and evil, serving simultaneously as a metaphorical background. While terrible events happen at night as the hours move frighteningly slowly, prisoners, who rarely see daylight, are happy when they witness a beam of light filtering through the stones.

The motifs of season, sun, light, and the sky provide information regarding the situation and the future. Hugo uses constant cold and rainy weather to portray bad events, while Andreev emphasizes cold and darkness. It is a beautiful and sunny August morning when the prisoner in Hugo's story is brought to trial. However, after he is sentenced, the man exclaims: "The sun, the spring, the fields full of flowers, the birds that wake up and sing in the morning, the clouds, the trees, nature, freedom, life, unfortunately, none of them are mine anymore!" (Hugo, 2016: 74). Andreev's heroes, Golovin and Musya, have no desire to listen to the jurors in the courtroom, instead focusing on the blue sky and sun. Gazing at the sky, Golovin returns to the real world for a moment and remembers the happy days of his youth. However, after the court announces the death sentence against them, the blue color of the sky begins to fade, and the warm summer evening begins to cool (Andreev, 1909: 54).

Mental confusion, unconsciousness and drunkenness can also be considered motifs that evoke death. For Hugo's prisoner, this situation begins after the decision to give the death penalty. In his own words, he explains that it is "between the moment of sleep and the moment of awakening". Thoughts are not clear in the foggy atmosphere that is depicted, and the prisoner sometimes cannot stand it and faints. On the execution day, when they ask him: "Are you prepared?", his eyes go dark, cold sweat pours from his body, his temples begin to beat, his ears fill with a hum, and he finds himself on the verge of fainting. He feels that someone is talking, but is not

[3] Regression: According to Freud, if the person is in a difficult situation, he/she can act in more primitive behaviors from lower developmental stages instead of the developmental period he/she is in (Bacanlı, 2002: 86).

entirely sure. Mishka, one of Andreev's prisoners, seems to be in drunken dizziness after being imprisoned, his thoughts and dreams collide and become entangled. Golovin shuts off his ears to the outer world to ward off the death sentence. He starts training, but after a while, he understands that it is also useless. Hours before his execution, Golovin falls into a gap between life and death, feeling as if his body no longer belongs to him. Andreev describes this situation as an incomprehensible spirituality that leads to God. After what happened, Golovin calms down again and is filled with energy. On the way to the execution, he calms the people around him, and to give them courage he wants to be the first to be executed. Andreev describes this mood with Musya's words: "How could it not be immortal? He is immortal even in this present moment. How can there be death, how can there be immortality? He is now both dead and immortal, as alive in death as he was when he was alive" (ibid.: 75).

Sleep functions as an additional motif in the work, connoting death. Thanatos (death) and Hypnos (hypnosis), known as the God of Sleep in ancient Greek mythology, are twin brothers. Both brothers live in the world of the dead (Hades). Sleep was understood in Ancient Greece as a temporary death and preparation for the end of life. In fact, various religions and belief systems portray sleep as the brother, twin, cousin, or friend of death. In these two works, the sleep-death brotherhood is quite pronounced. Normally, while sleep is one of the four basic needs alongside food, drink, and sex, it is not an accessible, beautiful, voluntary phenomenon for the heroes. Rather, it is an act they involuntarily engage in. For example, in *The Last Day of a Condemned Man*, when the prisoner goes to court, all the jurors are asleep. For these people, who have the right to speak and make judgments upon the lives of others, sleep is pleasurable and relaxing. At this very point, Hugo could not help but ask: "How could that bitter thought arise out of such sweet feelings?" (2016: 66). And while the judges feel the purity of Golovin's love and energy for life, Andreev shares that they do not change the death sentence. After hearing the assassination report, the fat minister could not sleep that night despite all his protection and strength. In his ears, "at thirteen o'clock, sir!" sentence keeps ringing because he is hours away from his possible death. Ivan Yanson also sits timidly on the stool at night, but is unable to sleep. In these works, sleep functions as a motif closely associated with the negativity and finality of death. Heroes want to live the compressed time to the fullest. The fundamental right, the right to life, prevails over the basic need of sleep.

One of the most important motifs in the work is compressed time, in other words, the certainty of death. Freud saw death as the purpose of life. According to him, everyone has the subconscious idea that he or she is immortal. Because there is no concept of time in a person's subconscious, there is no thought that time passes quickly (Drobot, 2021). For this reason, the human mind gives neurotic reactions to this compressed time because it is not accustomed to it. For example, in Andreev's work, the fat minister receiving the report of the assassination becomes very angry and the prisoners, whose execution days are approaching, feel themselves somewhere between a state of consciousness and unconsciousness. This is what destroys and devours the prisoners. As Hugo's prisoner said: "all men are doomed to a predetermined death" (Hugo, 2016: 68). However, the certainty of the last day to be lived and the fact that a new day will not dawn transports a person to an unfamiliar state between life and death. And man does not know how to live there, because he is a foreigner in such a land. The guards and jailers talk about the prisoners as if they were things because they were on their way to an existence that excluded life. Sensing this, Hugo's prisoner says to the bailiff, who angered him on the day of his execution: "don't be afraid, I don't have time to hold grudges anyway" (ibid.: 107). In another chapter, the prisoner wants to scribble

something after meeting with his daughter, but he gives up because he has only one hour left. In the first pages of *The Seven Who Were Hanged*, the minister is isolated from the concept of time after learning that there will be an assassination. The concepts of time and meaning undergo a massive shift in his mind. He notes that there is no reason to drink coffee and wear a coat on such a day, and he sees the soldier waiting at his door as a clean-cut man, well-mannered, with beautiful blue eyes. More precisely, the observing individual's focus is immediately and exponentially strengthened because of the following question: "What if death comes and finds me hours later?" For a minister, although he has so much protection and power, although his death is not certain, hours become so worthless, and life becomes so meaningful and valuable. The big fat minister turns into an ordinary, angry, old man who feels naked and vulnerable. The respect, majesty, and glory around him become but empty tins. What about people who have no power, whose death sentence has become definite, and who have been waiting for death for days in a cold and dark cell, away from their loved ones? Andreev makes this clear through the minister's monologue: "They have told me the truth now, I know the situation, therefore I'm afraid of it… But if I hadn't known, I would have enjoyed my coffee, yes, without knowing anything. Then… my dear, what will happen next? … death… But am I that afraid of death? My kidneys are already sick, it hurts... Someday I will die somehow, but I am not afraid because I do not know when I will die. Furthermore, those fools explained to me: 'At one o'clock in the afternoon, your Excellency!'" (Andreev, 1909: 11-12).

Hugo's prisoner's departure from his cell, his final glance back, his departing look when leaving the courtyard, and the old man saying "*see you again*" to him in front of the infirmary are among the moments that reach the peak of lyricism. Andreev's execution scene is another pinnacle of lyricism. Decomposed corpses cover the ground. However, the sun rises, life continues, the survivors came from the same route, and the execution squares await their next victims.

Just before the execution, Hugo's prisoner remembers his childhood and recalls good memories. He even falls asleep for about an hour and is woken up when his daughter arrives. After meeting with his daughter, he feels ready to be executed. Until the last moment, he hopes that maybe amnesty will come, but this hope is in vain as his head is cut at exactly four o'clock. Ivan Yanson, one of Andreev's inmates, believes that the longer the execution is delayed, the better. Even up until the very last moment, he does not extinguish the glimmer of hope in case the execution is abandoned.

Hugo depicts humans being stripped of value when the prisoner is stopped at the entrance to the city center of Paris on his way to death. The customs officers inspect the car and say "go", taxes would have to be paid. When he arrives at the Courthouse, he is handed over to the principal by the bailiff, which the author likens to an exchange of goods. At the time when the countdown begins, the architect enters the room with a tape measure and says, "My friend, this prison will be better in six months" (Hugo, 2016: 125). The gendarme responds that one shouldn't talk so loudly in a dead man's room (ibid.). This dialogue is meant to force the reader to witness an inhuman conversation before an inhuman punishment. Just as he calms down, the gendarmes change their guard and the new gendarme says: "Excuse me, I think you're going to kick the bucket today. It is said that the dead can foresee the lottery results. Will you promise to come to me tomorrow night?" (ibid.). In Andreev's story, the people who are tried in the courts are statistically there, it does not matter whether or how they die. In other words, while they have value statistically (as mathematics), they are not valued as humans.

In both works, all prisoners are well taken care of up until death. They do not give Hugo's prisoner a knife or fork to prevent him from hurting himself. They even talk in a

more subtle tone on the last day and ask if he wants breakfast. Additionally, the warden of the prison comes to visit and calls him 'monsieur' for the first time. Andreev's prisoners eat and drink well on the day of execution as well. But all these services are not done because they are loved. Surviving until the appointed date of the execution signifies their submission to the decision that was passed down regarding when they must die.

Both works saw vast repercussions after their publication. For instance, Hugo's work inspired public debates on the death penalty in France, while Andreev's fueled revolutionary critiques of Tsarist executions in Russia, and sparking public debate and forcing the issue into the collective conscience. The main themes are the value given to human beings, the death penalty, and the freedom to live. According to the authors, no crime requires an execution because the person to be killed is first and foremost a human being, and even he deserves to live life to the fullest. Of course, confinement is important, but what the authors are trying to emphasize is the right to life and mental freedom. When Hugo's prisoner is due to appear in court, he does not even seem to realize that his handcuffs have been removed because he is mentally imprisoned. He also strongly opposes his lawyer's request in court to convert the death penalty to a life sentence. He says that bodily pain does not mean anything besides spiritual pain. Andreev's prisoners do not fear death either because they chose the mental infinity rather than the bodily. As a result, death is criticized in both works, but among physical and spiritual death, the main criticism is spiritual, in other words, the taking away of freedom and the right to live from people.

Conclusion

In our study, we brought together the sciences of comparative literature and thanatology. Since the common subject of both is humanity, we wanted to draw attention to the problem of death penalty through these two different sciences. Although written in different years, places, and by different authors, *The Last Day of a Condemned Man* and *The Seven Who Were Hanged* served the same purpose. Valuing all people while they live, abolishing the death penalty, and not taking away the right to live under any circumstances were the chief motivations and messages of the books.

Hugo and Andreev's works converged in purpose, message, and worldview, rooted in lived experiences and shaped by their creators' subconscious reflections. Emerging from authentic stories, Hugo's witness to an execution and Andreev's response to Tsarist brutality, these texts blended autobiographical elements with a humanist ethos. The theoretical framework, leveraging Wellek and Warren's humanist approach, enabled an exploration of how both authors universalized the condemned's final moments, while Bassnett's interdisciplinary perspective integrated thanatology, psychoanalysis, and philosophy into the analysis. Through the research model's comparative-thematic lens, informed by thematology, we examined motifs such as season, clock, and compressed time, alongside themes of execution, freedom, and human worth. This approach transcends legalistic debates and reveals literature's capacity to advocate for life amid mortality, delving into death's philosophical, psychological, and societal dimensions.

Humanism anchored both narratives, mirroring Hugo and Andreev's inner worlds as they confronted death's inevitability and affirmed life's sanctity. The study illuminated the psychological tension between Eros and Thanatos, a framework that underscores their portrayals of condemned individuals facing execution. Within the Research Model's interdisciplinary design, thanatology, defined not as a science of killing but of death's mechanisms, enriched this analysis by exploring mortality through biological, psychological, and sociological lenses. Integrated with comparative literature's humanist, positivist, and psychoanalytic methods, it highlights how these authors support Eros over Thanatos, emphasizing the instinct to live and the right to life. Ultimately,

this interdisciplinary synthesis deepened our understanding of death's literary representation and reinforces the timeless significance of the right to life as a universal human imperative, uniting disciplines, cultures, and geographies in a shared affirmation of humanity.

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