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WHEN DEATH INTERCEPTS LIFE IN IMAGINATIVE WRITING

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WHEN DEATH INTERCEPETS LIFE

(Some Thought Runs On Representing Death in Imaginative Writing)

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*Death is one of the simplest, apparently, and one of the most fundamental, subjects for the writer. Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*.

*A free man thinks of death least of all things; and his wisdom is a meditation not of death but of life* (Spinoza, *Ethics* 4:67).

*There is, like that between revenge and forgiveness, a struggle between life and death. (Hay, como la que existe entre la venganza y el perdon, una lucha entre la vida y la muerte —Augusto Monterroso: *The Rest is Silence; Lo demas es silencio*).

*A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth. Ecclesiastes*

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I ask the reader to take this essay in the spirit of Sterne's way of writing:

That of all the several ways of beginning a book which are now in practice throughout the known world, I am confident my own way of doing it is the best—I'm sure it is the most religious—for I begin
with writing the first sentence—and trusting to Almighty God for the second

(Tristram Shandy 8:2).

-0. What is imaginative writing? Any that produces a text with inexhaustible meaning. But more demonstrable in the reader's (or in the case of plays, spectator's) ability to experience each distracting elements (such as what is going on in the real world, sex, violence, loss, etc.) by mean of h/h imagination.

Imaginative writing has a peculiar intimacy between real life and a sense of fiction. Consider, for example, a story that conjures a shared life of things not done, a gym we never join, a café we never go to, a language we never spoke. Looked at this way, life and fiction, far from being opposed to one another, are the warp and weft of a single weave. The things we only imagine, become the wonders opened up elsewhere. They fold themselves into the texture of our lives, becoming as real to who we are as the things we do.

Here there may be only grim realities but elsewhere there are wonders as real in the mind as perceived realities.

-01. So the imaginative writer not only perceives, thinks and describes the things here, but also imagines the wonders elsewhere.

-02. Elsewhere. From Old English elleswher, yonder, not here, some other place; cognate with Gothic ei-land, a foreign island.

-03. Imagination by means of elsewhere involves the need to _here_ and _go there_—to go on a pilgrimage to a holy site, to summit a mountain, to voyage to the north pole. All in order to open the wonders there.
In the words of Moses, at the end of his life, when he stood on Mount Nebo, and was granted a view of the Promised Land, said:

I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.

Analyzing the representation of virtual death is akin to that analyzing the nature of something deeply human, religion, politics, morality and the like. Our goal is to discover in each instance similarity and difference. With religion we talk about transformation, difference, and culture. When Buddhism, for example, moved from India to China most of its core values stayed the same as before. But its rituals, customs and some of its values were transformed by a new culture.

Each new context of death, like each new culture for religion, entails a different rhetorical intention for death.

The relation between death and its context is reciprocal. Each changes the other.

Virtual death is "pluripotent." It can appear in any kind of imaginative text and play a role in any rhetorical intention. In this, it is much like a stem cell, which can become (replace) any other cell—so virtual death can become (replace) any other mood, genre, or rhetorical intention.

At this writing (October 2014) a salient form of actual death is the Ebola virus. It is a filovirus and has been around for millions of years. The virus is made of only six structural proteins, locked together to become an object that resembles a strand of cooked spaghetti.
Despite its apparent simplicity, it is a deadly killer of people and has provoked a fierce response—a war. It has, one can say, increased our awareness of our mortality. Is this a good or bad thing? How should we represent this awareness in an imaginative text? What are the odds humans can "win" the war against Ebola?

No doubt Ebola has elicited a lot of newspapers, books TV broadcasts about the disease—in has, as I discuss throughout this text, great causal force. But is that a good or a bad thing?

Here are two responses to the questions:

A. The death of Anne Frank at age fifteen from typhus in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Her death has been called the "foremost symbol of slaughtered innocence." Anne's house in Amsterdam draws 4,000 visitors a day. Last year, the house attracted 2.1 million visitors. Her diary has sold 35 million copies in 65 languages. "When watershed Holocaust dates come up on the calendar, like the anniversary of Kristallnacht, the pogrom in Germany and Austria on November 9 and 10, 1938, Anne's surviving relatives and friends are invited to share tidbits as well as tell their own often harrowing stories" (The New York Times, November 5, 2014: A16).

It is how one dies that reflects the amount of causal force of death.

B. The human species carries certain advantages in this fight and has things going for it that Ebola does not. These include self-awareness, the ability to work in teams, and the willingness to sacrifice traits that have served us well during our expansion into our environment. If Ebola can change, we can change, too, and maybe faster than Ebola (Preston 53)
C. Representing death on the front page of a newspaper may attract more readers than locating the representation elsewhere. "Our hottest debates in the front-page meeting are about obituaries…” (New York Times Executive Editor, Dean Baquet on what deserves to make the front page. November 5, 2014: A20).

01b. Mutation. We know that killer viruses (Ebola, Flu, Lassa, SARS) change their form and modus operandi in order to survive from age to age. Can we say that the representation of virtual death changes, from one text to another, in a somewhat similar way and purpose?

What are the conditions under which death can change?

1. Change of context.

2. Change of reader in both place and time.

3. Change of rhetorical function.

Please examine a few different specimens of virtual death, say Chaucer, Donne, Jarrell, as samples of how context changes from age to age and how this effects changes in rhetorical intention—compare, for example, the context of death in Chaucer's "Pardoner's Tale" (below) and this modern representation:

FOR THE SILO BOYS

When the corn gave,/a boy was sucked to the bottom/
of the cement silo whose walls/ he was paid almost
nothing/to scrape clean with a steel pole./ It took
thirty-five men to pull his body/from the outlet sprout/.
corn had plugged his nostrils/ears, and throat as far
down/ as his lungs. In the calf barn,/rescuers cleaned
the field/ of his face, a few fistfuls of grain/a calf
sluggishly ate/on its way out to pasture.

In the Iliad, the moment/ Dolon, you, ugly, volunteered/
to spy on the Argives when/ no one else would, he was doomed/
to have his weasel cap stripped/while his head rolled in a trench/
darkened with other sons' blood/where his mouth would slowly
till with blades of grass. (Andrew Grace).

This poem, the reader may recognize, has a strong family resemblance to Auden's *Musee de beaux art*. Like Icarus, in Auden's poem, the Silo Boy dies in an environment of indifference, of "turning away" and death of the other as "not an important failure."

About suffering they were never wrong,

The Old Masters; how well, they understood

Its human position; how it takes place

While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;

How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting

For the miraculous birth, there always must be

Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating

On a pond at the edge of the wood:

They never forgot

That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.
In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

01c. Representing moral (ethical) problems with virtual death. Such problems appear when we
use words like "cruel," "indifferent," "injustice," "poverty" and the like. (Some moral
philosophers refer to these words as "thick concepts"—in opposition to "thin concepts" like
"goodness," "rightness," "kindness" and the like [please see. Kirchin, chp one; Vayrynen,
Introduction]).

Here is where language, with all its power to confuse us, comes into play. Minimally, we
have to look at three powerful forces—adjectival modification, presuppositions, and
implications.

Take the thick concept "cruel." Add it to "death" to produce "cruel death" (or a member
of its family) Now write the sentence "she died a cruel death." What sort of moral judgment have
we made? What does it presuppose and what does it imply? Minimally, writing the sentence presupposes that the writer wants to portray h/hself as s moral being capable of evaluating and describing an immoral act. Implied in the linguistic act are implications about the writer's relationship (mediated by "cruel death") with the reader. It says, in essence, "please join me in judging this particular death as "cruel" and therefore immoral—as well as violent.

By we have the option, by replacing the adjective "cruel" with, say, "peaceful" (a peaceful death) of making the description "thinner." Aristotle, though he doesn't use that kind of terminology (thick and thin), uses similar concepts to discuss the conditions for human happiness. All this concepts, friendship, honor, virtue, wealth and good children (plus others) are thin concepts. But deny them from life and one has thick concepts, homelessness, poverty, bad health and so on (Nicomachean Ethics Bks I-IV).

There is, of course, an ontological basis for this language. Linguistically, however, it comes down to the manipulations of adjectives (and adverbs).

01d. Interlude (from the Latin, "inter" between and "ludus" play). These are places in this text where the reader is asked to pause, read, and think about short statements with the word "life" and "death" in them. In-between one's birth and death—constrained by the scarcity of time—to be playful about life and death.

*Life lacks all conviction, death is full of passionate intensity.*

01e. What a vampire slaying kit should contain: A pistol for silver bullets, a mallet and four wooden stakes, a crucifix and a phial of holy water. Such a kit will invariably allay one's anxieties about the current vampire invasion.
02. Tradition and transformation. Let us assume, following the implications of #0 (above), that death has a "culture" of use in one age which the culture of a later age transforms. With this we assume that the most salient transformation appears in the values of the speaker (narrator) and in h/h rhetorical intention in taking virtual death as the principle moving (causal) force in h/h text.

In this essay, one can track the transformations in use from Epicurus (341-270 BCE; entry #7 below) to Horace (65-27 BCE) to Chaucer (1345-400), to Swift (1673-1745 CE), and then to many modern examples. Such transformations take place, please remember, in the context of a new culture of an older tradition.

But for a closer look at one such transformation let us take the example of Chaucer (Medieval) to that of Randall Jarrell (Modern). The goal is to look primarily at the salient, not but all, aspects of the transformation—especially death as the force that "gets things started" and the rhetorical intention of the author with death. What is h/s trying to say? Is the saying mainly descriptive, prescriptive or a combination?

A. Chaucer's representation of death in *The Pardoner's Tale*. Chaucer was born in 1345 and died in 1400. He is buried in Westminster Abbey, London. He is usually considered the first great English poet in a nation of great poets.

Synopsis: Characters. Three young men, "riotoures" who spend their time carousing in taverns, whorehouse and gambling dens. They hear a bell signaling a burial; a friend has been killed by a "privee theef" known as death, who has also killed a thousand others—a reference to the plague, or Black Death. The men set out to avenge their friend and kill death. They meet an old man who tells them that he has asked death to take him but has failed. He then says they can find death at the foot of an oak tree. When the rioters arrive at the tree, they find a large amount
of gold coins and forget about their quest to kill death. They decide to sleep at the oak tree over night, so they can take the coins in the morning. The three men draw straws to see who among them should fetch wine and food while the other two wait under the tree. The youngest of the three men draws the shortest straw and departs; while he is away, the remaining two plot to kill him when he returns. But, the one who leaves for town plots to kill the other two: he purchases rat poison and laces the wine. When he returns with the food and drink, the other two kill him, drink the poisoned wine and die a slow death.

The Pardoner was an official of the church who went about preaching against sin and selling pardons, not just for the living but also for those who died unrepentant.

His true goal, as Chaucer makes clear, is not to save souls but to get rich from selling pardons.

The story illustrates, in part, the pluripotency of virtual death, the power of one to do the work of many.

So the story of the three men develops on more than one level. On one level there is the theme of " radix malorum est cupiditas," or the root of all evil is greed, or avarice—one of the Seven Deadly Sins. A second level is one that states that who is greedy, or hoards wealth, risks death and, worse, the denial of a personal afterlife. A third level is a ironic one that develops the conflict between saying and doing. The Pardoner verbally claims that greed is evil while actually practicing greed. But irony also develops with the speeches of the three men who constantly say far more than they are. Death effortlessly accomplishes its end (they murder each other) while they talk about killing death for slaying a friend (l. 354).
Please try reading the lines below aloud. Part of the transformation I spoke about above involves the sound of the language from then to now. In Chaucer's time the final vowel was spoken:

Herkneth, felawes, we three been alle ones
Lat eech of us holde up his hand in other
And each of us bicome othere brother;
Ad we wol sleen this false traitour Deeth (367-373).

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Now goode men, God foryive you youre trespass,
And ware you fro the sinne of avarice:
Myn holy pardon may you alle warice-
So that ye offer nobles or sterlinges,
Or elles silver brooches, spoones, ringes.
Boweth your heed under this holy bulle!
Cometh up, ye wives, offreth of youre wolle!
Youre name I entre here in my rolle: anoon
Into the blisse of hevene shul ye goon.
….And Jesu crist that isoure soulless leeche
So graune you his pardon to receive,
For that is best—I wol you nat deceive (ll. 574-590)

In short, give your wealth to me in order to save your soul from death and eternal damnation.
B. Everyman, a Medieval morality play. Thought to have been written somewhere between 1473 and 1493. Uses death in essentially the same way as *The Pardoner's Tale*; namely to enact Jesus' remark that: "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (*Matthew 19:24*).

So what kind of culture do these examples of death presuppose? In what cultural context were they composed and how did the culture influence their presentation?

A cultural context is a vast subject. In the space I have I can only list some of its salient aspects: Please notice I "define" them by negation, or what they lack as viewed from a modern (2014) perspective.

a. Atheism and agnosticism. Both the Pardoner's Tale and Everyman were written in an intensely religious (Christian) context. Based on parish records (there were no censuses until the Eighteenth-Century), lawsuits, and tax rolls, 97% of the population was Christian—at least in Europe.

b. Longevity. The "old man" in the Pardoner's Tale was likely someone who had passed 40 years.

c. Violence. The middle ages were violent, murder, suicide, dying from wars disease were common. But the victims of violence’s were much fewer in number in relation to the whole—almost insignificant in comparison to 37,000.00 killed in WWI, the 47,790.00 in WWII, the 53,000 killed annually in car cashes and as many as 1.6 million dead from civil wars in the Middle East and Africa. In the Twenty-first Century .

d. Interception of death by new life: or, an afterlife for the individual.

e. Rhetorical intention: prescriptive.
02a. Swift and Death. Swift, a canonical author in English Literature, invested heavily, for both serious and comic reasons, in virtual death. In 1731, Swift wrote to his friend, John Gay, "I have been several months writing near five hundred lines on a pleasant subject, only to tell what my friends and enemies will say on me after I am dead. The poem, "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift," has as its epigram a quotation from the French writer Rochefoucault: *Dans l'adversité de nos meilleurs amis nous trouvons quelque chose, qui ne nous deplaist pas.* (In the adversity of our best friends, we find something that does not displease us).

Here is an excerpt from the poem (there are 567 lines in the poem):

> As *Rochefoucault* his Maxims drew
> From Nature, I believe 'em true:
> They argue no corrupted Mind
> Though your Prognosticks run too fast,
> They must be verify'd at last.
> "Behold the fatal Day arrive!
> How is the Dean? He's just alive.
> Now the departing Prayer is read:
> He hardly breathes. The Dean is dead.
> Before the Passing-Bell 16 begun,
> The News thro' half the Town has run.
> O, may we all for Death prepare!
> What has he left? And who's his Heir?
> I know no more than what the News is,
'Tis all bequeath'd to publick Uses.

To publick Use! A perfect Whim!

What had the Publick done for him!

Meer Envy, Avarice, and Pride!

He gave it all: — But first he dy'd.

And had the Dean, in all the Nation,

No worthy Friend, no poor Relation?

So ready to do Strangers good,

Forgetting his own Flesh and Blood?

Now Grub-Street Wits are all employ'd;

With Elegies, the Town is cloy'd:

Some Paragraph in ev'ry Paper,

To curse the Dean, or bless the Drapier.

The Doctors tender of their Fame,

Wisely on me lay all the Blame:

"We must confess his Case was nice;

But he would never take Advice:

Had he been rul'd, for ought appears,

He might have liv'd these Twenty Years:

For when we open'd him we found,

That all his vital Parts were sound.
From Dublin soon to London spread,
'Tis told at Court, the Dean is dead.
Kind Lady Suffolk in the Spleen,
Runs laughing up to tell the Queen.
The Queen, so Gracious, Mild, and Good,
Cries, Is he gone? 'Tis time he shou'd.
He's dead you say; why let him rot

This poem, please note, employs thinking and representing death in a bottom-up process of "first," "second" and "third"—or what I later call, following the terminology of C. S Peirce, "Thirdness." (For more on this writing strategy see below, #7). The poem is, of course, written in the first person. At "first" the speaker finds his thoughts intercepted by that of his death—while he is still alive. Life, in other words, is the "source" of death. Next, at the "second" stage, we find a reaction to his death by friends, acquaintances, and enemies—who are all alive. At the "third" and final stage are the readers' reactions to the "first" and "second" stages—this is the afterall of the poem as it is taught, read, interpreted by a multitude of teachers, Swift's fans, editors and so on.

Representations of Death in Swift's "The Bickerstaff Papers." In this text, death serves the cause of comedy that verges on satire. The text is divided, as a whole, into three parts, "Predictions For The Year 1708," "The Accomplishments of Mr. Bickerstaff's Predictions, Being an Account of the Death of Mr. Partridge, the Almanack-maker, Upon the 29 Instant" and "A Vindication of Isaac Bickerstaff." The occasion in all the texts is the publication of almanacs that predict what will happen the coming year. Bickerstaff, an almanac maker, after defending
astology as a "great Art," predicts, among many other things, that the astrologer, Partridge will
die during the year. Bickerstaff's claim is that Partridge is an imposter and has used the "noble
Art in a wretched Manner":

My first Prediction is but a Trifle; yet I will mention it, to shew how
ignorant those sottish Pretenders to Astrology are in their own Concerns.
It relates to Partrige the Almanack-Maker; I have consulted the Star of
His Nativity by my own Rules; and find he will infallibly die upon the
The 29 of March next, about eleven at Night, of a raging Fever: Therefore,
I advise him to consider of it, and settle his Affairs in Time.

The second part, "The Accomplishment of Mr. Bickerstaff's Predictions, is in the form of a letter
from a servant to a certain. The lord has sent his servant to verify Bickerstaff's prediction about
Partridge's death, "that he (Partridge) should die the 29 Instant, about Eleven at Night, of a raging
Fever." The servant calls on Partridge, observes him dying, listens to his confession that
astrology was nothing but "Pretences of foretelling by Astrology as Deceits…that only the poor
ignorant Vulgar give it any Credit," and retires to a coffee house nearby. Here he hears that
Partridge died at "five Minutes after Seven: By which it is clear that Mr Bickerstaff was mistaken
almost four Hours in his Calculation."

The back-story in all this is the fact that Partridge was a flesh and blood astrologer and
was alive all the time the "Papers" were written. In fact, many readers of Bickerstaff's
Predictions actually believed Partridge was dead. The Stationers Register, which ruled on who
could and could not publish, with Partridge's license to publish—on the belief that he was dead.
In the third part of the text, "A Vindication of Isaac Bickerstaff," Bickerstaff defends himself and his "art" against attacks by Partridge:

Mr. Partrige hath been lately pleased to treat me after a very rough Manner, in that which is called, His Almanack for the present Year.

He then goes on to prove "the Truth of my last Years' Prophecies" one of which was the death of Partridge on March 29, 1708:

Without entering into Criticisms of Chronology about the Hour of his Death; I shall only prove, that Mr. Partrige is not alive.

Note the "is not." Partridge was, of course, alive at the time. Bickerstaff continues with his proof of the "is not."

And my first Argument is thus: Above a Thousand Gentlemen having bought his Almanacks for this Year, merely to find what he said against me; at every Line they read, they would lift up their Eyes, and cry out, betwixt Rage and Laughter, They were sure no Man alive ever writ such damned Stuff at this.

So that Mr. Partrige lies under a Dilemma, either of disowning his Almanack, Or allowing himself to be no Man alive. But now, if an uninformed Carcass Walks still about, and is pleased to call it self Partrige; Mr. Bickerstaff does not Think himself any way answerable for that.

SECONDLY, Mr. Partrige pretends to tell Fortunes and recover stolen Goods... (so) he must do by conversing with the Devil, and other evil Spirits: And no Wise Man will ever allow he could converse personally with either, till After he was dead....FOURTHLY, I will appeal to Mr. Partrige himself....
02b. Danse Macabre. Or Dance of Death. A theme from the late Middle Ages reminding people of the fragility of life and the universality of death. Chaucer's *The Pardoner's Tale* is perhaps part of the tradition. But, since most of the population was illiterate, the message of danse macabre was conveyed mostly through graphic representations, murals, painting, morality plays and the like.

Danse Macabre has a double (somewhat contradictory) message 1) Remember you shall die 2) enjoy your life while you can. Here is "legend" from *Wikipedia* (entry Danse Macbre that conveys essentially the same message:

Three Living and the Three Dead: on a ride or hunt, three young gentlemen meet three cadavers (sometimes described as their ancestors) who warn them, *Quod fuimus, estis; quod sumus, vos eritis* (What we were, you are; what we are, you will be).

Compare this with Swift's treatment of death in the Bickerstaff Papers. One might want to say that there is a "dance" of death in the Papers. But it is more like a game—like a tennis game—where death serves as the ball that keeps the game going.

03. Randall Jarrell "Death of The Ball-Turret Gunner."

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,

And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.

Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,

I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.

When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose
What this poem lacks is mention of an individual afterlife—an event in which new life intercepts death. If so, does that mean that it is purely descriptive, void of any prescriptively?

Does this further indicate that religion, faith and an afterlife play do not exist, or exist at a much lower intensity, as causal forces? I would say they exist, but as marginalized forces. I base this on texts like the ones on near death experience, Marilynne Robinson's novels, T. Eliot "Four Quartets" and my personal experience with fellow academics who believe but who keep their heads down.

03a. Virtual death and resurrection. If a character (or characters) die in one part of a narrative and appear in other parts, then we can say they have a virtual resurrection. Yorick, for example, in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, dies and re-appears three times. In my play, "Faces on the Cutting Room Floor," Texas Rangers kill the two characters (Clyde Barrows and Bonnie Parker) eight times. Notice that these texts are comedies, ones that follow the "formula" of comedy by means of incongruity. In tragedy, by contrast, the only resurrection possible is a religious one—and it only a promise, not a fact. Here is the text of "Faces." The reader might want to analyze it from the point of view of incongruity—while keeping in mind the representation of both life and death. What factors are responsible for the incongruity? What is the audience's role in establishing incongruity?

**FACES ON THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR**
THREE CHARACTERS: The bank-robbers of the 1930s, BONNIE PARKER; CLYDE BARROWS; NARRATOR. BONNIE wears a red dress; CLYDE & NARRATOR wear a suit, tie and an optional hat. The action takes place in the “death car,” represented by B&C sitting in chairs.

SOUND: Gunfire that ends each scene can be simulated by a drumroll. Or by asking the audience to make the sound of gunfire.

The Director is invited to arrange the order of the scenes in any way he or she thinks appropriate. The script has a FADEOUT at the end of each scene.

AT RISE: The NARRATOR begins the play with the following remarks.

NARRATOR

Good evening (or afternoon) The following script was found on my porch. It seems to be composed of scenes cut from the final version of Bonnie and Clyde the 1967 film. As you are about to witness, the scenes are all about what was going on with the couple right before they were killed by Texas Rangers in a roadside ambush. Since all the scenes seem to be about “endings” (the end of the film, the end of Bonnie and Clyde, the end of an era, etc.) we may surmise that the director and the editor of the film were experimenting with different ways to end the film; or provide closure for the story. Oh, I should mention…the scenes in the play, with the possible exception of one or two were in no particular order when I found them.

SCENE ONE

NARRATOR

In this scene we find Clyde giving reasons why he and Bonnie make a perfect couple. Notice that the director seems to be working from a script that depicts Bonnie as an character with an independent will—in a manner alluded to above. .

While C talks, B files her nails,
CLYDE

Ours is a perfect union. You, Bonnie, are its soul. I’m its flesh. You give me heaven. I give you the earth.

(Beat)

Although I must admit we do have an occasional difference of opinion.

BONNIE

???

CLYDE

It’s my opinion that God created man and woman to complement one another. You, Bonnie, have intuition, your sensitivity makes you an artist. I, on the other hand, have practical knowledge and a lot of common sense.

BONNIE

???

CLYDE

It’s a natural quality of mind. But if it wasn’t for you, I would be just another pedestrian criminal: shallow and brutal. You make me noble, even a heroic figure. My strength and common sense are at your service. Which is to say at the service of goodness, beauty and art.

(Pause)

I protect you from the prose of life.

BONNIE
SOUND: Gunfire. B&C twitch and
Fall dead.

FADEOUT

ere Clyde reveals that he has had a full, or diploid, genome mapped of the DNA inherited from
his parents. Bonnie drives while Clyde examines his genome map. Remember that your personal
genome informs you of what you are now (your physical, mental, psychological, etc. traits) but
also what diseases, idiosyncrasies, disorders, etc. you are predisposed to.

BONNIE

What’s that, Sweetie?

CLYDE

(Displaying the map)

It’s called a full or5, diploid genome. It consists of the DNA of both sets of chromosomes from
each of my parents.

BONNIE

Really? Is that normal?

CLYDE

Of course it’s normal. Had it not been normal, I wouldn’t have had it done. It would have been a
waste of my money and time.

(Pause)
Would you like to have your DNA mapped? Our kids and grandkids might be interested in knowing just who you were and what genes they’ve inherited. Nothing beats the personal genome of your parents to tell you who you are and what’s going to happen to you.

BONNIE

Such as?

CLYDE

(Holds map up and points at various places on it)

See this gene, it’s the LCT one. It tells me I’m lactose intolerant.

BONNIE

Nothing to be ashamed of.

CLYDE

This here gene, DRD4, tells me I have a novelty-seeking personality.

BONNIE

No mystery there.

CLYDE

And this…it’s ABCC11 gene, it informs me that I inherited my brown, sticky, wet earwax from my father.

BONNIE

You know what?
CLYDE

What?

BONNIE

Now I know why I was attracted to you in the first place. What gal could resist a lactose intolerant, novelty seeking dude with sticky, wet earwax?

SOUND: Gunfire. B&C writhe and Drop dead.

SCENE SIX

NARRATOR

In this scene we find Clyde informing Bonnie that he intends to give up crime. This change in Clyde is due, it’s suggested, by the storm they have just passed through—not, I should say, an uncommon occurrence in Texas.

CLYDE

(Looking around)

It looks like it’s clearing up.

BONNIE

I believe you’re right. I see the sun over there.

CLYDE
You see a lot of storms like that in Texas.

BONNIE

Yes, I’ve heard it said that it has something to do with the fact we have no national parks in our state.

CLYDE

No doubt about it.

(Pause)

Do you feel like you’re a different person?

BONNIE

No, should I? Why do you ask?

CLYDE

I do. I’m different, Bonnie. A drastic change has come over me.

BONNIE

(Examines him)

You look the same to me.

CLYDE

I don’t mean the way I look. It’s on the inside that I’m different. I don’t want to live this way anymore. I’m fed up with it. If anyone wants to rob banks…live in history as a symbol of an anarchic utopia, star in an innovative movie that ushers in graphic sex and violence into the industry, then let them. There are plenty of people around who can do it. Maybe a terrorist? Or a spy for Russia. I’ve done my bit.
BONNIE

(Sad)
I’d never have expected that of you, Clyde. Stop robbing banks? Stop being a cultural icon. Become a conformist. You’re a fine one to talk like this, the best bank robber and media idol in the country.

CLYDE

And fated to be played by Warren Beatty, the best looking actor in Hollywood. Don’t forget that.

(Pause)
But going through that storm back there made me see the light about a life of crime. It’s obvious that we have the best system of laws in the world. Our governor is the most enlightened state leader in the country. That’s why all the bank robbers have confessed their guilt, been pardoned, and gone home. I’m the only one left.

BONNIE

We are.

CLYDE

We?

BONNIE

You said you were the only bank robber left. It should be the first personal plural pronoun, we.

CLYDE

Okay, we.

(Pause)
Now as I was about to say. If only I hadn’t been so ideologically abandoned perhaps I could have gone on longer. But to think that the whole population of our beautiful, peaceful and fertile state
is singing the praises of our governor and our laws…that all the prisons are empty, our banks free of the fear of being robbed, that I alone am….

BONNIE

(Over “am”)

We, we’re alone…ideologically abandoned.

`

CLYDE

Okay, okay, we.

(Pause, gestures)

Just look out there, Bonnie. See that beautiful meadow. Soon the farmer will come to harvest his crop. His face and the faces of his hired hands will light up with satisfaction and joy at another bountiful harvest.

(Pause)

And that’s not all. See on that hill over there. A new industrial park has gone up there. Progress, Bonnie, progress! If you look close you can see smoke coming up from the smokestacks.

BONNIE

Maybe I shouldn’t tell you this Clyde. But what you’re looking at is a crematorium.

SOUND: Gunfire. B&C

Twitch and fall dead.

FADEOUT

SCENE SEVEN
NARRATOR

In this scene we learn that Clyde’s friend is writing a biography of our couple. The friend, before sending the manuscript to a publisher, has asked Clyde to check the facts in it. While Bonnie drives, we find Clyde flipping the pages in the manuscript and correcting errors in it.

BONNIE

What’s that you got there, Sweetie?

CLYDE

It’s a biography of us. It’s going to make us rich and famous.

BONNIE

You mean…?

CLYDE

That’s right. We’re going to get half the royalties from it. With that and proceeds from the banks we can retire early, buy a boat, sail off to one of those South Sea Island and just have fun telling the natives about our escapades.

BONNIE

(Handing the steering wheel to CLYDE; indicating the manuscript)

Here, let me see it. You may have missed some things.
C hands B the MS
B pages through to the last page

It’s pretty short, isn’t it?

CLYDE

Well, we’ve had a pretty short career…so far. It’s bound to get longer as we get older and more experienced. I’m thinking right now about expanding our business into Louisiana.

BONNIE

You didn’t notice?

CLYDE

Notice what?

BONNIE

We crossed the Louisiana state line a couple of hours ago.

CLYDE

Why didn’t you tell me? I could’ve started making plans.

BONNIE

Well, Sweetie. I didn’t want to interrupt your proofreading…that’s important work.

CLYDE
I appreciate that.

(Pause; glances at B)

What page on you on now, honey?

BONNIE

At the end of the last page.

(Pause; puzzled)

That’s funny. Somebody’s marked through the last lines and has written “stet” in the margins.

CLYDE

Written what?

BONNIE

(Spells out the letters slowly)

S T E T. It’s in big red letters.

CLYDE

Oh, that. That’s just an editor’s mark.

(Pause)

You did say that the last lines were marked through?

BONNIE

That’s right. But you can still read them.

CLYDE

“Stet” means let the lines stand as they are. That is, keep the lines just as the author wrote them.

(Pause)

CLYDE (cont)

What do the lines say? Read them to me.
BONNIE

(Reading)
On May the 23rd, 1934, in Bienville Parish, Louisiana, Captain Hamer and his Texas Rangers killed my friends Bonnie and Clyde in a roadside ambush.

CLYDE
You know what?

BONNIE
No, what?

CLYDE
Let’s erase that “stet.”

BONNIE
Won’t your friend mind? After all, he’s put a lot of work into this book.

(Flourishes the MS)

CLYDE
Why should he mind? He asked me to check the facts in it, didn’t he?

BONNIE
So?

CLYDE
Well, it’s simple. We’re not dead are we?

BONNIE
No, we’re not.

CLYDE
So there you are. He’s got his facts wrong.

SOUND: Gunfire. B&C
Twitch and fall dead.

FADEOUT

SCENE EIGHT

NARRATOR
Shakespeare, we recall, commonly ends a scene with rhymed lines. Here we find the scriptwriter not only following the Bard’s custom, but going beyond him to write an entire scene in rhyme. Notice that our couple, by their use of analogies with livestock and references to extreme weather betray their rural origins.

(Pause)

Being the only one standing, and out of a job at the end of our play, I have taken the liberty to add an elegiac stanza. Alas, poor Bonnie and Clyde! I knew their story well.

CLYDE
Ah Bonnie, I love you more by half
Than does the cow the new born calf

BONNIE
How sweet! From you I learned to read the skis
To know when hail will fall or winds arise
You taught me first the heifer’s tail to view
When stuck aloft, that rain would soon ensue

CLYDE
You bet! Sweet is my toil when you are near
If you should leave, there’s winter all the year,
With you no summer’s heat I know,
In winter, when you’re here, with love I glow.

BONNIE
Amen to that! With you, as sunshine is to day,
Every minute, hour, seems sweet holiday
And holidays, if sadly you were gone,
Like worky days I wished would soon be done.

SOUND: Gunfire. B&C writhe
And fall dead.

NARRATOR
(Places a black arm band around his arm; Or places a red rose on the fallen couple)
The sun is set. The night came on a-pace,
And falling dew wets round our place.
The bat takes flappy rounds on heavy wings,
And the hoarse owl a woeful song he sings.
Our couple here knows it’s now too late,
To love, rob banks and to defer their fate.

(Exits)

FADE TO NIHLISTIC
DARKNESS

***

To the people of New York, Paris or London, "death" is a word that is never pronounced because it burns the lips. The Mexican, however, frequents it, jokes about it, caresses it, sleeps with it, celebrates it; it is one of his favorite toys and most steadfast love. Of course, in his attitude perhaps there is as much fear as there is in one of the others; at least he does not hide it; he confronts it face to face with patience, disdain, or irony (Octavio Paz).

***

1. With thought-runs we attempt to unpack the presuppositions of certain recurring words in imaginative writing (especially fiction, but not limited to it). We especially want to establish their "family resemblances" and try to determine their rhetorical intention or intentions. Thought-runs are, then, more like questions, answerable and unanswerable, than truth-making statements. Additionally, thought-runs do not always appear, taken as a whole, as a linear cause and effect exposition. With them, we often see a step forward, one back, one to the side, slightly askew.

The words we are particularly interested in here are "virtual" "death," "life," and "intercept"—plus, of course, their interactions.

1a. The reader will perhaps recognize in this form of writing a family resemblance to Wittgenstein's works.
1a1. Unpacking. A perspective on the purpose of a thought-run is that of "unpacking" the presuppositions, implications, nuances, intentions and the like of terms like "life," "death," "virtual" and "actual." This process assumes that such terms (and many more) are essentially esoteric or concealed—a state constantly updated by change of contexts. No term is independent of its context nor is the context independent of it. Their mutual dependence then implies not only constant change, but also an infinite of permutations in meaning. An obvious conclusion is that the work of unpacking will never be finished.

Please see below ESOTERIC in another context.

1a2. Whenever death intercepts life, it does so as a causal force—inside within the text and outside the text with the reader. All examples of intercepting death in this essay demonstrate its causal force in different ways and contexts.

The four causes (answers to "why?") of Aristotle give us a place to start examining death as a causal force in imaginative writing. Note, particularly, the word "change."

"A change or movement's material cause is the aspect of the change or movement which is determined by the material which the moving or changing things are made of. For a table, that might be wood; for a statue, that might be bronze or marble. A change or movement's formal cause is a change or movement caused by the arrangement, shape or appearance of the thing changing or moving. Aristotle says for example that the ratio 2:1, and number in general, is the cause of the octave. A change or movement's efficient or moving cause consists of things apart from the thing being changed or moved, which interact so as to be an agency of the change or movement. For example, the efficient cause of a table is a carpenter, or a person working as..."
one, and according to Aristotle the efficient cause of a boy is a father. An event's **final cause** is the aim or purpose being served by it. That for the sake of which a thing is what it is. For a seed, it might be an adult plant. For a sailboat, it might be sailing. For a ball at the top of a ramp, it might be coming to rest at the bottom." (Wikipedia, "Aristotle's Four Causes").

Wallace Stevens' lines from "Sunday Morning" are an open acknowledgment of the causal force of death:

> Death is the mother of beauty, mystical (84).

***

Death is the *mother* of beauty; hence from her,

Alone shall come fulfillment to our dreams and

Desires (61-63).

See my additional treatment of "Sunday Morning" for alternate ways to elucidate death as a causal force (4 and 4a below).

1b. **Family resemblances**: The reference here is to Wittgenstein *Familienähnlichkeit* ("family resemblance"). These are words connected by one another by a essential common feature may in fact be connected by a series of overlapping similarities, where no one feature is common to all. So with we also have "virtual," "textual," "fictive" or "quoted death." With death we have "abortion, "euthanasia, "right to die," "suicide," "passed on," "kicked the bucket," "gave up the ghost" plus words that presuppose the existence of death, "tomb," "grave," "internment" and the like.

1c. The problem this essay addresses is what happens, or what can happen next, when death intercepts the life portrayed in the text? What does the interception reveal about such life and the
rhetorical intention of the writer?

1ca: What do I do for an encore? "Curry (John Curry, a championship skater) faced a problem, common to sportsmen who have reached the summit of their profession—what to do for an encore? (TLS October 10 2014: 30). We may add to that by enquiring how do writers, after presenting death to reader, go on—a problem discussed by Wittgenstein's under the phrase, "now I can go on" (Jetzt kann ich fortsetzen; Philosophical Investigations Items #154-1154.)

1ca2. The problem relates to the question of knowledge. What do I have to know in order to go on?

1c1. Many models and theories are wrong. But some of them are useful.

1d. Near-death experiences (NDE) as a major causal force in life: see review in The New York Review of Books "To Heaven and Back!" October 23, 2014: 75-77. The reviewer critiques seventeen books on the phenomenon. His conclusion, stated as questions, goes:

If their (NDE books) authors are not liars, something happened to these people. But what? Can what they report, however unlikely it sounds, be reconciled with science, so that we can respect the phenomenon while rejecting its literal manifestations?

These are questions for a second article (77).

NDEs have the overall structure of death and rebirth in all major world religions—that is, the three phases of as life:death:new life.

VIRTUAL DEATH¹
What follows is a series of "perspectives" on virtual death, what it is, how it works and its alleged usefulness. I suggest we take all of them in the spirit of Mahavira’s advice to his followers (Mahavira was the founder of Jainism, a most elegant, and profound, religion).

What a person thinks is true depends to a large degree on where he is standing and on what he has been taught to think is true. This view I illustrate with a parable.

As an experiment, an Indian prince once ordered six blind men to touch various parts of an elephant and then describe their sensations. One man thought the elephant’s leg was a tree another that its ear was a large winnowing fan, and so on, but of course, none imagined the whole elephant.

Let's call this the “Doctrine of Maybe.”

1d. An obvious example of belief in the virtual is our discourse about symbols as an extrasensory reality, especially in religious art—for example, that the white columbine flower represents death; the butterfly transience, the white ermine, purity.

Color, above all, is salient here, especially white, black and red.

2. Please notice that the word "virtual" is sometimes used here an adjective, not just as a substantive. The function of an adjective is, of course, to anchor the noun in some named location and time (duration): give it weight, as it were, an act that subtracts abstraction from the noun and renders it more imageable.

2a. Names of the virtual. To use some Aristotelian terminology, the virtual can be said in many
ways. Or, to continue the family resemblance metaphor (above) a member of a family of overlapping words, "the irrealis," the "non-factive," the "subjunction," or "linguistic modality." The *pater familia* of this family is "talk about the non-existence." Sherlock Holmes, for example, does not exist. He is not an object of perception, touchable, seeable, audible, and so on—in a word, he is not presented to us, unlike Obama or Putin, in the flesh. Yet it is obvious that we can "talk" about Holmes as an existent creature: male, bachelor, friend to Watson, brother to Maycroft, and so on. We can, as it were, "pretend" that Holmes exists—or even, one supposes, believe that he does exist.

2b. A second perspective on the meaning of virtual is to examine the difference between "presentation" and "re-presentation," words that occur in all languages (for example, *representación, presentación* [Spanish]; *Präsentation Darstellung* [German]; ἐκπροσώπηση *παρουσίαση* [Greek]). With presentation, we are talking about information from the senses with seeing being the principal sense:

All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, sight makes us know and brings to light many differences between things (*Metaphysics* 980a22-28; emph mine).
Here Aristotle correlates seeing with what exists and with the viewer knowledge of what exists. But notice also that Aristotle uses language to "represent" what seeing presents to the viewer, "all men" and the knowledge gained from the seeing. Representation, then, is a second level between sense perception (presentation) and knowledge a third level. The virtual comes into being, along with language, at the second level. Knowledge of the virtual then presupposes information from the senses (the first level) linguistic representation (second level) and knowledge of both levels (the third level). Or, to put it another way, knowledge "emerges" with the convergence of the first and second levels.

Cannot we then claim that language, the home of the virtual, came into being for us to talk about not only what exists (object of the senses) but what does not, things that go under the names like "future," "probable," "possible," "conditional," "contingent," "incomprehensible" "eternal" and the like.

Here is a statement about the virtual from Marilynne Robinson's novel *Lila*:

'There is no justice in love,' Reverend Ames says,

no proportion in it, and there need not be, because

in any specific instance it is only a glimpse or

parable of an embracing, incomprehensible reality.

It makes no sense at all because is is the eternal

breaking in on the temporal. So how could it

subordinate itself to cause or consequences? (259).

2b1. Unlike the actual, which has lost all its potentialities by becoming actual, the virtual
contains, releases and renews all potentialities. Please see below under "Esoteric."

2c. A third perspective on the virtual is from the truth, or falsity, of propositions. The use of the virtual, seen as a set of propositions about the non-existent, does not commit the writer or speaker to either the truth or falsity of the proposition. In Ode 1:14, Horace has his persona make these propositions (or claims) about certain occupants, and characteristics, of Hades: it contains, not only the god Pluto, but his "prisoners" like Geryonmen Tityon, a three-bodied Spanish monster, the human dead and Cypress trees. In addition, it is a place encircled by the "black Cocytos," one of the rivers of the underworld, and the destination, and imprisonment, of all human and non-human creatures.

Does any reader, one with an intact mind, ask the poet to give ocular evidence to verify his claims that "Cocytos' or "Geryonmen Tityon" exists as objects of sense perceptions? Plato apparently believed that poets lie, that they make false propositions from non-existent objects. But this hasn't caused writers of imaginative writing from creating the non-factive, the unreal, the virtual and from readers not asking "show me the proof."

Please consider these lines, using virtual death, from Shakespeare:

To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprison’d in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about

The pendent world. (*Measure for Measure* 3.1.114)

Here the speaker sets forth two propositions about the afterlife—as one of two places, a fiery or an icy one. But, again, there is no obligation on the part of the poet to verify or falsify his claims.

A weaker claim, more like a conjecture, of the above (the afterlife) is the following:

But that the dread of something after death,

The undiscovered country, from whose bourn

No traveller returns, puzzles the will,

And makes us rather bear those ills we have

Than fly to others that we know not of? (*Hamlet* 3:1).

Hamlet's words do not contain propositional force largely because of the negatives, "undiscovered" and "no traveler." They do not, by implication, request any verification or falsification.

2d. A fourth perspective is on the virtual as what can be called the presence of absence. Existents like Obama and Putin can feel real pain and any other human sensation or emotion. Non-existents, like Sherlock Holmes, as virtual realities, cannot. But pain and suffering can, obviously, be given linguistic representation:

I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands,

organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same

food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases,

heal'd by the same means, warm'd and cool'd by the same winter
and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, do we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that (*Merchant of Venice* 3:1)

2e. A fifth, and perhaps more problematic perspective, is from biological conjectures about evolution. An example is that from "23 universal proteins" emerged a single ancestor of all plants and animals—and, finally us and our language—and, who knows, super-intelligent robot. From the proteins, in rough sequence, came bacteria, the development of a head, eyes and finally the primate head (with its grouping of sense organs) and, finally, humans and language with its TMA grammar (tense, modality and aspect) and virtualization—the ability to represent the non-existent (please see http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2010/05/100513-science-evolution-darwin-single-ancestor)

Is, then, the virtual, as a non-perceptible existent, a strategy of survival? Perhaps Think of our fear of the unknown, unseen and unheard? (See Bickerton 37-73 for details on how language encodes all this in aspects of the verb).

2f. A sixth perspective on the virtual is given in the system of thought called "normative reasoning." Please consider the following statement:

A person in control of a fast moving car, the fact that the car will injure, and perhaps kill, a pedestrian if the steering wheel is not turned is a reason to turn the wheel.
The normative character of this reason becomes clear if we contrast it with an explanatory reason. We can say that the reason the driver turned the wheel was that he wanted to avoid hitting a pedestrian. That explains his action. But the normative reason—the reason to turn the wheel—is present whether the driver turns the wheel or not. It is a reason why he should turn the wheel. The normative reason enters into an explanation of action only if the driver recognizes it and is motivated by that recognition to act on it. (Scanlon; Nagel).

All the seemingly endless number of authors who employ virtual death in their works—think especially of Homer, Shakespeare and Hemingway—presumably have an explanatory reason for using death. But do they have a normative one? One that motivates them to use the word "death" or some other member of its family, """"perish," "kill," "murder," "starve," "abortion," "suicide" etc.?

My almost answer is no. Or no for some writers but not for all. In a minute I will give reasons for the no answer by appealing to the reader's help in giving normative reasons for virtual acts of death.

This essay can be read, as a whole, of my giving my own normative reasons for a particular writer's use of death, or a member of its family.

Whoever claims that all that exists is "now" misses a lot of the joy of the virtual—an infinite source of "now" and "then." What was, is, plus what can be.

(For other perspectives on the virtual as something beyond raw sensory information see the addenda to this essay—one that encapsulates salient points about the subject made by

- 44-
Aristotle, Ryan, Levy, Lyons, Crane and Deleuze).

2g. A seventh perspective on virtual reality is the distinction made between "Observer Independent" and "Observer Relative" (or "Dependent"). John Searle, the creator of these terms, has this to say, in part, about the distinction:

(The) distinction is between those features of reality that exist regardless of what we think and those whose very existence depends on our attitudes. The first class I call observer independent or original, intrinsic, or absolute. This class includes mountains, molecules, and tectonic plates. They have an existence that is wholly independent of anybody's attitude, whereas money, property, government and marriage exist only insofar as people have certain attitudes toward them. Their existence I call observer dependent or observer relative (52).

I believe, by what I have said above, that virtual reality, in all forms, is observer dependent. The writer who creates virtuality and the reader who interprets it, move and have their being as an observer dependent.

This,, we might want to say, is the default state of language. If not intercepted (interrupted) by observer independent stuff (Searle's mountains, molecules and tectonic plates) virtuality will continue to be the case. One such interception, of course, is for the writer to stop writing and the reader from reading.

Such interceptions, we reckon, could be anything associated with daily living, a noise in
the street, one’s spouse asking the writer or reader to take out the trash or a Facebook
communication via h/h iPhone.

2h. An eighth perspective is on the virtual as dreams and daydreaming in
contrast with sensory impressions:

In short, in the most interminable of dialectics, the sheltered
being gives perceptible limits to his shelter. He experiences
the house in its reality and in its virtuality, by means of
thought and dreams. It is no longer in its positive aspects
that the house is really 'lived,' nor is it only in the
passing hour that we recognize its benefits. An entire
past comes to dwell in a new house. The old saying:

'We bring our lares with us' has many variations.

And the daydreams depends to the point where an
immemorial domain opens up for the dreamer of a home
beyond man's earliest memory….the house
shelters daydreaming, the house protects the
dreaming the house allows one to dream in

peace (Bachelard 5, 6).

2i. Ninth Perspective. Sir Thomas More's Utopia (nowhere) is an exercise in virtual thinking—as
is James Hilton's *Lost Horizons* and works like it.

2k. Tenth Perspective. A text that enables the reader to maintain a convincing illusion to what is going on in a text. This is the capacity to provoke reflection simultaneously invited to remember what h/s was supposed to forget; namely that h/s is watching a fictional, representation of something may or may not hve been faith to some form of reality extra-textual, or off stage.

Bottom line: the virtual is a linguistic artifact that gestures toward the actual while transcending it. It presupposes that we receive information from the senses. But the virtual cannot be reduced to just sensory information. If it could be, then we would be, presumably, at the evolutionary stage of plants and animals—creatures who move and have their being without being able to talk about the non-existent— but still able to communicate within their own species and (minimally) with outside species.

In this essay, I work primarily with perspectives 2a, 2b and 2g (above).

LIFE

3. Life is the default state of imaginative writing and of all religions. Things in such a "state" will continue, if they are not intercepted, as they are (a steady state) to a completed state as they were, as they now are and as they will continue to be. A common example of a default state is that of the mammalian fetus as a carrier, and result, of the X chromosome. If it is not intercepted by the Y (male) chromosome, the fetus will always result in the birth of a female. Or, in more common terms, the non-intercepted fetus is always female in and out of the womb. Only an intercepted fetus becomes a male.
Here we have one reason why Aristotle claims that "nature favors the female."

3a. What comes from life versus what comes from death. With life please consider what comes from (arguably) the two main concerns of living people, sex and food. From sex comes, for example, pleasure, diseases, children, grandchildren, great-grand children, divorce, an augmentation of decline, in income, discord, a cleaner house and a vast number of novels, poems, and plays.

From food comes obesity, nourishment, dietary restrictions, cookbooks, restaurants, recipes, poisoning, dining with friends, communion, companionship (con "with," pan "bread," with the bread) plus states that reflect the lack of food, hunger, starvation and famine.

Here, as John Dryden said of Chaucer, is "God's plenty." Now compare that with what comes from death, grief, elegies, obituaries, epitaphs, representations of tragedy—plus everything caused by the lack of life, especially sex and food and their progeny.

3b. In these lines Homer portrays life and death, as most religions do, as a cycle of life, death, and rebirth—in the language of this essay, life and death continually intercept and re-intercept each other.

As is the generation of leaves, so is that of humanity.

The wind scatters the leaves on the ground, but the live timber Burgeons with leaves again in the season of spring returning. So one generation of men will grow while another dies.

( Iliad, VI. 146-150)
3c. Needless I say that life was in the writer when h/s wrote "death" or one of its family. And that it is also in you who read this?

Assuming, of course, that you are still with me.

In this essay the focus is on death as the interceptor of life in imaginative writing. A comparison might be to the predator:prey relationship. Unless "caught" by the predator, the pray will continue living, going on its usual way. Having "caught" its prey, the predator will go on as it was and is and would be—until death in some form "catches" it.

The comparison fails, however, whenever we believe, or even assume, that death has no predator capable of killing it. But, of course, if we are religious then we believe that death is always followed by new life. Death's interception of life is temporary and contingent. All of John Donne's nineteen Holy sonnets, for example, rest on this premise. Please, as a sampler, take this, and the one following (later on), as examples:

Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurp'd town to another due,
Labor to admit you, but oh, to no end;
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,
But am betroth'd unto your enemy;
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

The poet, in short, pleads with God to break his bonds to God's enemy, indestructible death.

If the predator:prey analogy fails at some point, is there animal, or plant, from which a nearly almost analogy can be made? Perhaps. Please consider the case of the lionfish, a "fish that can "eat anything that fits in their mouths"….that "reproduce copiously and adapt effortlessly."

The fish now (2014) threatens to eliminate all marine life (except the very largest of marine life) on the Southern seaboard, around Florida, the Gulf Coast, The Caribbean and even part of South America (The New York Times, "A Call to Action Against a Predator Fish With an Import Ban, ap and Even Rodeos." September 26, 2014: A17, A29)

3c1. Blood is life. When we think of blood we think of life. When we think of something, a person or an animal, drained of blood we think of death. This is the basis for the Jewish prohibition (especially orthodox Jews) of eating meat and, perhaps, the principle underlying vegetarianism.

To eat meat is to warrant the killing of animals.

3c2. "Intercept" is a member of the family which includes "interrupt," "usurp," "disrupt," "invade," "intrude," "rupture" and others. I leave the reader to attempt to unpack the core presuppositions here, one that gathers them into a family.

3c3. The origins of life versus the origins of death. We usually know "where" death comes from,
and the conditions that make it possible, disease, war, old age, and so on. We also know, in some
cases, what and who motivated murder and dying. But the situation with life is much different.
When did it emerge in the universe? What motivated it to emerge? Did it happen by chance? Or
was there purpose and intention behind its emergence?

Obviously, this is a huge subject (see, for example, White, Weinberg; Shapiro). To
explain where, how and why, life arrived on earth would be, in effect, a theory of everything—
something no unlike a theist's belief in a creator God. But simply raising the question opens the
door to accounts of how imaginative writers can represent life in terms of its origins. Constitutive
of these "accounts" is the belief that life can be made intelligible—that every buzzing blooming
thing can be understood and explained. My own view it that it cannot be made fully intelligible,
even in a tentative, contingent way. But again this does not mean that the search for intelligibility
is useless. In fact, the opposite is true. It provides a writer with a way, however, winding and
murky, to go on with the story h/s is telling and the truth h/s is revealing.

How does this "going on" happen? Or emerge in the mind of the writer? Simply by
asking "why, what and how." If X is the "what" (a person [character], a situation, an event) then
why and how does it appear to me the way it does? What are the constitutive parts of the
appearance? My subjectivity gives rise to the objective by means of what I take to be the
necessary kick-starts of X's existence.

In this, I believe there are three major parts. Please notice that my focus is on the human
and h/h temporal and spatial situation in the world.

A. Chance. Aristotle famously said that the effects of chance, but not the cause,
can be the same as the effects of intentional design. But what happens (or seems to happen) by chance only happens in the absence of purpose (*Physics* bks 4-6). If there was no purpose in the universe, the end for which things exist (*telos*), then chance alone would be able to explain life.

Modern science, of course, rejects chance as playing any part in the origins and development of life on earth. Following Darwin and the discovery of DNA modern science holds that life can only be explained by genetic variation, adaptation and some sort of design. But it cannot be intentional design because it is not scientific. So what is left? One answer might be a version of Peirce's concept of "habit-taking." This states, in minimal form, that taking a habit means learning something new. "Taking" refers to a process not a state. Humans take habits and they lose them and so new knowledge adds to what one already knows. Habit-taking can then be seen, like seeing and hearing, a survival skill. All this presupposes that habit-take is not only what an individual does. It also runs through the behavior of the whole human race (*CP* 6:613).

We still have the linguistic problem. Why do we have a family of words that we use to represent chance? Words and phrases like "accident," "luck," "fortune," "by chance," "with any luck," "it happens" and so on. We use these all the time to refer to things with no known (or knowable) cause but things with both a local and global effect.

For imaginative writers, a member of the chance family can start a story and sustain it with the effects of a chance event—in the case below with "accident":

**GREASEFIRE**
An accident. You've been telling yourself. You just happened to be on that run—nothing else to it—you hadn't skied it before, or anything like it. You'd maybe wanted to test yourself, try the black diamond run, the toughest, riskiest. Normally, you don't take chances. Your wife and your two small daughters were off somewhere, probably on the beginner's run. You'd left the youngest, the baby, with your mother. Funny. The young skier, you smelled her first. Like the aspens, after a quick rain. But more fresh, lemony. On the first run she'd passed you, like you were on jacks. You're not a risk freak, not in this, not in anything. You have a nice family, you pull down 41Gs a year.

You could see she was on 205s. The skis of an expert. On the second run, she slowed, turned her head—planted her ski-poles—smiled. Bit by bit, you're working up, assistant department head, street-department, maybe, department head. Next year, then a new car. You ski on 120s, kiddy skis, one of your friend said. They're safe, easy to turn.

Can you help me, with my earring? The skier says. You felt her breath on your neck. The skier helped you with her earring—her fingers, touching, guiding yours. When you finished, she smiled, turning her skis out and down, waving for you to follow. The motion of her hips, dynamite. You're a family man, a guy who's always on time.

What's eating you? Your wife's looking hard at you. It's her way of showing concern. Or is it?

Nothing, you say. Why?

Coming back to the city after that ski-weekend set off some weird, internal, things. Sure, you did some of the usual things. You helped your wife change the baby...you bought
groceries...you bought a gift for a friend's little boy. But you felt strange, unlike yourself. Things looked different, like things look to people with a fever, maybe. A couple of times you’d driven into a strange drive-way and just sat there. One time this big guy came out of the house and shouted Hey what you doing there? He kept shouting as you threw the car into reverse and backed out. You saw him waving at you as you drove away, you’re thinking you've got to pull yourself together. People get shot for what you’re doing.

You shouldn't be doing this, calling that woman you’d skied with. She's in Sun Valley. You should be working on that memo to the boss about the prevention of greasefires in the service center. But where's the harm in talking with her. You never minded, at first. Things like your wife putting the birdcage in the dishwasher. Just another rule to live with. It's not a rule, she says, it's reality. Diseases come from dirty cages.

Hey, there, you say. It's me, the guy who helped you with your earring. You can hear, outside the service center, the evening rush is on. I'm happy you called, she says. Ready to try the other big runs? You say. Have you skied the expert runs at Sun Valley? She asks. Her voice sends the sounds of the E’s, I’s, and R’s up and down on little roller-coaster rides. It reminds you of South Georgia where you’d gone on your mission for the church. You’d had a secret ambition to talk Southern. But you didn't want to sound silly, jeopardize your chance of a promotion next year. You had bills to pay, the house, the cars, the dentist. 750 big ones for each of the girls.

I've got some new ones now, she says. New ones? You ask. Earrings, she says. Are they like the others, you ask. Like little chandeliers? You remember, she says, laughing. No, she says, these are shaped like shields. Like knights used to carry. Her laughing reminds you of the sound
of a chandelier in the wind, silvery, tingly. Weird, her voice makes you feel stronger. You tell yourself it's safer to call her from here, not at home. My new earrings, she says, go with a different outfit. Daddy and I found them in a cute shop in Rome, on the Via Condotti. You know the street, she asks, it's just off the Piazza di Spagna? No, you say. You start to feel jumpy, a little scared.

You've never been to Europe. You suddenly feel left out of something, maybe a little mad. How far, you wonder, is it to Sun Valley? Do they have night-skiing? What if you brought her flowers, a big bunch? You hear the silvery, southern voice saying, we like Italy...we have a small ski-chalet at Cortina d'Ampesso... Where? You say. That's in the Dolomiti, Northern Italy. Hemingway liked to ski there, she says. Yeah, you say. You make a note to look the place up in an old atlas you have at home. Your wife would sure be pissed off if she knew you were calling another, younger, woman. But she might like the safe way you're handling it.

It's only Wednesday, you say. What if I call you in a couple of days? Please, please do, she says. Her voice seems to float on "please" and glide to a stop on "do." Ciao, she says. Yeah, you say, chow. Please, please call, she says. You put your foot down, starting to get up.

Something slick on the floor causes you to slip. I will, you say.

It's kind of like flirting, this calling. It's not really risking anything. You're not committing yourself to anything. Married men do it all the time. You turn and look at the clock. 10 before 7. You have about a 30 minute drive home. Plenty of time to play with the girls before they go to bed. You even might ask if Elmer has been fed. You want to catch the 10 o'clock news. You've heard a small plane is down somewhere in Northern Utah.
Outside it's snowing. You try to see the mountains. It's too dark. You can handle it. You're always in control, know where to stop. At Vegas, one weekend, you'd played a little $10 blackjack. You won a few bucks, $30, or $35. You don't remember. Your wife and kids were off, visiting her mother in Missouri. You were bored. Everybody you know seemed to be out of town. Salt Lake City...was? Salt Lake City You don't take chances with your paycheck. You'd quit after the $30-something win. You don't want to mess around with what you have. You got home from Vegas before your wife and kids. You like it that way.

This weekend. You worry. You might have to spend it writing that memo to the boss. You've always found it hard to write. It takes time out of talking. It's snowing harder. The storm, you know, is a general one, it's snowing all over the Northern Rockies. You have to be careful about a greasefire, the boss says, they're easy to trace, hard to put out. There'll be lots of new powder on the high runs, the chutes, cornices. The boss is worried about the cost of fire insurance. You turn onto State Street and start south, thinking about that. You know there'll always be that kind of fire in the work you're in. Thing is to stop it before it gets too big, out of control.

Right?

You're a married man. The young skier...her silvery voice... You have responsibilities... Sun Valley....

Forget it, it's dumb. Right? (Washington).
A. Life as stochastic relationships. "Stochastic" As a process that proceeds by trial and error or by guesswork. As a state the effect of an unknown cause. From the Greek "to aim at a target" with the general meaning of an infinite series of distributed random variables. The keywords here are "infinite," "random" and "variables." Before a writer begins to write these three do not converge in his mind—be they an even, persons, locations or duration. H/s may be conscious of the infinite, the random and their variables, but h/s has to imagine how they might converge to create a coherent representation of life.

On Death, without Exaggeration

It can't take a joke,

find a star, make a bridge.

It knows nothing about weaving, mining, farming,

building ships, or baking cakes.

In our planning for tomorrow,

it has the final word,

which is always beside the point.

It can't even get the things done

that are part of its trade:

dig a grave,

make a coffin,
clean up after itself.

Preoccupied with killing,
it does the job awkwardly,
without system or skill.
As though each of us were its first kill.

Oh, it has its triumphs,
but look at its countless defeats,
missed blows,
and repeat attempts!

Sometimes it isn't strong enough
to swat a fly from the air.
Many are the caterpillars
that have outcrawled it.

All those bulbs, pods,
tentacles, fins, tracheae,
nuptial plumage, and winter fur
show that it has fallen behind
with its halfhearted work.
Ill will won't help

and even our lending a hand with wars and coups d'etat

is so far not enough.

Hearts beat inside eggs.

Babies’ skeletons grow.

Seeds, hard at work, sprout their first tiny pair of leaves

and sometimes even tall trees fall away.

Whoever claims that it's omnipotent

is himself living proof

that it's not.

There's no life

that couldn't be immortal

if only for a moment.

Death

always arrives by that very moment too late.

In vain it tugs at the knob
of the invisible door.

As far as you've come
can't be undone.

Here the variables, "baking," "farming," "killing" (represented by gerundives) convey with "life" in a potentially infinite and random way. But then they diverge by the interceptions of death—by nature "when-less" and "how-less." Divergence is the result of negation, of which there are twelve such appearances:

There's no life

that couldn't be immortal

if only for a moment.

Death

always arrives by that very moment too late.

B. Intention. An alterative explanation of life and death is that of intention, or purposeful design. This is an unscientific posture. The scientific position is that there is no purpose, or intention, in life or death—at least from the perspective of the origins of life and death. This seems to suggest that the search for an explanation of the origin of life and death is futile. But this still leaves us puzzled by the fact that any life form we see is a wonder. How did it come, given a multitude of possibilities, into what it is now? Perhaps it is better to give up on the search for the origins (at least the ultimate ones) of life and death and focus on how they appear to us—
as something inexplicable, unintelligible yet marvelous.

From a virtual point of view, however, intention seems to be an important concept in a writer's skill set. This is due to a reader wondering what the writer is up to. Or, in other words, why do we categorize types of imaginative writing, as fiction, non-fiction, memoir and the like. In the context of this essay the question becomes "how does death intercept life in this text and what are the consequences of the interception"? In the following story, "Evil Makes Us Human," such interception comes in the form of the murder of a soldier, an act that sets off, among other things, an trial, imprisonment and a disruption in the way the protagonist, a judge, thought about the law.

**EVIL MAKES US HUMAN**

> Evil belongs to the class of the unlimited…good

> to that of the limited. Aristotle Ethics 1106b 28-30

The trial was held in a small municipal building. The man they brought in had been caught just as he delivered the final blow. He was young, pallid, drenched in a sweat of terror. Blood was streaming from his lips, split open by the butt of a rifle; and he was smearing it over his face with gore-spattered hands, the fingernails of which were torn. He was a hideous sight. His body shook; he was filthy and obviously miserable, but still recognizably human.

The presiding judge questioned him. The man did not respond, not even give his name. He merely cast his eyes about wildly, in a frenzy of anguish and hostility. Then some policemen testified, loudly, with vindictive enthusiasm. The charge was clear: the man had killed a soldier on his way to Afghanistan and had taken his watch and wallet. There were no further questions.
The judge stared at the man and raised his gavel for sentencing. Movement in the courtroom stopped. As the gavel struck the desk, the eye of a reporter caught sight of the judge’s manicured fingers and a flash of his gold cufflinks.

“In accordance with criminal law,” the judge said, “I sentence this man to death. Take him away.” The man did not grasp a word said. He let himself be led away, snuffling and wiping his lips with blood-stained hands. The trial was over.

***

The judge picks up his pipe and goes outside to smoke. It is just getting dark. When the moon comes up, its marbled light makes everything look ossified. A white road, ghostly trees, pale meadows stretches as far as the eye can see. A translucent whiteness, a crystallized longing, an endless, frozen tension. As far as the eye can see. A pale silence as far as the ear can hear. A lifeless, icy, peaceful night. No starlight to give its approval; there is nothing but a cold and intense glare.

Yet there was to it all, it seems to the judge, an infinite but unexplainable meaning. He looks up. Directly above the neck of Pegasus, swirls Andromeda, the galaxy of 200 billion suns. The judge thinks: we can only stand and admire it from across an unimaginable distance. But it lies, unbounded, beyond the reach of any truth or certainty.

Then, at home, the judge sleeps with his wife. He hears something stir. He hears a sound as of bedclothes, and what seems like a faint sigh; and somewhere in that darkness he hears something that sounds like, “love.” He can hear breathing next to him and along his side he
can feel, like a faint exhalation, something like her nearby side, so close that his arm hairs bristles.

In the station house the policemen are snoring. With these hearty snores, the night protests the beauty of the moonlit night. On the other side of the street, in the cell where the condemned man is confined, it is dark and quiet; there the terrifying moonlight only has a slit to work its way through.

The prisoner sweats. Beads of sweat break out, run down his face. It’s as if his forehead is shedding tears. His shadow is untouchable. In a dream, the judge sees himself sentencing the man to death. The man’s mouth is open as if he is trying to yell for help. The judge never lowers his gaze from the face of the condemned man. Nothing is banal, nothing can ever be, under the chill light of the moon. No creature stirs anywhere, no mole squeezes its way through the grass; no bird sings as proof that it exists. Leaves, blocking light from the moon, turn something into nothing.

Are all things nothing but inexplicable ghosts? Is there nothing but this unearthly negating moonlight and the condemned man, shivering in his cell? Suddenly, a Voice, as if uttered by an endless universe, breaks the silence: “There is no center or circumference.” The judge, waking from his sleep, replies to the Voice: “How can anyone say there is no center and no circumference. They were designed, according to law, by nature and God.” The Voice replies: “There is no law.” The judge responds: “We are surrounded by the law like the sky and horizon around us. How could we do anything unless we are compelled by it to act a certain
way? How could I hold the citizens in line without the law. There would be no justice without the law.”

The Voice, speaking calmly through the moonlight, says: “There is no justice.” The judge replies: “No one should say that. I condemned the man because he killed a soldier, I acted in the name of the law. If there was no law, I would have acted according to the dictates of my conscience and killed him on the spot—and my conscience would have been clear. I would have done the right thing.”

To this the Voice replies: “There is no conscience.” The judge puts on his shoes and robe and walks outside to confront the Voice. “Out of conscience and justice, we cry and rage...we strike out with fury and with compassion. If you were God himself, you could not do otherwise.”

The Voice, speaking through the moonlight, does not reply. The condemned man in the cell turns his face toward the sky. What he can just make out through the slit in the roof looks like a milky dome infused with petrified light. He feels it must be possible, if only he had a long, long ladder to climb up and into it. But the further he penetrates, raising himself on this gaze, the further the dome recedes. And still it is as though in time it can be reached, as though by sheer gazing he might be able to stop it and hold it. The desire to do this became agonizingly intense.

Then the Voice repeats the message: “There is no justice because there is no love or conscience.” Surely, the judge thinks, the white stones, the blood of all the murdered people, will rise up against the Voice and cry out in protest; they will defend God, the source of all love; they
will passionately bear Him witness. Deadly silence. No sound but the snores of the policemen in the station house.

It is midnight. The judge breaks his reverie; puts on his clothes and drives past the station house. There is a policeman standing outside the door. The moonlight shrouds him with a strange, unearthly, indifference. There is nothing unusual to see; there is nothing odd to hear; there is nothing; there is only the usual silent universe.

The municipal building is dark. The judge lights a candle, and makes his way into his court where he sits in judgment. He lowers himself into his chair and sets the candle on the edge of the desk. The yellow flame waviers, droops, lighting and warming only itself.

The judge holds the flame in his steady gaze until his eyes fill with tears.

(Washington).

Authorial intention, in this case (and perhaps in most cases) appears as a coherent cause and effect. Or, perhaps, as a series of "if/then" statements. If there is a murder and the murder is apprehended, then it follows that there will a trial; if there is a trial than there is the possibility of imprisonment. The "if," in short, starts a series of sorting through possibilities, itself a process of eliminating many of them as a requisite for arriving at a single representation.

Should we then assume that working with intention is something limited to humans and perhaps a few animals, especially domesticated ones? If so we can say that intention presupposes a certain kind of consciousness. In order to have an intention, and to act from one, we have to be aware of it as part of our belief content, not just be aware. I may be aware that a person I see in
the street is my neighbor, but I may not be aware that h/s is a spy for Russia—as h/s in fact is. Similarly with my intention to use death in a story. I use it, as in "Evil Makes Us Human," not only as a part of the narrative but with the awareness that it enables me to transcend the perspective of the immediate life of the story (as given by the senses, instincts and intuitions) and open larger objective realities and truths.

C. Teleological explanations of life and death. *Telos* is Greek for "purpose," "goal," or intention. It is most often cited with reference to Aristotle biology, especially in the History of Animals. It presupposes the potentiality of something, animal, plant, or event, to become something else, its *telos*. A common example is an acorn becomes an oak tree—assuming, of course, that a pig doesn't eat the acorn on its way to becoming an oak. In a chapter of his *Grammatical Man*, Jeremy Campbell gives homage to Aristotle for his "discovery" of DNA, a teleological process:

> He (Aristotle) defined physics very broadly as the study of things that change, come into being, and pass away, and these include plants and animals as well as earth, air, fire, and water. In his universe, change leads to genuine novelty, not by accident, but because things possess a kind of concept, or plan, which they endeavor to realize, each in its own way. A chicken fulfills the plan implicit in the egg, an oak tree the "concept" contained in the acorn. This, for Aristotle, is a more satisfying explanation of the physical world than one which supposes it to be composed of particles colliding at random like billiard balls (267).
Campbell goes on,

Max Delbruck, professor of biology at the California Institute of Technology, and a Nobel Prize winner, has argued, with a mixture of playfulness and serious intent, that if the Nobel committee were able to award the prize for biology posthumously, they should consider giving it to Aristotle for the discovery of the principle of DNA (272).

It is easy to see life as change, of things striving to realize their potential, a concept that gives them a new form and function. From the union of sperm and egg a fetus may come into being. It then can become an infant, later an adult and so on. It contains, in most cases, the potential for death.

How might this relate to interceptor death in imaginative writing? Take, for example, the change of a person into a ghost. Hamlet's father is an example. From being alive, to be dead (killed by Claudius), he became a ghost. In all three scenes, he appears at night. His ghostliness, we might say, plus the locations of all his appearances, were the telos of Shakespeare's purpose with the ghost.

One can see a similar telos with the two ghosts in this short story (my own):

VOICE FROM THE ABYSS
My friend, I am here in the grip of terrible ignorance and superstition. I’ve been wanting to go outside and pee for some time. But there are large bats flying around. Their wings, like leaves blown around in fall, are knocking against the windows. I hear screams coming from the river.

Sounds of digging are coming from the basement. It happens at the same time every day. But nothing has changed down there.

I feel as if the houses are staring down at me with malicious expressions, full of nameless spite: the doors are black, gaping mouths in which the tongues have rotted away, throats that might at any moment give out a piercing cry, so piercing and full of hate that it would strike fear to the very roots of our soul.

It’s the law...you have to turn left at all the intersections.

No one told me about the insects or the bats or the zombies. No one told me the truth about the lousy infrastructure here. So what if I didn’t think to ask? Somebody could have told me: the cruel things that go on right in my backyard for everyone to see. I’m sitting here, friend, afraid to go outside and I’m writing my apology to you. We’ve had a bad harvest. The price of grain is increasing. The devil appeared at the marketplace here last week. He wore a cap in three different colors of red and he carried a sign with NEVER LOSE TOUCH WITH EVIL written on it.
The mayor and his wife started drinking heavily at the thought of the devil returning. Yesterday the mayor got blind on a combination of beer and vodka. Then he splashed some of the vodka on his wife and set her on fire.

The sheriff’s wife, trying to put out the fire, died in the flames. So we’ve got one more angry ghost to contend with.

By the way, the beer here is terrible. It’s because the ants are having sex in it.

Everybody tells me lies. Not only the ones you would expect in a place like this but also the kind that surprises you. Nobody told me about the footsteps alongside my house at night. Or the annual tax on sidewalks and shoes.

My house sits at the edge of a woods, alone. I hear howls at night. One evening a local contractor was sitting on a stump in the woods reading The Plumbing Ordinances and something hit him from behind. He sat there for three days, staring straight ahead.

Most of the husbands here turn into wolves at night. When someone’s knocks at the door the wife never opens it on the first knock. If a wife did she would see her husband while he is still a wolf and he would eat her up and run off and never be seen again. When he knocks for the second time she still mustn’t open, because she would see him with a man’s body and a wolf’s head. Only at the third knock can she let him in. By that time the change is complete. The wolf has disappeared and he is the same man he was before.

Never, never open the door before they have knocked three times.
Back of my house is a deep ravine. A house has dropped to its edge and has been hanging there for years with one half of it in the air, propped up by a flimsy pole. I’m told that three or four generations of the undead have lived in it indifferent to the perilous position of the house.

Why didn’t anyone tell me about round-the-clock sound of sirens?

A citizen went to relieve himself in the woods the other day and saw heads without bodies rolling around in a clearing. He told his wife about it and then he died.

Now all he can do is fly around and fluoresce.

In order to increase revenue, the town council is renting out all public buildings for the storage of toxic waste.

This place is full of the enemies of progress. There are trolls, witches and werewolves everywhere and the inhabitants of this place refuse to do anything about them. Every time the highway department builds a new bridge over a river here the zombies burn it down.

All this, my friend, is keeping me from buying the stamps at the post office you want in order to complete your collection. I’m sorry. I apologize. Everybody is entitled to have a complete collection.

I believe, with all this going on, that I have a good reasons for not posting the letter.
3c4. In imaginative writing death generally intercepts life in three different temporal sets of means and ends: before, during and after the interception. The word "when" (in the title of this essay) presupposes all three events. This assumes, of course, that the writer employs death by means of existence, location and duration—death "is," death is always somewhere, death has a certain duration—that is, it has its exits and entrances in a text.

I expand on the three-fold nature of "is" (existence, location and duration) below.

3c5. Persons without religious faith don't believe that life, once intercepted by death, can re-intercept death. Death is final. Persons of faith believe in re-interception. For Christians there is one re-interception. For Hindi, Jainists and Buddhists, death can be re-intercepted millions of them—as many times as it takes to reach Nirvana, where life can never be intercepted by death.

3c6. What comes from suicide. Studies of the causes of suicide, statistics on who kills h/hself, where it most often occurs, causes for suicide, web-sites that offer instructions on how to "slaughter" oneself, movements like "Death with Dignity." The New York Times (November 4, 2014: A19) contains a notice of the suicide of Brittany Maynard 29 under the influence of the philosophy of "Death with Dignity." (See also Wikipedia, "Suicide.").

"Suicide" (from the Latin sui "self" caedere "kill").

The great French mathematician and philosopher, Blaise Pascal, suffered great pain the last few years of his life. The pain grew more intense right before his death. He dismissed his doctors and said "A Christian is supposed to suffer." Then he died.

3d. A further implication of the above is that the writer can employ death as either necessary and inevitable or contingent and temporary. For Horace, for example, death is
inevitable and therefore necessary. I invite the reader to do h/h own translation. In many others, especially those on the Internet, most translators (including Googol Translate and all the other on line translators) allow themselves to be sucked into an existential vertigo by Horace's syntax.

Eheu fugaces, Postume, Postume,
labuntur anni nec pietas moram
rugis et instanti senectae
afferet indomitaque morti,
non, si trecenis quotquot eunt dies,
amice, places illacrimabilem
Plutona tauris, qui ter amplum
Geryonen Tityonque tristi
compescit undâ, scilicet omnibus
quicumque terrae munere vescimur
enavigandâ, sive reges
sive inopes erimus coloni.
frustrâ cruento Marte carebimus
fractisque rauci fluctibus Hadriae,
frustrâ per autumnos nocentem
corporibus metuemus Austrum:
visendus ater flumine languido
Cocytos errans et Danai genus
infame damnatusque longi
Sisyphus Aeolides laboris.
linquenda tellus et domus et placens
uxor, neque harum quas colis arborum

te praeter invisas cupressos

ulla brevem dominum sequetur;

absumet heres Caecuba dignior

servata centum clavibus et mero

tinguet pavimentum superbo,
pontificum potiore cenis (Ode 1:14)

Please notice that the poet focuses on the before and after of death, the "instanti senectae" (cast as aging) and the afterlife in Hades. The way to Hades is a necessary one, emphasized by the gerundive, "enivaganda." (must journey). Now compare this with John Donne's "Death Be Not Proud":

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

Death, in short, is contingent on a creator God who kills death and renews life. But notice how Donne portrays the nature of life and how death intercepts it. Broadly speaking, one can depict life as a comedy, tragedy or tragicomedy. Donne's "poison, war, sickness" fill life with suffering. Though tragedy may be the only common word to describe suffering, we still sense its deficiency.

The poem ends with life restored. Does this mean it has a happy ending? If a happy ending implies comedy, should we then call it a comedy? This too seems deficient.

3d1. The self as the other. Representing the before and after of death, as I mentioned above, seems fairly obvious in most writing. One simply thinks of the before as the cause of death and the after as its effects. But what can we make of the instant of death as a threshold moment of life?

Here we have to consider some permutations on the relationship of the self with itself as life, the self as dying and the self as the dead other—where other is a projection of the life self into the future.

Clearly, the actual itself as life cannot be simultaneously conscious of itself as a three-fold selves (life, dying, dead). H/s can only be conscious as what Heidegger calls "sein sum todes" (existing toward death) and the motivating force behind Hamlet's "to be or not to be." The self as life and the same self as dying and death cannot be given any details by the conscious self. It can be represented as a virtuality, not possible, and so not representable, in thought. The threshold moment of death for the life self can never be "now."
But none of this is the case with a virtual death. All one has to manage it is to create the threshold moment (between life and death) as a self "seeing" (and often "feeling") dying and death in a projected self. Hamlet sees the moment, for example, as the boundary between a discovered and "undiscovered" country. Everyman, from the Medieval morality play, sees it as the arrival of a figure in black. In more modern times, the moment appears for example, as the ending of Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro"; death of the lion in his "The Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber," Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych* and again, with Hemingway, this passage from one of his bullfighting vignettes of 1923:

Maera felt everything getting larger and larger and then
smaller and smaller. Then it got larger and larger and larger
and then smaller and smaller. Then everything commenced to
faster and faster to when they speed up a cinematograph film.
Then he was dead (qtd Reynolds 146).

Virtual death comes, in short, by the self experiencing the self, especially the body, as the other dying in time marked as a slow duration. Of all the modern authors I am aware of, Hemingway's virtual death-laden texts form the *loci classicus*.

3e. Epitaphs and elegies. Should we classify Donne's poem as a epitaph (one that could have been placed on his tomb in Westminster Abbey) or as an elegy for himself? Something with a family relationship with Gray's "Elegy in a Country Church" or Milton's "Lysidas?"

This calls for a distinction between epitaphs and elegies. For most scholars of the evolution of the terms the principal difference between an elegy and an epitaph is the
representation of time. Typically, it requires more time for a reader to read an elegy than an epitaph; and the “message” of an elegy is more likely to transcend the historical event that called it into being. Long term mourning is often at stake: The “primary purpose” of an elegy is thus to present a “psychological working through of mourning” (Newstok 51; Clymer 359). In this, an elegy is much like a sermon. To elegize is to perform a literary act before or after a death or a funeral— notable examples being Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” Shelley’s “Adonias” and Milton’s “Lycidas.” Unlike an epitaph they are “too long” to be written on a tombstone. (The etymology of “elegy,” legein or “to speak,” suggests a certain length of time). Elegiac writing appears for Bloomfield as a characteristic of a distinct literary movement; namely, as the “continuing effect of Romanticism…the elegiac mode remains the dominant mode of modern poetry” (156).

But, considering the work of Donne, Shakespeare and other poets of the Renaissance should we take Bloomfield's claim as a plausible one?

An epitaph, by contrast with an elegy, plays down temporal presentation in order to foreground spatial meaning and context. (By its etymology, an epitaph is a written form “upon a tomb” [epi-taphos]) The primary purpose of an epitaph is to identify a body that is “here.” With an epitaph we are always (usually in graveyard) in the presence of a corpse or the space where one has been. When we elegize, the corpse is usually absent. Moreover, as Mikics points out, the personal address in an elegy is a “you,” not the usual third person form of an epitaph (102). For Kay, the basic distinction between an elegy and an epitaph is “generic separation”: with the former we are in “association”
with “death and a funeral”; with the latter, in the presence of “the erection of a monument and with a…more conclusive, response to death” (65).

In short, following the lead of the above scholarship, it is incorrect to say, as the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics has it, that the “epitaph is a shortened form of the elegy” (Newstok 52). The “hereness” of the epitaph, near and above a body or the space where one has been, is the essential difference—in short, immobility, not time and movement, dominate the presentation.

What are they then, Donne’s poems, elegies or epitaphs, or something in between?

3e. Life, Risk and Death. Death most often intercepts life in risky situations: mountain climbing, deepwater diving, war, robbing banks, extreme skiing, and the like. Let me take as my paradigmatic example mountain climbing with special reference to Fallen Giants. (Isserman and Weaver).

The pattern of representation here is narration followed by a counter-narration. The author narrate the life (or lives) of mountaineers before h/h (their) death and then follow it with a counter-narration of the effects of death. Here are three examples.


On June 27, their (Buhl and Diemberger) third day on the mountain
They were headed for the summit along its Northeast Ridge, unroped and making good time. But 24,000 feet the weather turned against them, the wind blowing so fiercely it wiped out their footprints….Fearful of losing the trail they would need to follow on their descent and through a misstep breaking through a cornice, they turned back short of the summit. It was a prudent decision: but it proved in vain. A cornice
suddenly crumbled beneath Diemberger, who was the lead climber on the descent. He managed to leap to safety. When he looked back behind him to check on Buhl, there was no one there. All he could see were Buhl's footprints leading to the edge (335).

Notice how the narration combines talk about both mind (the subjective) and body (the objective). We see the mind in words like "making good time," "Fearful of losing the trail they would need to follow…" and "It was a prudent decision, but it proved in vain." For the body (objective) perspective we have descriptions of the cornice collapsing, Diemberger's "leap to safety," his look "back behind him to check on Buhl" and other such information as conveyed by sight.

Counter-narration:

The successful and innovative Austrian Alpenverein Karakoram Expedition thus ended with the death of one of the heroes of the golden age of Himalayan mountaineering. His death was the result of a misstep on a dangerous mountain, but in some measure it was also the result of the poisonous rivalry that had consumed his final expedition (335).

Many, but not all, counter-narrations give a summing up of the death-event by means of causal forces, both near and far. In this example the near was the physical conditions of the mountain and the far were what the authors refer to as "poisonous rivalry."

B. The life and death of Scott Fischer and Rob Hall. In May 10-11,1996 eight mountaineers were killed on Mt. Everest. Two of them were leaders of the expedition, Fischer and Hall.
Narration:

In the spring of 1996 eleven expeditions set up Base Camp below the Khumbu Icefall, including a least six commercial operations (one of these had Lhorse rather than Everest as its goal). Two of the commercial Everest expeditions were American ventures, one lead by Scott Fischer and the other by Peter Athans and Todd Burleson. New Zealander Rob Hall guided another of the Everest-bound expeditions. There were still more commercial expeditions operating on the Tibetan side (448).

With this narrative we sense, due to the crowded conditions on the mountain, that something tragic is going to happen. This theme continues for several pages more—including:

The disaster that unfolded (eight dead) on May 10 had been Predicted by Mountain magazine in 1999: there was no safety in numbers at the summit of Everest. Because the climbers were of widely mixed abilities, they moved at the pace of the slowest of their party. A bottleneck developed at the Hillary Step. Ropes that were supposed to have been fixed on the summit had not been put in place. Climbers stood around in the cold, using up their oxygen. Deadlines for turning around and heading back down the mountain were ignored by the guides because the summit seemed so close, and perhaps because their professional
self-interest lay in seeing as many clients make it to the top as possible (450).

Here the counter-narration supervenes on the narration. In doing so, it stops the narrative flow and turns it in on itself to make it more intelligible. Such intelligibility arrives as an a tipping point created by the convergence of existing and non-existing facts. Among the non-existing are the lack of fixed ropes to the summit, the scarcity of oxygen and the ignoring of "guidelines" for turning around. Among the existing facts are crowding, time of day, the guides need to "seeing as many clients make it to the top as possible."

The voices of supervening arrive also as friends and wives of the persons killed:

One woman who described herself as a friend of Beck Weathers (who survived, albeit with severe frostbite) wrote to complain about the climbers risk taking: 'the pregnant wife left behind [by Rob Hall] cannot be comforted by her husband's bravery when she goes through the delivery of her child alone and has no father to greet and help raise the infant' (451-452).

C. The Death of Gunther Messner on Nanga Parbat.

Narration:

As they (Gunther and Reinhold Messner) approached the bottom of the Diamir Face, Reinhold decided to leave Gunther behind to rest while the scouted the glacier ahead: Gunther was to join him shortly. But when his brother failed to appear he climbed back up to find him. Gunther was no longer there; instead there was a
sign of a recent avalanche (397).

`Counter-Narration:

After searching for his brother for the remainder of the day and into the
night, suffering from shook, grief, and exposure, Messner finally set off
again down the mountain, reduced to crawling on all fours when he was
found and rescued by local villagers…Messner carried a heavy burden
of remorse after the expedition (397).

Go on correlation of mountain climbing w/ journey to the n. pole, p. 81.

THE ESOTERIC AND REPETITION.

4. The truth about X loves to hide. No-one, to my knowledge, says this more succinctly
than Shakespeare and Laurence Sterne:

*Horatio:

O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!

Hamlet:

And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,

Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

*(Hamlet 1:5)*

*But mark, madam, we live amongst riddles and
mysteries—the most obvious things, which come
in our way, have dark sides, which the quickest
sight cannot penetrate into; and even the
clearest and most exalted understandings amongst
us find ourselves puzzled and at a loss in almost
every cranny of nature's works. Laurence Sterne
(1713-68)

Esoteric (from the Greek esoter or inner). What is esoteric is hidden, or concealed, either from all but a select few or from everyone. One of our starting points here is the supposition that the default state of the truth of virtual life and death is "to stay hidden."
The role of the writer is then to "un-conceal" the hidden truth (or meaning) of virtual death. It follows then that every instance of virtual death, like the many instances in Shakespeare, reveals a "new" truth without destroying the truth already revealed, the given truth.

The esoteric then makes possible repetition. Each repetition carries new information and (presumably) reveals a new truth about death—especially in the how and why of its interception of life. Here we are put in mind of the different religious traditions. From the birth of institutionalized Christianity in Rome there came the Roman Catholic church, then the Eastern Orthodox church, followed then by the Protestant Reformation and its subsequent division into Baptists, Methodist, Mormons and the like.

The claim of each is that with its coming a new truth was revealed about the relationship between man and God. The same process, and claim, appear in the three traditions of Buddhism and the two traditions of Jainism.

So, by examining specimens of virtual death, let us attempt to unpack the how and why of each "death" or one of its family, "die," "starve," "kill," and so forth. (I italicize
some, but not all, of the members of the family of death in this and all following specimens):

A. From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose
(Randall Jarrell)

Here death intercepts life as a force, "nightmare," "dark," "washed out," which sucks the "I" out of life, itself just a "dream." The ultimate source of this particular death is the "state." Without it, nothing that follows could have happened. No state, no war, no death.

Notice too that there is no life beyond death, no renewal of life unlike Donne's "death thou shall die." If we assume that there is no afterlife mentioned, or presupposed here, then we might go on and claim the poem as a very modern treatise on death—that it was written in, and for, an atheistic (or secular) age.

Above I said that virtual death and life always have three fundamental units, existence, location and duration. These all have their source in the threefold use of the verb "to be," "is," "estar," "einaï," "sein," etc. (see Kahn; Buck; Wikipedia, "Indo-European Languages"); "Category: Indo-European Languages").

To tease out how and why members of the death family intercept life in the following poem, Wallace Stevens, "Sunday Morning," we have to unpack the presuppositions of each member by asking "how does each exist?" "where does it exist?" "what is its duration?"
But, before going on to the representation of death in the poem, let me begin with that of life. For this, I will employ a method of analysis called "epistemic seeing."

But first the text of the poem:

B. Complacencies of the peignoir, and late
Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,
And the green freedom of a cockatoo
Upon a rug mingle to dissipate
The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.
She dreams a little, and she feels the dark
Encroachment of that old catastrophe,
As a calm darkens among water-lights.
The pungent oranges and bright, green wings
Seem things in some procession of the dead,
Winding across wide water, without sound.
The day is like wide water, without sound,
Stilled for the passing of her dreaming feet
Over the seas, to silent Palestine,
Dominion of the blood and sepulchre.

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?
What is divinity if it can come
Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,
In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else
In any balm or beauty of the earth,
Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?
Divinity must live within herself:
Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued
Elations when the forest blooms; gusty
Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;
All pleasures and all pains, remembering
The bough of summer and the winter branch.
These are the measures destined for her soul
  Jove in the clouds had his inhuman birth.
  No mother suckled him, no sweet land gave
  Large-mannered motions to his mythy mind
  He moved among us, as a muttering king,
  Magnificent, would move among his hinds,
  Until our blood, commingling, virginal,
  With heaven, brought such requital to desire
  The very hinds discerned it, in a star.
  Shall our blood fail? Or shall it come to be
  The blood of paradise? And shall the earth
  Seem all of paradise that we shall know?
  The sky will be much friendlier then than now,
  A part of labor and a part of pain,
  And next in glory to enduring love,
  Not this dividing and indifferent blue.
  She says, “I am content when wakened birds,
Before they fly, test the reality Of misty fields,
by their sweet questionings;
But when the birds are gone, and their
warm fields Return no more, where, then,
is paradise?” There is not any haunt of prophecy,
Nor any old chimera of the grave, Neither the
golden underground, nor isle Melodious,
where spirits gat them home, Nor visionary south,
nor cloudy palm Remote on heaven’s hill, that has
endured As April’s green endures; or will endure
Like her remembrance of awakened birds,
Or her desire for June and evening, tipped By
the consummation of the swallow’s wings.
She says, “But in contentment I still feel
The need of some imperishable bliss.”
Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,
Alone, shall come fulfilment to our dreams
And our desires. Although she strews the leaves
Of sure obliteration on our paths, The path sick
sorrow took, the many paths Where triumph
rang its brassy phrase, or love Whispered a little
out of tenderness, She makes the willow shiver
in the sun For maidens who were wont to sit and gaze
Upon the grass, relinquished to their feet.

She causes boys to pile new plums and pears

On disregarded plate. The maidens taste

And stray impassioned in the littering leaves.

Is there no change of death in paradise? Does ripe fruit never fall?

Or do the boughs Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,

Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,

With rivers like our own that seek for seas

They never find, the same receding shores

That never touch with inarticulate pang?

Why set the pear upon those river-banks

Or spice the shores with odors of the plum?

Alas, that they should wear our colors there,

The silken weavings of our afternoons,

And pick the strings of our insipid lutes!

Death is the mother of beauty, mystical,

Within whose burning bosom we devise

Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly.

Supple and turbulent, a ring of men

Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn

Their boisterous devotion to the sun,

Not as a god, but as a god might be,

Naked among them, like a savage source.
Their chant shall be a chant of paradise,
Out of their blood, returning to the sky;
And in their chant shall enter, voice by voice,
The windy lake wherein their lord delights,
The trees, like serafin, and echoing hills,
That choir among themselves long afterward.
They shall know well the heavenly fellowship
Of men that perish and of summer morn.
And whence they came and whither they shall go
The dew upon their feet shall manifest.
She hears, upon that water without sound,
A voice that cries, “The tomb in Palestine Is not
the porch of spirits lingering. It is the grave of Jesus,
where he lay.” We live in an old chaos of the sun,
Or old dependency of day and night,
Or island solitude, unsponsored, free,
Of that wide water, inescapable.
Deer walk upon our mountains, and the quail
Whistle about us their spontaneous cries;
Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness;
And, in the isolation of the sky,
At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
Ambiguous undulations as they sink,
4a. Life as epistemic seeing. Of all the five senses, seeing is, as Aristotle points out, the one we most "delight" in "know" the differences between things.

All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, sight makes us know and brings to light many differences between things (Metaphysics 980a22-28; emph mine)

All the other senses, of course, convey information about the world to us but not with the same precision or scope as seeing. Size, shapes, edges, textures and especially color are only available to us by seeing.

So what is epistemic seeing? To respond to the question we need to bring into the picture nonepistemic seeing and nonseeing. The essential difference between these forms is seeing with the presence or absence of a "belief content." With nonseeing there is, obviously, neither epistemic and nonepistemic seeing. Nonseeing, with Kukso, Martin and Sorensen (16-17; 188-90), I take as things missing in regards to their existence, location and (sometimes) duration in the text. Missing in this sense implies a hiatus in awareness (or consciousness) of the one nonseeing.
What the consciousness of any particular specimen of imaginative writing does not see is the subject of another study—to which I direct the interested reader.

The "belief-content" doesn't have to be any particular kind but it must be something, usually something experienced and remembered (Dretske 1969: 88):

Whereas seeing that a is F entails belief that a is F, nonepistemic seeing lacks commitment to a belief content. When cavemen witnessed a solar eclipse, they saw the moon even if they had no beliefs about what they were seeing (Sorensen 38).

Sorensen goes on to say that nonepistemic seeing is compatible with epistemic seeing. "The caveman can nonepistemically see a distant bird and epistemically see it (by virtue of his belief that the observed creature is a bird" (39).

Seeing epistemically, in short, is being aware of what one is seeing. The "she" of the poem, obviously, sees epistemically many things that surround her, the chair she sits in, the coffee she drinks, the cockatoo. As an elderly person, she remembers things she has seen before as some particular thing, the Eucharist, rain, snow, the sun, water and the ordinary things of life.

All these palpable realities contrast with things seen (as well as dreamt, felt and heard) "without belief" or awareness. These, by the terminology of this essay, are virtual realities, beyond and outside the sensory world. They are nonepistemic. There, but unknown and unknowable, because of any sort of internal and external differences

All genuine (non-rhetorical) questions are of this nature. Please notice how conditional and modals forms, "if," "why," "can," "should," etc. support the questions:

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?/
What is divinity if it can come/only in silent/
Shadows and in dreams?
***

Shall our blood fail?/Or shall it come to be/
The blood of paradise?/ And shall the earth/
Seem all paradise we shall know?
***

Is there no change of death in paradise?/
Does ripe fruit never fall?'

The "she" sees and by so doing (along with feeling and hearing) creates a sensory and a non-sensory, transcendental world.

Where and how does death intercept life in the poem? Obviously, as causal efficacy. Without it, "Sunday Morning" as well as other texts mentioned here, would exist in a different form or not even exist.

But what about the reader? Does h/s "see" what "she" sees? Or is h/s like the blind men and the elephant? Sensing only parts of the whole?

Let us consider, for a while, death as the cause of a change (through time) of consciousness—of both the protagonist of the poem and its reader.

I mentioned before the three fundamental units of the verb "to be," the most powerful and comprehensive verb of all languages. These are existence, location and duration. With these we can say that death changes one's mode of existence, h/h location, and duration.
What do these three then tell us about the experience of the "she" in "Sunday Morning?"

A. Existence. There are essentially three different kinds of existence supporting the life of "She." One is the one she remembers as sensory fragments of past life:

All pleasures and all pains, remembering

The bough of summer and the winter branch (28-29)

Nor visionary south, not cloudy palm remote on heaven's Hill, that has endured as April's green endures, or will endure

Like her embrace of awakened birds (53-56).

The existence, seen as a reaction to the first, is present existence, the "now."

Seem all of paradise that we shall know

B. Location. Location is mainly established in the poem by what linguists call "deixis," from the Greek "pointing." Pointing comes into being by a collaboration of seeing and a certain movements of the body.

The sky will be much friendlier than now (41-42)

She dreams a little and she feels the dark

Encroachment of that old catastrophe

As a calm darkens among water lights (6-8).

Finally, there is future existence, in the realms of "heaven" and "paradise."

Is there no change of death in paradise?

Does ripe fruit never fall? (73-74).
Alas, that they should wear our colors there (81).

Their chant shall be the chant of paradise (92)

They shall know well the heavenly fellowship (98)

And when they came and whither they shall go (100).

Location is mainly established in the poem by what linguists call "deixis," from the Greek "pointing." Pointing comes into being by a collaboration of seeing, certain movements, and postures, of the body plus the language of space, especially spatial prepositions, "in," "before," "on," "under" and so on—in short, evocation of the environment of here and there.

Of sure obliteration on our paths. The path sick

Sorrow took, the many paths where triumph rang

Its brassy phrase (64-66).

Do the boughs hang always heavy in that perfect sky

Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth? (74-75).

And shall our earth seem all of paradise we shall know?

(40-41).

As a whole the poem seems overburdened with spatial terms, "shores," "riverbanks," "
"clouds," "fields," "grave" and so on. So what is the point of them? To suggest that the "she" doesn't know where she is? To suggest that she is reporting on a dream? To make the claim that everything is uncertain? That only fools believe in certainty?

The word "path" may suggest an answer, or at least a response.

The path sick sorrow took, the many paths where triumph

Rang its brassy phrase, or love whispered a little

Out of tenderness (64-67).

C. Duration. Taking a path means change and change means duration, one form of time, and duration implies direction.

So, we might want to say that "she" wants to take a path that will go from "here" to "there." From "earth" to "heaven" ("paradise")? From doubt to certainty? From a world of change to one of "unchanging." From an imperfect to a "perfect" world?

In his famous essay, "The Unreality of Time," J. L Mactaggart claims that we can never know what time is because defining time requires doing so by reference to time itself—a procedure that leads to an infinite regress.

But imaginative writers don't look at time that way. They also see it as a interruptions (interceptions) in a chain of cause and effect—cause loses contact with effect, effect from cause.

4b. "Death became him (the novelist William Burroughs) because death had always been the seed from which he grew." (The New Review of Books. October 9, 2014: 48.)

5. Is there an Ash Wednesday message in all representations of death? The need to remind the reader that h/s is going to die?
5. Voice from beyond the grave. Tombstones monuments and memorials speak to us, those of us who stop to read their inscriptions. For example, Swift's self-composed epitaph:

*Hic* depositum est Corpus

IONATHAN SWIFT S.T.D.

Hujus Ecclesiæ Cathedralis

Decani,

*Ubi* sæva Indignatio

Ulterius

Cor lacerare nequit,

Abi Viator

Et imitare, si poteris,

Strenuum pro virili

Libertatis Vindicatorem.

*Obiit* 19º Die Mensis Octobris

A.D. 1745 Anno Ætatis 78º.

Here is laid the Body of Jonathan Swift, Doctor of Sacred Theology, Dean of this Cathedral Church, where fierce Indignation can no longer injure the Heart. Go forth, Voyager, and copy, if you can, this vigorous (to the best of his ability) Champion of Liberty. He died on the 19th Day of the Month of Octob (Wikipedia entry under "Swift")

5a. Voice from beyond the grave and missing out on things. A. E. Housman's "Is My Team Ploughing?"

Please notice the structure of the poem—it takes the form of a dialogue between a virtual dead and a virtual life—a life that continues with "no change" (l.7)

Is my team ploughing,
That I was used to drive
And hear the harness jingle
      When I was man alive?"

Ay, the horses trample,
The harness jingles now;
No change though you lie under
The land you used to plough.

Is football playing
Along the river shore,
With lads to chase the leather,
      Now I stand up no more?"

Ay the ball is flying,
The lads play heart and soul;
The goal stands up, the keeper
      Stands up to keep the goal.

Is my girl happy,
That I thought hard to leave,
And has she tired of weeping
As she lies down at eve?"

Ay, she lies down lightly,
She lies not down to weep:
Your girl is well contented.
Be still, my lad, and sleep.
Is my friend hearty,
Now I am thin and pine,
And has he found to sleep in
A better bed than mine?

Yes, lad, I lie easy,
I lie as lads would choose;
I cheer a dead man’s sweetheart,
Never ask me whose.

6. Fear and death. Two well known responses to the fear of death, according to Michalski's account, are those of Plato (in the *Phaedo*) and St. Mathew:

The dying Socrates wanted to give us concepts that would provide peace, concepts that will soothe our anxiety in the face of death. The Gospel of Matthew, as I understand it, is the complete opposite: it testifies to the incurable presence of the Unknown in every moment of my life, a presence that rips apart every human certainty built on what is known, that disturbs all peace, all serenity -- that severs the continuity of time, opening every moment of lives to nothingness, thereby inscribing within them the possibility of an abrupt end and the chance at a new beginning. Two visions of death, two visions of the human condition (88-89).

6a. A difference of opinion: "Some suppose that the more you take from life, the less is left for death; others, that the more you take from life, the less remains to be lived"

(Regina Derieva; *TLS* October 10: 15).
7. Is death overrepresented and overrated in imaginative writing? Almost all thoughts (and discussions) of the rights and wrongs of killing, including suicide, euthanasia, capital punishment, war and natural death, are based on the assumption that death is bad: very bad for the one who dies. But is it? The Greek philosopher, Epicurus, denied it two millennia ago:

Accustom yourself to believing that death is nothing to us, for good and evil imply the capacity for sensation, and death is the privation of all sentience; therefore a correct understanding that death is nothing to us taking away the yearning after immortality. For life has no terrors for him who has thoroughly understood that there are no terrors for him in ceasing to live. Foolish, therefore, is the man who says that he fears death, not because it will pain when it comes, but because it pains in the prospect. Whatever causes no annoyance when it is present, causes only a groundless pain in the expectation. Death, therefore, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not. It is nothing, then, either to the living or to the dead, for with the living it is not and the dead exist no longer.

Even if we reject Epicurus' lines on death, there is still a question of whether we overrate death. Death, often thought of as the worst of evils, especially in regard to specific deaths (in contrast to death itself and the reality that we are mortal) merely deprives us a period of conscious existence which, in many cases is a relatively short period and often not
always a good one. But how bad is that? How does it compare with being tortured but left alive? Of being locked away for many years? Away from the people that you care about? Death cuts off the last years of our life. But how bad is it to lose time at the end of life rather than in the middle—say in a comatose state? iii

7a. In #7 (above) the suggestion is that "our" death, under certain circumstances, can be a less evil than many other things—a comatose state, a wasting neurological disorder or time in a prison.

Can we also argue that my death is always a benefit to others? Here is a recent letter to the New York Times (October 7, 2014) on the topic:

The Upside of Death

TO THE EDITOR:

Re “Don’t Spoil the Ending” (Books, Oct. 7): Our society’s efforts to continue individual lives indefinitely fails to take into account the evolutionary value that death provides to life. Not only does the death of the oldest generation free up limited resources for the young, but it also allows new traits to arise in a population that are more suitable to changed circumstances. Rather than conquering death, our use of the bulk of our medical resources to prolong the lives of the elderly often leads to increased suffering, instead of increased happiness. We would be better off spending our medical assets on assuring the lives of the world’s children.

Steve Gins

Kenmore, Wash.
7b. Can we claim that not being born is better than being born? Jonathan Swift, the great English satirist, uses this claim as a premise of his imaginative text, *A Modest Proposal*.

7c. Cannibalism as virtual death and life has frequent representations in many imaginative texts, for example, Lord Byron's *Don Juan*, Swift's *A Modest Proposal* and Slawomir Mrozek's *All at Sea*.

The relationship here between life and death is triadic: X kills Y to feed Z. The *classicus locus* is Swift's *Proposal*. Slaughter houses (X) cannibalize infants (Y) under a year old and the well-to-do feast on their flesh (Z).

Fifthly, This food (infant flesh) would likewise bring great custom to taverns, where the vintners will certainly be so prudent as to procure the best receipts for dressing it to perfection; and consequently have their houses frequented by all the fine gentlemen, who justly value themselves upon their knowledge in good eating; and a skilful cook, who understands how to oblige his guests, will contrive to make it as expensive as they please.

7d. Death as the presence of absence. "Absent centre around Mary Shelley…Mary Wollstonecraft died giving birth to her. Her half-sister, Fanny, later committed suicide, as did Shelley's first wife Harriet, when he abandoned her for Mary. Out of Mary's five pregnancies, only one child would survive into adulthood. Shelley himself drowned before he reached the age of thirty. Death, the constant *presence of an absence*, is the very thing Mary is competing against in *Frankenstein*." ("A present centre." *TLS*, October 31, 2014: 9).
Death, thirdness, architecture. Throughout this presentation I have made use of what C. S. Peirce (mathematician and philosopher) calls the trichotomic or “the art of making three-fold divisions. Such a division depends on the conceptions of 1st, 2nd, 3rd. First is the beginning of that which is fresh, original spontaneous, free. Second is that which is determined, terminated, ended, correlative, object, necessitated, reacting. Third is the medium, becoming, developing, bringing about something” (280). A good example is metaphor and its close kin, analogies and similes. Each of these has the general meaning of "transfer." Given any X (something perceived) language allows us to transfer its meaning (function or use) to Y on the basis of Z. Z can be either stated or presupposed:

*Poverty (X) is a giant that uses your face as a rag (Y) to wipe a dirty world (Z) (Ferdinand Celine).

*My love (Y) is like a red, red rose (Z)—where Z (presupposed) represents the qualities of both "my love" and roses (Robert Burns).

*Jealousy (X) is a green-eyed monster (Y) that mocks thee (Z) (Shakespeare).

In what I have attempted to do above is to employ thirdness in analogy with architecture, constructing it, using it and modifying it. Construction, of necessity, is a bottom up process beginning with small, simple, parts. Aristotle's method of thinking follows this pattern. We arrive at the whole of something by first, step by step, naming and describing its simple, but essential, parts. The best example is Aristotle's *Metaphysics*—though it forms the structure of all his works. The subject of study here is "being" (ousai). It has ten simple parts (called the "Categories") among which are substance, quality, quantity, and relation, among others. These, in turn, presuppose that
they must be studied by simple methods such as cause and effect, means and ends, privation and possession and so on. In all, description has three distinct parts, 1) a study, 2) subject matter and 3) manner of study.

Each thought-run here rests on these three parts. 1) a study (the interception of life by death); 2) subject-matter, death as interceptor and 3) method of study—all collected under the title of thought-runs.

The goal with virtual death in imaginative writing is to make it intelligible. I make no claim of achieving that goal here. But I think I have opened a few routes toward it.

7d. Death as a Wonder Elsewhere. Above (#-01) I spoke of the "wonders elsewhere" in the context of Imaginative Writing—not only the wonders perceived here and now but those recalled in memory and seen in the mind. One such wonder goes under the heading of "Magic Realism" and has its source in the struggle between life and death: Here is an example from ancient Chinese poet, Li Po—where "mountain" represents the eternal presence of life and the "I" as death an ultimate absence:

We sit together

the mountain and I

until only the mountain

remains.

***
8. Death of the human species. Death's final interception will eliminate the human species and possibly all life-forms. How will it happen, presupposing that there is a possibility of such event? One setting is the "heat death" of the universe. No universe, no life of any kind, no light, no sound, only silence:

*The vast majority of the universe is empty. And empty space is silent. As Cage (a composer) grew older, he expressed optimism about the future of music. He took solace in the conviction that there would always be sound. But given high standards, 'always' means every time. The laws of thermodynamics doom the universe to heat death. Everything, everywhere, will end in silence (Sorensen 290).

Another way to end human life is by way of superintelligent machines the product of developments in artificial intelligence, A. I:

Nick Bostrom, author of the book 'Superintelligence' lays out a number of petrifying doomsday settings. One envisions self-replicating nanobots, which are microscopic robots designed to make copies of themselves. In the hands of a malicious person in possession of this technology might cause the extinction of intelligent life on earth…Elon Musk recently said that artificial intelligence is 'potentially more dangerous than nukes. And Stephen Hawking…wrote that successful A.I. would be the biggest even in human history. Unfortunately, it might also be the last.' (Bilton)
NOTES

1 Email from a colleague on the a forthcoming study of death and conference on "Dying, Death and Disposal of the Body (DDD).

The "Death representations in Literature" volume is still in work. If everything goes well, it will be released by the beginning of the next year.

I will send you an e-mail to let you know. Maybe if you're passionate about 'death and dying' field/research topic, you will consider to come to our "Dying and Death in 18th-21st Century Europe" International Conference, held each year in Romania, Alba Iulia, in September. Next year, our conference will join forces with the famous DDD Conference: "Death, Dying and the Disposal of the Body (DDD12): Eastern and Western Ways of Dying and Death"

Here is the link (We are now in the process of finalizing the call for papers).

http://death-studies.ro/ddd12/

Best regards,

Adriana

2 Pete Ayrton, ed. No Man's Land. London: Serpent's Tail; Jon Glover and Jon Silkin's The Penguin Book of First World War Prose (1989); Henri Barbusse's Under Fire (1916); Erich M. Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front (1929); W. N. Barbellion writes in an extract from The Journal of a Disappointed Man (1917): "(War) is noble, filthy, great, petty degrading, inspiring ridiculous, glorious, mad, bad, hopeless yet full of hope."
WORKS CITED


Eliot, T. S. *What is a Classic?*


Levy


Robert Shapiro, *Origins: A Skeptic's Guide to the Creation of Life on Earth*


http://death-studies.ro/ddd12/

Best regards,

Adriana

