**ἀνάστασις[[1]](#footnote--1)**

“Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration…

Where the fear has gone there will be nothing.”—Frank Herbert

One of the main goals of art is to touch the emotions of the beholder; if we don’t feel anything then either the artist or the observer has failed. The subject of death is used in different forms of art and literature to incite emotion, to wrench the heart of the spectator, to *make* them feel. Some depict death with the intention of steering the emotions toward anger, hatred, or disgust, while others instead promote sorrow, grief, or pain. Authors, songwriters, screenwriters, poets, painters, choreographers, and others, use death as a tool, but as artists many have done so in a way that is frequently insightful or pleasing to the eyes and minds of their audiences.

The inspiration for Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake* was a short ballet by Mikhail Fokine called *The Dying Swan,* or sometimes simply *The Swan.* It depicts the final moments in the life of a swan. In poetry one of deaths most famous appearances is in Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s *The Lady of Shallot,* in which we see the events leading up to death. In Percy Shelley’s *To Night* we see death take on a character. In much of the music of the past and most genres of modern music, death is one of the most common themes, with songs such as *My Immortal* by Evanescence and *Whiskey Lullaby* by Brad Paisley and Allison Krauss. Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica* and Francisco Goya’s *Third of May 1808* show the horrors of death on a larger scale. In books we find it in the loss of Beth March, Matthew Cuthbert, Sheril Taggert, Boromir and Gandalf, Kelsier, Sirius Black, Albus Dumbledore, and countless others throughout written works.

Often the actual death of a character is not even necessary; we just have to believe they’re gone. We then grieve for their loss and the horror of trying to go on without them. We can then experience the joy at learning of their survival and return.

In the past fifty years this frequently-seen theme of death has experienced a new branch: repeated death and rebirth of the same character. Similar to making the audience believe someone has died and then having a great reveal of how they survived, but taking it a step further. They *did* die, they *were* gone, but they found a way to come back. This idea is not widespread yet, but it appears to be growing. One of it’s first appearances is in 1963 in the British television series *Doctor Who*. In order to keep the series fresh and new, producers decided to make it so the Doctor (the main character) could cheat death each time it came for him by becoming a new person, but retaining all of his memories and emotions. This tactic has allowed the show to last for forty-nine years and it has been renewed for a 50th next year. Each time he dies the Whovian[[2]](#footnote-0) community mourns his passing, and the loss of all the current incarnation’s quarks and catch phrases. But with this sorrow comes a hope for more wonderful adventures with an equally exciting new character, and curiosity to see what parts of his past self this new man has retained.

This theme caught on. We see the same kind of idea in various other television series, such as *Stargate SG-1*, wherein one of the prominent characters, Daniel Jackson, dies 8 times, and through various events manages to come back to life each time. He is happily alive at the end of 10 seasons and 3 movies. Another example is *Supernatural*, in which both of the main characters, Sam and Dean Winchester, dies several times. Sam expires 4 times, and Dean 20. Of Dean’s 20 deaths, he manages to die 11 of them in one episode. And if we take another look at *Doctor Who* we see that in the last three seasons they have revived their old idea and extended it to a new character, Rory Williams, who dies 8 times, 3 in one episode. At one point he is erased from existence in the universe, history, and memory. And yet he still comes back.

Though it hasn’t become widespread yet, I expect that this new genre will take root in other forms and venues of art, and it will be interesting to see the interpretation other kinds of artists give it. As our society moves into darker and more difficult times, with more wars and hardships, I believe our desire for lighter and happier art will grow. In times of ease we tend to imagine what it would be like if we lived in times of the past. Times filled with adventure and looming darkness. When such shadows are at our doorstep, however, I expect that we will yearn for the simpler times that have been, and hope for their return. I also think we will search for and desire a better and brighter new world; a world where we can overcome death and pain.

I think this new theme is largely nested in the fear of the unknown, of death and what comes with it. I’m interested to see where our budding generation of artists will take the theme of death. Instead of bringing out emotions of fear, anger, or grief at the thought of death, this new way of portraying it can inspire emotions of happiness and the hope for more life beyond death. If we can move past our fear we can become so much more as a society. As Frank Herbert wrote: “I must not fear. Fear is the mind killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain.” Where we stand now, too many dwell on their fear and forget to live. If we can let this fear of what we cannot see move through us, if we can move past it, then our society will be able to move into a new era; an age of freedom from fear and pain. That fear will no longer hold a prominent place in our society. We will be liberated, and we will remain.

Audience—Intellectuals, Artists, and Statesmen

1. Greek word anasrasis, meaning resurrection [↑](#footnote-ref--1)
2. Slang term for fans of Doctor Who [↑](#footnote-ref-0)