The return of the dead

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The kind-hearted servant of whom you were jealous,
Who sleeps her sleep beneath a humble plot of
grass,
We must by all means take her some flowers.
The dead, ah! the poor dead suffer great pains,
And when October, the pruner of old trees, blows
His melancholy breath about their marble tombs,
Surely they must think the living most ungrateful,
To sleep, as they do, between warm, white sheets,
While, devoured by gloomy reveries,
Without bedfellows, without pleasant causeries,
Old, frozen skeletons, belabored by the worm,
They feel the drip of winter's snow,
The passing of the years; nor friends, nor family
Replace the dead flowers that hang on their tombs.
If, some evening, when the fire-log whistles and
sings
I saw her sit down calmly in the great armchair,
If, on a cold, blue night in December,
I found her ensconced in a corner of my room,
Grave, having come from her eternal bed
Maternally to watch over her grown-up child,
What could I reply to that pious soul,
Seeing tears fall from her hollow eyelids?

Charles Baudelaire

Some biographical hints that might help to understand the path I have taken in my research.

I lost my father at the age of one year and I have lived for several years (those that are fundamental to my psychic development) symbiotically with my mother. Then when I was older she got remarried and had my brother. I was just over thirty years old when my mother died in a car accident and for me it was a very painful shock. A few months later in an attempt to overcome the mourning I went in psychoanalysis. At the end of this long and psychologically tiring journey, I thought I had overcome the trauma and, as far as possible, returned back to normality.

I was wrong!

One day me and my wife were offered a trip to Egypt, which I joined enthusiastically. Egypt is a strange country with a recent history that no one is interested in. What is usually fascinating is its age-old civilization and the mighty traces that this civilization has left, the monuments, the temples, the statues, but above all the tombs, everywhere. On entering Cairo

the first thing they show you in this chaotic city are the pyramids, that is to say, gigantic graves. Then as the journey continues you have more and more the feeling of being immersed in an imposing and huge cemetery, inhabited not only by the dead - like every cemetery- but also by its cohort of gods that, being almost all destined for the dead, are the most important in the Pantheon of the country.

Once back, after the loss of a dear friend, I suddenly fell back into depression. It did not take long for me to understand that - despite the analysis - I still had not succeeded in mourning my mother's death.

Having overcome the depression, I had a dream: I was sleeping in the lower side of a bunk bed and I realized that in the upper one there was the rotten corpse of my beloved mother. Remember that Plains Indians leave their dead on a kind of pedestal. They deliver them to the weather and to the animals.

After so many years my mother was still above me, looming. It struck me that I had not let it go, and soon realized something that I had only guessed so far: my grieving process had basically failed. Technically, mine had been an incorporation rather than an internalization As if I had imprisoned her inside me in a "crypt" preventing her from taking flight. Despite its cruelty, I must admit that the dream left me with some unconscious awareness- like a revelation- which gave me some hope.

Personal experiences are, at least in my opinion, the basis of our research, and it has been years that I have been filling the holes of my psyche.

Zombies

George Romero's "Night of the Living Dead" dates back to 1968 and is inspired by Richard Matheson's story "I Am Legend" in which a mysterious virus has infected an entire continent, transforming the risen dead into cannibal murders. Since then, this figure has become a powerful part of the modern imaginary, with an endless series of literary works, comics and movies.

I want to examine three of them, which I think are very significant: World War Z; The Walking Dead and Games of Thrones.

World War Z is a 2013 movie directed by Marc Forster, and it is the adaptation of its homonym novel, dated 2006. Neither is likely to ever be considered high art, but the director's work has a slightly novel vision of the living dead, while the skilful use of the modern technology of cinema arouses considerable emotional involvement among viewers.

In fact, in World War Z, a film that seems to be built to enhance the beauty and the athletic qualities of Brad Pitt, the zombies are, compared to the norm, very different.

The story is simple: Gerry Lane (Brad Pitt) is an employee of the United Nations, at the beginning of the story he is in the car with his family in the traffic of a city that, if I remember correctly, should be Philadelphia, when suddenly chaos breaks out. Hordes of infected dead transformed by an unknown evil pounce with incredible ferocity on anyone who is on their way, biting, infecting and transforming everyone in few seconds.

Having been called upon by the government to provide his help, he agrees to return to duty and starts searching for the place of first infection. The shared hope of everyone is to find a vaccine to save the survivors from the seemingly unavoidable horrendous massacre.

I argue that this umpteenth film about zombies is remembered for two reasons:

1. Because of the mastery with which zombies are represented, they appear not only horrific, but also as beings that seem impossible to resist. Not slower and therefore more avoidable, (a motif reminiscent of medieval dance of the macabre) but fast and, at the same time equally greedy for human flesh, In addition, compared to the traditional zombies in which the transformation requires at least some time, here the metamorphosis happens almost immediately. In short, more dangerous, uncontrollable, and even more threatening.

2. For the discovery of a vaccine with staggering properties. In this film, in fact, the authors adopt a variant that makes this movie different from others of the same kind. A change to the plot that I think is very significant. That is to say, not all men are potential victims. Gerry Lane discovers that the dead in their destructive fury towards everything and everyone, seem to ignore those who are suffering from fatal diseases. As if these seriously ill people were invisible to them. In a nutshell, he senses that one can escape the fury of the dead by injecting a lethal poison and then immediately afterwards, the antidote, so as to survive. On discovery of this kind of vaccine, humanity (since no American movie can do without a happy ending) will head towards victory in this terrible battle.

At least that is what the film suggests to us.

In the TV series "The Walking Dead" the type of zombie matches with the ones invented by Romero, slow, also obsessed with human flesh and only sensitive to noise. Here again, most of humanity is infected with a terrible virus that has turned it into an immense army of zombies. Few survive. Generally, the survivors organize themselves into various type of groups and gangs. The groups are often unknown to each other, or are more often locked into murderous struggles, for food, water, or simply for power.

In my opinion, the long TV series can be divided into two strands, which appear chronologically one after the other. In the first, the tremendous struggle is directly against the living dead, accompanied by dramas within the group due to that this obsessive and threatening presence. Threats everywhere, and also unexpected moments, sometimes of courage, and even cowardice or indecorous escapes when facing danger. These acts seem perfectly justified by the hellish situation in which the survivors are immersed.

All this is coloured by true massacres that the survivors carry out against these (once human) beings.

This carnage often creates tremendous conflicts of conscience, especially in the first part especially when, as sometimes happens, the infected people are relatives, friends, or simply people with whom any kind of interaction was once made. In these cases, as the protagonists learn at their own expense, compassion or simply humanity must be banished, or at least suppressed. Destruction of the brain of the dead, with any sort of a weapon, becomes a sort of categorical imperative in order to prevent them from turning into human flesh-thirsty monsters. Even companions, once bitten and immediately aware of their doom, during that short and dramatic interval that precedes the transformation, beg their companions or whoever surrounds them at that moment, to be "killed" in the prescribed manner. It seems that their real terror is not death - to which they seem, if not used, clearly resigned - but metamorphosis. Perhaps this terror, in those periods of great religiosity that have characterized long periods of our history, is the same type of terror that characterized the faithful near death: that of being condemned to hell.

Death here takes on a particular aspect: it is not feared as much the living dead are. And the sentence "rest in peace", commonly expressed in every funeral, assumes, in this case, its full meaning. These representations tell us that there is something "worse than death".

The other narrative thread follows the first. While in the first phase the main theme revolves around zombies, where life is a continuous struggle to defence against their attacks, in the second phase it is the gangs, often formed by ferocious criminals, from which it is necessary for the survivors to protect themselves at any cost. In this second phase, the living dead slide from their central role and are almost confined in the background. This despite the fact that it is still them and their animalistic ferocity that forces the survivors to behave with such brutality!

Sometimes, very occasionally, they take on the appearance of unconscious victims, slightly worthy of some mercy.

Even if from the background, their terrifying presence remains responsible for the collapse of civilization in this world. The habit to kill has so profoundly undermined the psyche of all the protagonists, that even the purported heroes of this story are not exempt from extreme aggression and violence. But then again, in order to survive in such a world, it is necessary to know how to kill, and not only once but continuously, obsessively. The living ones gather around scattered small groups immersed in an ocean of living dead and everyone has tried in vain to send back in the world of the dead dozens if not hundreds of zombies. But, as the series teaches, it is a vain attempt: it seems that every massacre that the survivors operate is completely useless. Like holding back the tide with a broom. The number of undead seems to be endless and the battle never ends.

I believe that the whole story should be seen and interpreted as a kind of nightmare, from which one cannot get out. Or as the re-launch of a video game, in which a paranoid obsession to shoot down all assailants prevails.

Moreover, the vastness of the representations of this nightmare and their enormous diffusion is - in my opinion - explained as an enormous difficulty of the modern world to relate not so much with death but essentially with the dead.

There is, however, a third type to consider, a long and articulated saga, from this point of view slightly different from the others because it is not centred exclusively on the "undead"; but perhaps for this reason it is even more significant: Game of Thrones.

The story is very intriguing and also very complex, but in some ways it can be summed up as a gigantic and ruthless struggle for power between contenders, helped from time to time by the various people that inhabit the so-called "Seven Kingdoms". Here too (with some distinctions that lead us to disambiguate - even if with great difficulty - the protagonists from the antagonists) the fight is conducted by all parties with ruthless violence. The world is pictured as gloomy and morally bankrupt, and as a place where it is difficult to glimpse a semblance of resolution, or at least of hope.

Alongside these power struggles that, in their vicissitudes and how they have been realized, have long captured the attention of millions of spectators, there is another narrative strand seemingly parallel to the first. In the sense that, ultimately, it could also not be included in the general narration. I mean that its absence could go unnoticed by the viewer, now perfectly engrossed in progress of the other fascinating stories. Yet it has a very important value.

What is it about?

Far in the north, in a world of cold and frost, a giant ice dam has been built since time immemorial and, according to those who erected it, has the task of defending all seven

kingdoms from a very serious threat posed by a mysterious population ready to invade and destroy the whole kingdom.

This population, headed by a leader, and maybe even by a hierarchy of warriors, is entirely made up of undead people.

The threat is so serious that those who have always defended the barrier are a sort of warrior monks, subject to a strict discipline, (every slightest disobedience can be punished with death) and ready to sacrifice their lives to prevent invasion. All of them living behind the barrier are, in fact, aware of the seriousness of the situation. It is no longer about who will conquer the throne, but about the very survival of the whole kingdom of men. The Undead are going to invade and occupy the space of the living. But still it does not seem that this danger, though looming, can distract the people of the seven kingdoms from the bloody struggle they are involved in.

Each of these pieces, though indirectly, provides us with a particular way of interpreting a common theme. Injecting a deadly poison as a solution to the tremendous threat of the dead, as Gerry Lane suggests in "World War Z" - I think that symbolically it means to assume a death so far denied. A denial that somehow could be the direct cause of the ferocity of the dead and their desire for revenge. "Game of Thrones" imagines a world in which the struggle for power is so extreme that men forget their essential relationship with existence, while "The Walking Dead" is the most pessimistic and hopeless work of the three. It may also be the closest to how we nowadays establish our relationship with the dead.

The selection I have made of these three pieces (one movie and two TV series) represents a small part of the rich and seemingly never-ending zombie[1] genre. There are so many films, stories and comics revolving around this theme that inevitably lead us thinking that it is a true indicator of our need to target the dead, together with the consequent general malaise related to them.

Moreover, it must be noted that in the first two representations the origin of the disease that turned men into zombies must be traced back to some virus (possibly the result of horrifying or simply failed experimentations) with the emphasis on (I must say a very weak) sense of collective guilt. Conversely, in "Game of Thrones" there is no guilt: there is only living dead animated by a ruthless hatred towards humans. And it is the same hatred that apparently distinguishes all the dead beyond the barrier. As if death were a curse that pushes all those affected (at least in those lands) to strongly hate the living and to punish them simply for their crime of being alive.

Which – at least sociologically – raises some questions that require some explanation.

The Revenants

The return of the dead' theme is not a modern prerogative, it is very old and perhaps universal. Also, it represents a chapter of the general relationship, present in every social grouping, between the living and the dead. In a nutshell, it is the eternal question of what should be done about the dead.

This problem, albeit in different ways, somehow affects all cultures. Each culture takes "care", "cultivates" the dead, and it does so with a degree of ambivalence whose intensity can vary accordingly. One thing is certain: ethno-anthropological research has shown that the intense bond that binds people of a culture to their deceased runs parallel to a fear of them.

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1 We should actually add also vampires to the list

And among these mortal dreads, the main one (although of course it does not include all the deceased) is that of their return.

The same research informs us that these cultures adopt particular systems and rituals to exorcise this frightening possibility, since apparently the dead can return and not always with good intentions.

Jean-Claude Schmitt, in a rightly famous work (Schmitt, 1994) , deals precisely with the theme of "the returning dead" that he calls with a French term difficult to translate, "les revenants". In this fascinating work, he argues that both the imaginary of death and in a particular the imaginary of the returning dead are an essential part of the magic-religious set of beliefs of every society. This belief naturally takes different forms, depending on the social group. His work specifically concerns the Christian West and in particular that long period commonly called the Middle Ages.

In fact, examples of the returning dead can be found almost everywhere in the entire Western "literature"[2]. In the Bible we can mention Saul who, through the intercession of the Pythoness, recalls Samuel from the world of the dead, asking him to reveal his destiny. The episode in many ways resembles Necromancy, strongly condemned in the Bible, and Jean-Claude Schmitt assures us it is the only instance. But if revenants are rare in the Bible, they are not so rare in medieval times.

On the contrary!

Jean-Claude mentions Saint Augustine, and how, although on one hand he denies the possibility of the dead to live amongst the living people, on the other hand he sees in the angels the power of mediation conferred by God, whereby by virtue of this power, they show men the images of those related to them. What Augustine calls image resembles through and through the notion of a ghost, that is, of an immaterial being that manifests itself with a "mask" representing the effigy of the one who died.

But soon this notion in the medieval world will be flanked by a different idea: those who return from the afterlife acquire more and more a corporeality, that is, they take on the "bodily" features of when they were alive. No more ghosts or shadows like those that Odysseus encounters on his travel to the underworld of Hades. Those same shadows that assume their pristine fatness as they approach the sacrificial blood, not anymore beings composed of flesh and blood.

An idea that therefore belongs deeply to Christian culture.

Remember that Christ did resurrect with his body, and it is precisely by exhibiting his body of flesh and blood to the sceptical Thomas that he unequivocally demonstrated his return to life. And, as is known, according to the prophecy, at the end of time people will resurrect "with their own bodies". Perhaps to establish the lack of distinction in the soul-body dichotomy or because they to have not yet fully understood the idea of soul that later will be better defined.

The revenants will continue to manifest themselves in the long medieval period, arousing, in the case of the saints, authentic hopes or otherwise tremendous fears. Jean-Claude Schmitt claims that from the eleventh to the twelfth century there is a turning point which is very significant. Not only do the apparitions of the dead increase, but also that they manifest more often in groups.

It seems - according to the scholar - that it was a Norman reporter who, while writing a story about the Normans, first described of the chilling appearance of a "troop of the dead" or

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2 As literature is intended broadly speaking books and reports of that time.

even called "of wild hunters", made up of a large mass of "living dead people", armed with weapons, even riding horses, and who, at least in the opinion of the chronicler, appear aggressive and dangerous. A pack that appear to be demons until the reporter recognizes the faces of people he used to know, and realizes they are dead people.

Well, this army of the dead is very similar to the army that in Game of Thrones threatens the world of the living. No more ghosts but groups of dead beings, moved by hatred towards the living. The Norman reporter seems the first to have witnessed the vision of those whom we will then improperly call "zombies".

The grieving process

The grieving process introduced by Sigmund Freud in the common discourse has been widely used and trivialized, taking on different meanings. A seemingly serious version of the Italian proverb "chi muore giace e chi vive, si dà pace" (those who die lay , and those who stay will find some peace) is prevalent. But the grieving is a long and difficult process of which there has been much discussion, especially in the psychoanalytic world.

For the Viennese master, the grieving process initially manifests itself with a lack of interest in the outside world that derives from the loss of the object to which one was affectively linked. All the mourner's energy seems absorbed by pain and memories, until the Ego is confronted with the dilemma: to decide to follow the lost object (follow it in death) or to continue to live on, by breaking the link with it. In this latter case, the grief is processed, otherwise in the former case we speak of pathological grief. Here, as a consequence, ambivalences (unavoidable for psychoanalysis) will arise – followed by guilt trips or better re-morses – that prevent the natural success of the process itself.

A more fleshed out is the position of Freud's brilliant disciple Melanie Klein, who insists more than her teacher on the ambivalent aspect of any affective relationship. The loss would trigger early and ambivalent relationships that involve the subject, a re-emerging of hatred followed by a feeling of triumph at the announcement of death that would exacerbate the consequent and inevitable feelings of guilt. The targets of this unresolved ambivalence would turn into ruthless persecutors, and this process would prevent the necessary detachment from the dead.

Within this dichotomy the solutions are structured – essentially defensive – by the culture, every type of culture (as the anthropology has shown us) in order to solve the problem. The intention is to systematize what is found to be useful in leading the dead to peacefully separate themselves from the living. In other words, to institutionalize a psychologically valid system that convinces" the dead to accept their new condition without further involvement of those affected by the loss. In a nutshell, a system that eliminates the fear of persecution among the living.

In his impressive work on the anthropology of death, Louis-Vincent Thomas documents in great details the systems adopted by the various cultures (in particular in the African world) to console the living and reassure the dead. In examining them he emphasizes: "... the surprising complexity, the astonishing richness of the means designed to organize condolences, the fight against the pain of separation and the anguish of death: beliefs, thought systems, liturgies, rites, the techniques to find the dead and look for what the living can benefit from this new status, are composed according to cultural areas". In these areas Thomas tells us "... the imaginary field favours the symbolic language, accepts death in order to transcend it, turns the

deceased into an alter ego, refuses to dichotomize in an absolute way the world of living beings with that of the dead"(Thomas, 1975, p. 524).   So – although the scholar himself does not seem to agree that much – in denying separation - at least the definitive one- we end up denying death as well. Then, only oblivion will eventually let the dead drift definitively away from our lives, but then the symbolic instruments will have controlled if not completely deprived them of their power. (Both in a positive and negative sense, both for saints and demons).

Always of course if symbolic systems work!

Christian culture is not very different. Jean-Claude Schmitt tells us that the orientations of Christian culture towards the dead are widely built in the notion of memoria, which basically had a different meaning from what we attribute to it today, in fact, it was aimed only at the deceased. In fact, it was an exquisitely liturgical memory. The names of the passed away, at least those worthy of mention, were included in the so-called memorial books, libri memoriales, in the necrologies, or in monastery and convent obituaries. Those people were remembered in a particular way during Masses that were especially celebrated for their salvation. According to the author, these ceremonies had a dual function: a manifest and a latent function. Ostensibly it was a way to recall all those worth remembering and commemorating according to the community. However, the French scholar highlights that the true purpose, the real latent function of this so-called "memory", was also that of being able to separate in a psychologically useful way the living and the dead.

Now, let us remember that the Christian afterlife was tripartite. At the two opposite poles there is Hell and Paradise and in between the extraordinary invention of Purgatory.

It took several centuries, from the III to the end of the XII century for Purgatory to become fully integrated into Christian dogma (Le Goff, 1985, p. 84). "It was formed at the beginning in practice: prayers for the dead, and all the acts for the salvation of the dead always called the suffrages". It was in fact in the IV century AD that Christians – as Jacques Le Goff (Le Goff, 1981) explains – still not convinced by eschatological horizons, began to reflect upon the situation of those souls dwelling in that suspended time between individual death and final judgment: based on some reflections of the Fathers of the Church, they concluded that the souls of certain sinners could be saved precisely in this period of time, after having succeeded in some very tormented trial. Salvation, or at least the length of the sentence, could be determined by the behaviour of the living. By appropriate acts every believer would allow the remission - partial or total - of the dead's sins.

This extraordinary invention had some surprising consequences: on one hand it allowed the religious to partly, even if only minimally, substitute divine power - instead, their prayers and behavior were able to change divine judgment. On the other hand, this allowed them to maintain almost constant contact with their loved ones, giving them the intimate illusion of never have been abandoned, though they actually keep the dead distant from themselves by placing them in far and different space and time from which they could not return. This way the inevitable feelings of guilt would dim, the fear of retaliation would be dispelled, and finally the living would have been allowed to slowly and smoothly forget all those who died. Thus, time was allowed, without great drama, to dissolve their memory in the river of oblivion. This system, in an apparently paradoxical way, revealed the true function of "memory" or at least of that memory: forgetfulness. Meanwhile, the Church, through its functions, and with the help of specialists of symbols related to this important function, probably in perfect (at least supposed) good faith, assured a guaranteed "everlasting " memory of the deceased.

This new representation of the afterlife was accompanied by the institution of the feast of the dead and also by the collocation of cemeteries around the parish church. The function of intermediation between the dead and the living made the ecclesiastical system even more essential for the religious, and, by consequently made dispelling these beliefs even more difficult.

Sometimes this technique, which was intended to first bring peace and then aid forgetting, would not work perfectly; some of the dead prevented the "grieving process" from working, but most importantly the system which had worked well enough for so long began to be seen to have some limitations. And this happened at the same time when Purgatory entered into the Church dogma for the first time.

The transition to modernity

This change (Cavicchia, 2007) has taken place on various levels, and often over the same period of time:

1. new orientation towards the past;
2. collapse of the ritual;
3. individualisation;
4. inevitability of death.

Time

Nowadays, there are many studies on the diversity in the construction of time in the Western world and all of them agree that this culture reverses a millenary custom. It is known that all traditional societies are oriented towards their past, drawing strength and meaning from an original time when what is essential for the existence of men has already been accomplished. The re-proposition of this primordial time (which in essence means annulled time) is the task of the traditional man and the cult of ancestors is a direct and logical consequence. In these societies time appears collapsed, which allows for easy cohabitation between the living and the dead.

On the contrary, modernity – as is unanimously known – is projected into the future to find its full realization. The idea of progress (even if now it is in crisis) is consistent with this new orientation in the history of humanity. The consequence is devaluation of the past, including a devaluation of those who have built this past, that is to say past generations. The dead count for less and genealogies have only a very fatuous charm.

If we add to this the modern speed of change or rather its acceleration, which makes the identifications of the past very quickly obsolete, everything contributes to relegate those who have preceded us to a grey limbo, little visible, or at least with unclear outlines.

The Rite

As for rite, it goes hand in hand with the spread of secularization: the more plausibility of religious responses loses ground, the more credibility is lost in the rites of which religion has had a quasi-monopoly up to now. The secular rituals that still exist, despite efforts, do not convince the vast majority of Western populations so that they feel no longer able to cry

credibly over their dead. After all, what the critics of modernity still do not understand is that the fracture between the two worlds (traditional - modern) has been very deep and that modern orientations or new rituals are not yet able to replace the institutionalized and well rooted-in models, as we have seen with Purgatory.

The Individual

I would not like to dwell so much on the issue of individualisation more than I have already. What I would like to stress here is that the more modern man feels and realizes himself as an individual, the more he will tend to personalize, that is, privatize his meaning. To reject the "liturgy" that etymologically means "the work of the people". This means that each individual starts to manage their losses by not fully sharing others' meanings, and this inevitably creates isolation from society and a consequent loss. Moreover, individualisation means the search for autonomy, in the sense that each person (at least on paper) tends to choose and construct their own destiny and this aspiration has a very explicit meaning: the rejection of fathers – excluding the case of their symbolic elimination, reading it in psychoanalytic terms.

And fathers represent the past, as has always been the case since the dawn of time - just think of the widespread diffusion of ancestor worship in every society. On the other hand, there is a price to pay for freedom.

Death as a definitive end

Even if not completely internalized by everyone, the awareness of the inevitability of our end is slowly becoming the way – especially in certain more cultured segments of the Western population. This idea inflicts a death blow on the founding belief of Christianity and its ritual systems adopted so far, with some success. in fact they all presupposed an idea of survival that is today declared non-rational and therefore totally illusory. Dichotomization (the two worlds, separate but contiguous) is no longer possible, the passage has closed, and the world of the dead is only a melancholy world inhabited by memories.

Someone said that the sunset of rituality and this new conviction has exacerbated the fear of death in us as modern people. I cannot respond with adequate certainty to this statement; I just note that the daily worry of archaic cultures to respond to death and properly manage their deaths, makes me think that the thought if not the terror of dying was very relevant. And that in our world probably – as Paul Yonnet states with convincing arguments – death, not being daily visible as it was in societies prior to ours, would instill less fear(Yonnet, 2014). Historically, infant and maternal mortality rates were very high. Until the beginning of the 1900s, the death of one or more children was still very common and all family members in every age group were used to dealing with the dead.

The four points briefly analyzed mark the difference between two worlds, or better two cultures, in many ways opposed to each other: a culture that canonizes or sanctifies the dead, shaping itself in their memory based on received customs and ideas, and a culture that in the name of the new, the fascination, the unexpressed, but also based on individual freedom, refuses links with tradition, denies the past holds the meaning of life, and therefore rejects any (simplified) mixture with those belonging to the past.

This attitude towards the dead made Louis-Vincent Thomas write these significant words: "It is to be expected that the dead will be pushed to take revenge, eventually disturbing the unconscious of their imprudent survivors"(Thomas, 1975, p.522).

Someone has written that the dead who are no longer addressed die twice, but that is not true. It is not true because "Dying twice does not mean strengthening of the status of the dead, but rather, the fact of keeping him present, "not really dead" (Higgins, 2004, p. 1643). In short, the desymbolization carried out in this difficult passage prevents, hinders or delays the grieving process, and makes it possible for the dead to become dangerously "not really dead".

So, the dead condemned to stay in this intermediate time, because no one is able to collocate them in a plausible home anymore, can once again demand it!

Otherwise they get infuriated!

But the solution is not restricted to the behaviour of the individual, the grieving process is a work that, in order to bear fruit, must first of all become a fundamentally symbolic collective response to the losses shared by all or almost all, or rather deeply and collectively internalized. Ten men are needed to recite Kaddish in the Jewish community during the mourning. At present, we should need to take back the past and our ancestors who built it, to possibly try to be proud of our genealogies (which we mean, are those that also found our identity), to develop a new Purgatory or its successor, which naturally has to be credible, meaning in harmony with the new values and the new knowledge that modern times absolutely expect.

The Collective memory

This general vision must be accompanied by the historical circumstances which are limited to the 20th century and which have aggravated, or even brought the transition to a conclusion: I am referring to the two World Wars which caused bloodshed first in Europe and then worldwide.

I recently came across a good historical work by two French scholars, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, on the First World War. The work is entitled 14-18, Retrouver la Guerre (Audoin-Rouzeau & Becker, 2000) and is a vivid documentary on the First World War, with a closer look at the French side.

After reminding us of the statistics (10 million deaths and huge numbers of injured) of the horrific violence involving almost the entire Western world, the two authors face the problem of post-war mourning.

A particular grieving process because – they rightly say – it is a specific type of mourning since the dead were mostly the youngest men in society[3]

This unusual massacre has ended up reversing the normal order of the succession of generations and has done so in a very short space of time, preventing any form of understanding and adaptation to this sudden and tragic change. And this has been a tremendous shock that took us a while to understand in all its gravity. A shock which was felt all the more because, paradoxically, at that time, there had been a drop in the mortality rates of the young.

What was missing, moreover, from those who had suffered such a sudden and painful loss, was the lack of a body, the body of those who had died far away and who were often irrecoverable because they were unrecognizable. This lack prevented the survivors from practicing the so-called piety for the dead, that is, those rites that have always been practiced for

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3 France witnessed more than 600.000 war victims and 400.000 war invalids.

the body of the dead, and that were able to pacify the dead and help the death's metabolization. It is with the corpse and through ritual treatment of it that the symbolic elaboration begins.

Someone is right to say that the distinction between the animal and human world is precisely the treatment of the bodies of the dead. Let us remember Patroclus who, in the form of a ghost, reproaches Achilles for not having yet provided for his funeral ceremony, and how Priam humiliates himself in front of Tethys 'son in order to have the body of Hector, the most loved of his numerous offspring, and to be able to give him what is still called "an honourable burial".

When Achilles is moved with pity by the tears and petitions of this old father and personally returns the body of the Trojan hero, Priam begins the rites of condolences. Only at the end of the complex ten day ceremony does the king of Troy feel that he has fulfilled his duty towards his dead son and has set for posterity the trail for his glorious past, which relieves him and all his companions from pain[4].

On the other hand, the lack of a body would have meant that there was a concrete and very real threat of immediate and almost inevitable anonymity. The prospect for all those who had suffered a loss is that their children would become unidentified dead (deprived not only of life but also of their name) what the Greeks called nonumnoi: The Unnamed dead tragically delivered to immediate oblivion.

The authors posit that their research has shown a widespread sense of guilt in the generation too old to fight and that therefore had to resign themselves to seeing their children die. The death of an adult child is not only perhaps the most painful loss that can be conceived, but it becomes even more unbearable when it is accompanied by guilt.

Rudyard Kipling, who lost a son in the First World War, depicts the feeling of guilt with particular effectiveness in a very short poem in 1919 in which he lets his deceased son speak.

> If any question why we died,
> tell them, because our fathers lied.

Someone with a touch of malice coined the term "Abraham's Complex" referring to the sacrifice of Isaac, advancing with this definition the hypothesis of a desire of fathers to eliminate their children.

Well, according to the authors of the work, these conditions have made the "work of mourning" very difficult.

In 1918/19 Abel Gange made a film that in many ways will remain in the whole history of cinematography. The film is entitled "J'accuse" and foreshadows "our living dead".

The protagonist, a soldier and poet named Jean Diaz, is being driven mad by the war. He is hospitalized, escapes from hospital, reaches his village and tells the villagers of a dream. In a battlefield cemetery with reversed wooden crosses, a huge black cloud rises from the bottom, and ghostly figures emerge from the ground. "They are wrapped in crumbled bandages, some limp, others blindly wander with their arms raised, others still stagger like Frankenstein's monster. All of them leave the battlefield and follow the country lanes to their villages. What they want is to see if their sacrifice has been in vain"(Winter, 1998, p. 27).

They will naturally be disappointed!

Later Gange resumed the theme using a resumption of a march of victory made by the victorious Allied army accompanied by the most important authorities of the time: and while

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4 Patroclus appears in a dream to Achille reclaiming his missing "honourable burial".

the soldiers parade under the Arc de Triomphe to celebrate the victory, the army of the dead march above it.

The film is a prefiguration of what will happen in the following decades. The historian Jay Winter, to whom I owe these precious indications, in a fine work on mourning and memory, holds that in countries devastated by war the shock of the conflict was so profound that - in his opinion - the world of the living should have taken into account the dead that would have somehow invaded it. To confirm his theory, he analyses two phenomena that characterized the decades following the First World War: the art of that time with the quite obsessive representation of the return of the dead, and the spread of spiritualism like wildfire. That was an incredibly widespread phenomenon that significantly involved all the layers of the population of that time, even the most culturally different.

After the carnage of the First World War came the Second World War and the horror of Nazi extermination camps and Soviet gulags: together with the tragic lack of unknown and unburied dead bodies (when not reduced to "smoke in the air") and the consequent impossibility of adequate ritual. Until the end of the 50s and 60s (think of the death of one of the greatest mass killer in the history, Joseph Stalin) there was a sort of "affective traffic jam", an inability to recover the dead and properly place them in a collective memory to then be able to let them go.

Then inevitably – we should no longer be surprised – came the revenants, a perfect representation of our current deficiencies and fears!

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