**ἀνάστασις[[1]](#footnote--1)**

Audience—Intellectuals and Artists

“Fear of the unknown is a terrible fear”—Joan D. Vinge

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 throughout 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 artist 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 death’s most famous appearances is in Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s *The Lady of Shallot.* In most genres of modern music death is one of the most common themes, with songs like *My Immortal* by Evanescence to *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[[2]](#footnote-0), Matthew Cuthbert[[3]](#footnote-1), Sheril Taggert[[4]](#footnote-2), Boromir and Gandalf[[5]](#footnote-3), Kelsier, Sirius Black, Albus Dumbledore, and Fred Weasley[[6]](#footnote-4), and countless others throughout written works.

In the past fifty years this frequently seen theme of death has experienced a new branch: repeated death and rebirth of the same character. This idea is not widespread yet, but it appears to be growing. It began in 1963 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 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[[7]](#footnote-5) community mourns his passing, the loss of all the current incarnations 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 held on too.

This theme caught on. We see the same kind of theme 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 he 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 death’s 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 added it to a new character, Rory Williams, who dies 8 times, 3 in one episode. And at one point he is erased from existence in the universe, history, or memory. And yet he still comes back.

I think this new theme is largely because of the fear of the unknown, of what comes with death and what comes with it. It hasn’t spread much into others forms of art yet, but I expect that it will, and I’m interested to see where such artists will take it. Instead of bringing out emotions of fear, anger, or grief, at the thought of death, this new way of portraying it inspires emotions of happiness and the hope for more life beyond death. And, after all, happiness that is known is the best kind.

1. Greek word anasrasis, meaning resurrection [↑](#footnote-ref--1)
2. *Little Women, Louisa May Alcott* [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
3. *Anne of Green Gables,* Lucy Maud Montgomery [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
4. *Atlas Shrugged,* Ayn Rand [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
5. *The Lord of the Rings,* J.R.R. Tolkein [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
6. *Harry Potter*, J.K. Rowling [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
7. Slang term for fans of Doctor Who [↑](#footnote-ref-5)