epiphany and an answer. As my mother got close to death, she told me she had many chats with the Grim Reaper herself. If I asked, she would tell me what they speak of. "Oh Tommy, don't you know we sometimes talk about you. He asks me why you haven't gone to Yosemite Park, or Barcelona or the South of France yet. He asks, exactly what are you waiting for?" Perhaps she will give me a gift from him. I am sure it would be a wristwatch which I ought to wear every day and think about time—and how it is always running out.

Artists and writers do not deny the cruel fact that life will end someday. They have the courage to realize the ugliness of death and dying, and to weave something around it to make it more beautiful. They have the good fortune to be able to write about it or act it out in public. The Oscar-winning film *All That Jazz* is about the death wish of Bob Fosse (written and directed by Fosse), a womanizing, workaholic choreographer. It made the work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross famous. A young Jessica Lange played Death and wore a see-though white silk gown and veil. Fosse, played by Roy Scheider, flirted with her the entire film until in the end she won. Death always wins. *All That Jazz* is another reminder that we will all face the Grim Reaper some day, so take some time to live life, feel joy, and create something beautiful for yourself. Death instincts will win in the end, but the life instincts can win while we are alive to feel them. This is the simple and yet vital role of the all the arts, be that architecture, film, music, literature, or painting. They give us the life instincts to marvel at and to revel in.

If you are not an artist, and do not have an outlet in which to express your grief, you must rely on the opportunity to craft a eulogy at the funeral. Make it long and heartfelt; and bring your tissues up to the podium. This is always cleansing. We can fight death by creating beauty, by witnessing beauty, or by traveling to see beauty. Either way, we are all in a battle of life against death. So I say live in beauty until the end, where finally the Grim Reaper smiles on us and wins the very last match. So win every day, feel joy every day, watch beauty every day. If you do that, it is a life well-lived, and you will be ready to finally sink into the masterpiece.

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Death, Psyche, and Evil

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There is an intrinsic relationship between the fear of mortality, our invention of the sacred, and the nightmarish history of human violence. The apprehension that we cease to exist has spawned myriad visions of afterlives, paradises, reincarnation, and divine transcendence of the flesh. Death has been denied, forgotten, and transformed from fear, despair, and horror into joyous mirages and dreams of soothing repose. Disintegration of the body, the loathing of decay, putrefaction, and defeat by death have been transmuted into divine beatification and cathartic triumph. Death has been a seduction, an erotic longing for oblivion, rebirth, and merger with God, even a satiating absorption of fear into sadistic violence.

There is no paucity of research on what people believe about death. Yet, there is a dearth of psychological study that illumines the immense intricacies of our unconscious fantasies of death and the impact of unconscious dread on our propensities for war, atrocity, and extermination of evil. We may read countless explanations of what sacred doctrine or perverse terrorist misreading inspires some to imagine that apocalyptic martyrdom leads to Paradise, but barely any psychological adumbrations of why someone might feel that he must kill and die to be loved.

We still require deeper explanations for why death can be purification, rebirth, or orgasm. It is not enough to speak literally of death, purity, or evil. When Hindus purify themselves in the fetid waters of the Ganges, one of the most polluted rivers in the world, we must understand that the act is not literal cleansing. Nor is liberation from the corpse when consumed by fire. In this case, the living body in all its functions is an impure prison of the soul, and the holocaust is release

from the cycles of birth and death. We must understand too, that the contamination of a corpse in ancient Judaism is not a realistic fear of disease. One who fails to purify himself in the proper ashes "shall be cut off from Israel" and from God (Numbers 19:13). In *The Savage in Judaism*, Rabbi Howard Eilberg-Schwartz demonstrates that in the Tanach a woman's fluids, even those in birth, are also contamination and death. Yet the circumcision of the male child purifies with blood; male menstrual blood reverses the contamination of death.

Death is still treated as though it were one specific, identifiable thing people all understand, while believing different things about it. Death is far more than it seems. To genuinely understand our attitudes toward death we must exhume what has been buried, and what we may not want to know about death. It pervades our most sacred and passionate beliefs, and compels our most sinister behavior. We must therefore dissect the fantasy, imagery, poetry, delusion, and action that embody, dissolve, transform, displace, and occlude our thoughts on death. For we may envision death not only as the end of life, but as punishment, mutilation, catastrophe, aloneness, or alienation. Also, death may be dreamt even as sleep, rest, love, embrace, the womb, rapture, purification, or vengeance.

Culture, accident, and experiences form our profoundly disparate associations, feelings, and convictions about death. What leads us to stoicism and acceptance? What wracks us with fear and loathing, gestates existential misery, turns us to religion, or leads us to apocalyptic atrocities? Why does one culture envision death as undying darkness, while another sees death as a gossamer dream. A culture may conceive death as resurrection of a divine body, and yet another may divine murder in the name of God as the gateway to paradise. The terror and trauma of a plague, cataclysm, or war may be relived in images and obsessions unconsciously gripping the psyche, unconsciously reenacted and re-inflicted to exorcise and extinguish death. Individuals within a culture may distill their own unique experiences into artistic or aberrant conceptions of death. One person may be ensconced within the cultural vision; another may transcend the confines of such conception, reach an epiphany, and depict death in innovatively creative ways. Alternatively, one may hasten death in the formation of a suicidal cult, seek to catalyze the apocalypse by dispersing and orchestrating death, or become madly obsessed with extinguishing evil. A writer may compose an epic poem that awakens others to a new shape of death, a religious reader may reinterpret sacred texts to sanctify infliction of death, or a government may institute policies that murder innocents under the auspices of piety, charity, democracy, and peace.

Death weds the sacred and our fantasies of evil. Salvation and resurrection depend upon moral demands, demarcation of good and evil, the acts and piety that divide infernal Hell from heavenly bliss. Ritual and taboo are intended to ward off evil. They establish the sacred ways of controlling, cleansing, abjuring, and warding off contagion, wickedness, danger, defilement, catastrophe, and death.

The terror of catastrophe breeds stratagems designed to isolate and defer the calamitous danger that may so easily erupt. Death is so utterly terrifying that its causes are hallucinated: a mere ray of sunlight upon the king, a misplaced petal that doesn't protect his foot from the ground, a toenail clipped at inauspicious times, the bowels relieved on impure days. A boy may die if he encounters his menstruating sister. A flood or plague may descend on a city if a woman cuts her hair on the wrong day. The causes are often imagined, sometimes approaching the symbolism and unreality of phobias and paranoia.

People then grasp at delusional means of magical control, supplication, piety, and purity. These traditional remedies, primitive science, or reasonable speculations have their foundation in terror and fantasy. Communities invent rituals that become sacred because they banish evil and death. There is an infinite repertory of apprehensive maneuvers desperately striving to avert disaster. Youths, or a goat, may be chosen to contain the defilement and evil, which is then expelled from the city. An animal may be sacrificed, while the knife is declared guilty. There are numerous, diverse rituals practiced to prevent death from raining plague, vengeance, or cataclysm.

Evil is not always a religious concept. Yet, the rationale of a moral or ostensibly secular ethi-

cal system may be permeated by fantasy and functionally sacred means of control and aversion. Evil denotes innate badness and remorseless malice. When the word "evil" is invoked, the other becomes a repository of vile intentions, not merely one adhering to a different value system, but one without humanity or compassion not as fully human and caring as oneself. The other is not a person whose beliefs are merely incorrect or ignorant, but a malign nonhuman force clamoring for death. When evil is spoken as a metaphor, the attribution of malice and hostile intent may be more diaphanous, but when invoked as innate wickedness, a theological dimension splits good and evil into rigid categories that sanctify the pure self and demonize the other who may be justly slaughtered. One kills to eradicate evil, and need feel no sadness or remorse. As a metaphor, evil is evocative. We can use the word to imagine visions of the Devil, Hell, fire and brimstone, ghosts, vampires, Claggarts, and Iagos. The metaphor can be rich, a profound evocation of our feelings and fantasies that we may consciously explore.

The linguistic machination is also psychological. Marking another as evil provides a mythic justification, the magical sound that enables people to numb their empathy toward those who deserve to die. The relegation of humanity to evil is also a psychological process, the sequestration of vile qualities from the self. The acute splitting of categorical good from evil seeks to isolate evil from the physical self. One splits malice, rage, destructiveness—all evil aspects from the conscious sense of self—and displaces them onto or into the other. One needs the other to be the visage of evil and to siphon and infuse evil elsewhere. Evil is not only drained from the self, but from one's community and God. These too must be purified, cleansed of all malicious qualities, and instilled with loving beatitude. God isn't allowed to sin, must love us; he is who we invent to declare us good, beloved, righteous, and divinely sanctioned to blight our enemies. This cannot be the rule. Not everyone perceives evil in starkly black and white terms. Not everyone is arrested in paranoid-schizoid hallucination, thrives on vengeance, or yearns for violent outlets. Here, then, is a psychology of evil, for it is terror that compels unquestionable worldviews, flight from ambiguity and unknowing, consolidation of rigid strata of good and evil, and enemies that can be killed to eradicate the relentless threat.

The terror may derive from psychic representations, the internal presences of others digested from infancy onward, and intrapsychic entities that are as ghosts and demons that plague one with fear, horror, rage, and self-loathing. These ghosts torment the psyche but may easily become the conscious ego, the sense of identity and desire. One may be scarred so profoundly that one cannot but experience the world as wicked, malignant, and persecutory. One may align oneself with the rage and self-loathing, and thereby inflict it on others to please one's ghosts, purify the self, and murder evil in the other. One can simultaneously seek to murder one's evil ghosts, and one's wicked God—the evil residue of the purified god—by killing the enemy.

There are genuinely threatening, malicious people in the world, but evil is almost always a hallucination, projection, and transference, the displacement of archaic injuries, objects, conflicts, and torment unknowingly experienced in the present as a real and external menace. There is for some a compulsion to repeat the process of splitting evil from internal presences that ghost the psyche, to then find an enemy who becomes the repository of evil, and can then be killed. The repetition may never be satisfied because no violence will ever un-haunt the psyche of its odious ghosts. One may never silence the echoes of self-loathing, or satisfy the voices that demand one's own death, no matter how repeatedly one seeks to please the voices with murder of the self in the other.

One can be spontaneously terrified into violence by reacting to a threat or a fearsome idea. Many people can be manipulated instantly and regressed to paranoid terror where the enemy is raging for one's death and must be quickly destroyed. History is rife with unspeakable and uncontainable violence erupting when communities are threatened by the fantasy of an enemy. A culture may magnify a tiny, benign minority into a homicidal threat that must be murdered to raze evil, or a leader feigning peace and piety may beguile a people with mendacious words of terror, seducing and soothing us with promises to root out and vanquish evil. Our own terror stupefies reason: it scares us away from consciousness, perception, and aware-

ness. We regress and we thus become naïve and seducible by the most horrendous violence.

Death is not merely one static fact we all comprehend, but the most elusive and intricate of symbols, a physical reality that is vastly altered and suffused with fantasy and imagination, denied and evaded in countless ways, and finally, indelibly fused to our experiences of self, the body, the divine, and our most sadistic acts of slaughter. We must illuminate the mortal terrors that send us hurtling into sacred visions and doctrines of salvation, delirious and sacred denials of death, hateful apprehensions and delusions of inhuman enemies, as well as acts of malice and slaughter.

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Death Anxiety and Threats

Experiencing My Father's Life and Illness

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The trajectory of my father's life has been handicapped by professional failures for as long as I can remember. Indeed, it has been perhaps the only recurring tragedy within our household, the one that sneaks into conversation or, in some cases, requires no words and is thus articulated by a rigid quietness every night as he prepares for the awful nightshift at a local grocery store.

He was a hard-working student at my age. He converted his years at Seton Hall University into an accounting degree—a degree he now harps on as being worthless—because of his parents' encouragement. They wanted a stable and honest career for their son, and although their intentions cannot be faulted, my father felt that the number-based environment stifled his creative tendencies and strong personality. He wanted to be a weatherman. He should have been a weatherman. But he chose accounting instead because it offered the most certain future.

My father spent several years in the accounting field before I was born, but when I was close to five years old and my sister was only two, he made the life-changing decision to shift professional gears and find something fresh and satisfying. His gamble resulted in a seven-year unemployment spell that made my graphic artist mother the sole provider for the family. Because I was so young, my mind recorded this episode in photographic fragments; I remember the stacks of classified ads he collected, the restrained but real frustration of my mother, the TV dinners he prepared when my mother worked late, his continued interest in meteorology, and his insistence that I find the career that absolutely fulfilled me. Forget money or pressure, he repeated along with my mother, be what you want and should be.

Ten years ago my father—at age forty-three—swallowed all professional pride and sought a job that would offer him consistent but modest money while he searched elsewhere for employment. He began working the night shift at a local grocery store and reluctantly fell into the routine of sleeping during the day and stocking shelves all night. A decade has passed since he started his night crew odyssey, but only two things have changed: his store and his health.

It was March 2006 when my father's appearance reflected the sickness within. He was particularly tall and lean before doctors found a tumor attached to his pancreas, but in the brief three-month period before he arrived in the emergency room, his body withered like a dying oak tree; the severity of his illness was matched only by the spectacle of his size. By the time he was admitted to the intensive care unit he had lost tremendous weight and, most strikingly, his characteristic awareness and humor. He was so ill he