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The Political Psychology of Death: Until It Do Us Part

Editor

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Author: Editor

From pop culture. Chuck Norris as Matt Hunter about Richard Lynch as Mikhail Rostov in the film *Invasion U.S.A.* (1985). “It’s Time to Die”. And to Rostov at the end of the film, “It’s Time”. And it is, as Rostov gets blown through a window in a fiery explosion courtesy of what looks like an MA161 with a custom rocket launcher and pistol grip of a Walter P38. So the relationship of Hunter and Rostov, mortal enemies, ends. Both lives over. Rostov forever over. Hunter, over for a new beginning. The relationship in Hunter’s memory beginning to ever change as well.

From higher culture. Life as relationships inevitably but often surprisingly ended by death in the political psychology of that relationship’s participants. In Fyodor Dostoevsky’s novel *House of the Dead* (1860-1862), Aleksandr Petrovich Goryanchikov is sentenced to deportation to Siberia and ten years of hard labor for ending a relationship—murdering his wife. Relationships with others from back home, within the *katorga* (penal labor camp), and with his wife are sundered and sutured. Literal and figurative death doing the parting and soldering.

In James Joyce’s short story from *Dubliners* (1914), “The Dead”, Gabriel Conroy is immersed within an annual Christmas party populated with social relationships—some deadened and divorced from any feeling, just performative ritual. He looks forward to a post-party night of live passion with his wife Gretta. But before the party dies out, Bartell D’Arcy sings “The Lass of Aughrim” leading Gretta to wistfully mourn for a former beau, Michael Furey, who, she believes, may have succumbed to an early death after singing in the rain—The Lass of Aughrim to her. The story ends with Gabriel not with a night of passion but looking out at the snow falling on living and dead alike. There are live and dead images of three people encompassing a marriage built for two.

And in Emily Dickinson’s (1890) “Because I could not stop for Death/“He kindly stopped for me-/The Carriage held but just Ourselves-/And Immortality.../We paused before a House that seemed/A Swelling of the Ground-/The Roof was scarcely visible-/The Cornice—in the Ground-/Since then – ‘tis Centuries – and yet/Feels shorter than the Day /I first surmised the Horses’ Heads /Were toward Eternity—“. Can death do us part when the relationship is with death? And is death death’s life?

Death is always with us. It cannot be otherwise. It may part some relationships but not others. Begin some relationships but not others. Death will live up to this. And death has not yet parted from scientific psychology, as paradoxical findings continue to accumulate. Sharp et al. (2019) have found that the personality trait of openness to experience declines in advance of death in late adulthood. Gasiorowska et al. (2018) have found that exposure to money minimizes reminders of mortality from leading to increased thoughts of death. McCabe & Daly (2018) have found that meeting cultural standards for valued behavior protects people from death concerns, while not meeting these standards can weaken this protection, heightening death concern. And Hodge (2018) has found that at times the dead are intuited to survive death, whereas persistent

vegetative state patients are intuited as *more* dead than the dead—matters being further complicated by conceptions of biological, metaphorical, and social deaths. Political psychology's life over its death may necessitate a resolution of when and when not death will do us part.

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Abstract/Description: This article describes interwoven complexities and psychologies of life and death in the lives of political actors.

Disciplines: Other Psychology, Philosophy, Philosophy of Science. Political Science, Other Political Science, Psychology, Defense and Security Studies, International Relations

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