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## Three Deaths

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### Abstract

This is a film review of *Three Deaths* (2020) directed by Jay Dockendorf.

### Keywords

Tolstoy, Death, Christianity

### Author Notes

William Blizek is the Founding Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film, and is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is also the editor of the Continuum Companion to Religion and Film (2009).



**Three Deaths (2020), dir. Jay Dockendorf**

This short film is based on Leo Tolstoy's short story, "Three Deaths: A Tale," first published in 1859. We see a mature woman riding in the back of a car, coughing. Finally, the coughing gets so bad that the car pulls over and we see the woman coughing up blood.

We then see a car with a young woman and a young man passing the car that has pulled over to the side of the road. We now follow the young couple to a home where we find a strange man lying in bed, clearly and quickly approaching death. The man asks the couple to be sure to bury him in the back yard and to put up a tombstone with the date of his death, where he is from, etc. The young man promises to do so.

Next we see the mature woman lying in her own bed. She has returned to her home to die. She tells her cousin "I am ready for this," she is "not afraid," and "I know where I am going." But then she tells her cousin that she wishes she had gone to the treatment center earlier. After her cousin leaves, she asks her husband to call the herbal healer. Clearly, she is not ready to die and is hanging on to life with both hands.

In the last scene, the strange man has died and the young girl reminds the young boy that he promised to bury the man in the back yard and to put up a headstone. After the boy buries the strange man, he goes out into the woods to chop down a tree (the third death) from which he makes a wooden cross that he plants on the strange man's grave.

In true Tolstoy fashion the film shows us that the simple life is the best, that Christianity offers only false hope, and that death is a part of life.