



TYPE: Article

Title: Dead Man

Author(s): C Jason Lee

Source: Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory (JCRT)

Published by: Whitestone Publications

Stable URL: <https://jcrt.org/archives/03.2/lee/>

DOI (newest version): [10.17613/2yz0y-2qg09](https://doi.org/10.17613/2yz0y-2qg09)

Copyright © held by the author(s). All rights reserved. This text may be used and shared in accordance with the fair-use provisions of U.S. copyright law. Any use of this text in other ways requires the consent of the author and the publisher, the *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, and must cite publication in this journal.

<https://jcrt.org/copyright/>



Lee - Life after death, or death as life? Dead Man, postmodernism, and ontology - JCRT 3.2

Life after death, or death as life? *Dead Man*, postmodernism, and ontology

C. Jason Lee

University of Central Lancashire

The question of the meaning of human existence in the totality of Being, this fundamental question of philosophy, gains its true and practical importance through man's total discovery of death."¹ Only through death does life take on significance but, for many, the very fact of death removes the significance of life altogether. For Baudrillard "death is meaningless, civilised life as such is meaningless".² He writes that 'ours is a culture of death' and contemporary culture is formed out of an attempt to dissociate life and death. The dead have been excluded, unlike in the 'primitive' mind where the dead are part of the social, as in the Jarmusch film *Dead Man* (1996) Baudrillard's division of life and death can be questioned for not only does one involve the other but they can occur simultaneously in the same being as the fake William Blake shows in *Dead Man*. Baudrillard writes the repression of death in contemporary society leads to the repressive socialisation of life.³ The debate surrounding screen violence continues unabated, male violence along with female beauty being the most revered elements in American culture.⁴ In the majority of feature films male protagonists, other than in rare exceptions such as *Thelma & Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991), are shown to be in control of death. In the film to be analysed here, despite the protagonist being a male killer, his control over his own death and that of others is questioned, as is death itself.

Here, this psychology of self-knowledge is 'self-deception' but utopia and dystopia exist concurrently and paradox rules. There are parallels with Eastern philosophy and the film as a whole challenges 'Western' notions of the real, and the importance of reason. The character William Blake confirms the idea that the primary want of the human race is immortality. However, on a conscious level this is not his motive, as he wanders from place to place, his continual meetings with and departures from 'Nobody,' being seemingly random, his desire being merely to find some food, the desire for tobacco being uncannily presented as the main desire of Nobody and many of the other characters. It appears that he is now staying alive and shooting those that approach him due to the influence of Nobody and he chooses the identity Nobody which has given him that of a revolutionary poet over that which he has previously built for himself, a subservient accountant. His new identity drives him on to attain greater mortality, not necessarily immortality.

Nietzsche saw art as redemption via illusion⁵ and these representations of death can lead to redemption, something that in *Dead Man* takes on a new significance with the image of an icon made from the head of a sheriff and sticks, commented on by one of the paid killers before he crushes the head below his foot like a melon. This defacing of the corpse shows Cole's total hatred of the law but it evokes such horror in his colleague, Conway, revealing that 'the corpse may have

¹Jacques Choron, *Death and Western Thought*, trans. Ilsa Barea (London: Collier Books, 1963), p. 27.

²Max Weber, quoted by Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Iain Hamilton (London: Sage, 1993), p. 163

³Weber., pp. 127,147,131,130,133.

⁴Elizabeth Wurtzel, 'Murder in the doll's house', *The Guardian Weekend*, May 9 1998, p. 16.

⁵In his earlier work *The Birth of Tragedy*, . Later, he changed his view, believing that there were more virtues than just those of the aesthetic. See Hollingdale in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 32.

more authority, than any other political body'.⁶ This fascination with the artistic use of corpses of animals and humans was commented on as early as Aristotle.⁷

Maraux's quotation relates to Blake travelling with himself as a dead man, even before he is wounded. The philosophical notion that death is with us all from birth is exemplified plus the fact that his parents have both recently 'passed on', as he puts it, and his fianc'e has left him, are losses which indicate he is carrying the burden of many forms of death. Thus, while the quotation could be referring to the later situation of Nobody, who accompanies Blake, it also refers to himself. Heidegger's dilemma of understanding Being out of being, is solved in the film through the death of others. Blake confirms his value through his killing and he gives value to others as if, with Sartre, there is the belief in consciousness as a consequence of the existence of these objects.⁸

3. As with death, in *Dead Man* notions of the self are ambiguous. 'Alienation of man is a thing of the past: now man is plunged into homeostasis by machines.'⁹ It is in the town of Machine that William Blake begins to be reduplicated. Blake is never self-aware but he is also a mystic being totally rid of self; he is neither dead or alive, but absolutely alive and immortal. The dead, the shadow to Blake, the spectator, may then become alive through the contemplation of his lack of self, the film working as a purgation, not only in relation to Blake's characterisation, but in its very structure going against the manner in which life is traditionally recreated or interpreted.
4. According to Choron, only since eschatological thinking began did awareness of an end to life occur. The cyclical nature of part of the narrative of *Dead Man* suggests that the meaning within the film can be related to 'primitive' thinking concerning life and death, which is cyclical.¹⁰ William Blake, not the poet but an accountant from Cleveland, travels to the town of Machine to work for Dickinson's Metal Works but finds his job gone. In self-defence, Blake kills Dickinson's son while with the man's ex-fianc'e. He is then accompanied by a Native American called Nobody, who believes he is with the real William Blake, to the lake that will take him to the next world, crossing the mirror of water into the life of his death which is identical to his birth. The Native American Nobody tells him that he will return to where he came from, the source of the all. Along the way he kills a number of white men, the 'Indian' saying that he now has the poetry of the gun. This list of events denies the repetition in the film that gives it both a linear and cyclical format and adds to the hyperreal quality. Throughout the film it is uncertain whether William Blake, played by Johnny Depp, learns anything and therefore it would be misleading to state that it is a simple rites of passage film. Blake's understanding is not in the form of enlightenment but in the form of depletion.¹¹ In this he is a type of anti-hero, almost unaware of his actions and the film as a whole challenges some of the main myths that dominate this genre.
5. Through cryogenics, issues surrounding abortion and euthanasia and other debates concerning medical ethics, death is one of the most important issues in contemporary American culture. However, it might still be argued that there is a certain 'denial of death', Ernest Becker's 1973 book of the same title still having relevance. Becker claims the human race wants to worship the hero who has encountered death, thus bringing liberation from fear as

⁶Goodwin, p. 9.

⁷Goodwin., p. 7.

⁸John Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (London: Penguin, 1975), p. 497.

⁹Wurtzel, p. 16

¹⁰Choron, p. 25.

¹¹Kent Jones, review of *Dead Man*, *Cineaste*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1996, p. 45.

the taboo has been crossed and the hero survives.¹² William Blake is a form of hero and *Dead Man* is concerned with a preparation for death. I shall argue that the film is set within a mythical realm, akin to dream, rather than in any actual historical period, although it is obvious that generally the period is the latter half of the nineteenth century, an age in which, Becker maintains, religion and philosophy begin to be once more obsessed with ideas surrounding death and the after-life. The Blake of the film is the equivalent of Blake the poet's Spectre, the nineteenth-century doppelgänger, whom Blake the poet identifies with rationalism.¹³ It is this rationalism that is broken down in the film, dogma being anathema.

6. Rheingold held the cause of "death anxiety" to be "mother deprivation."¹⁴ The main representation of the indigenous in the film can be read as a type of mother, here termed the 'Death Mother', but the Blake of the film's initial anxiety is about life. Freud's emphasis on castration anxiety relates to a general loss and fear of death. With reference to Otto Rank and Heidegger, Becker makes the point that anxiety in life is linked to death anxiety, the latter causing a person to become as though dead, yet still alive.¹⁵ Blake is overtly neurotic during the train journey to Machine, but, 'a full apprehension of man's condition would drive him insane'.¹⁶ Despite, or perhaps because of his rationality, he is predominantly oblivious to his situation, and this unawareness allows him to be led by his 'Death Mother' through the womb of rebirth. According to Rank, neurosis is a way of avoiding misery because reality is misery but by being reborn one sees a greater reality.¹⁷ Blake is constantly being reborn and death becomes a form of liberation, an embodiment of 'sanity' in comparison to the lifeless living, the 'insanity' of his life before he meets Nobody. Death that is outside the state challenges power and this may explain the mass cultural obsession 'wielded by great murderers, bandits or outlaws'.¹⁸ Death can be subversive, if it is outside the control of the state, but death in *Dead Man* is even more subversive, given that it is even outside the control of its main perpetrator.
7. Blake's lack of awareness is of vital importance to the film's iconoclasm, which essentially reveals the myth of self-knowledge. Here, this psychology of self-knowledge is 'self-deception' but utopia and dystopia exist concurrently and paradox rules. There are parallels with Eastern philosophy and the film as a whole challenges 'Western' notions of the real, and the importance of reason. The character William Blake confirms the idea that the primary want of the human race is immortality. However, on a conscious level this is not his motive, as he wanders from place to place, his continual meetings with and departures from 'Nobody,' being seemingly random, his desire being merely to find some food, the desire for tobacco being uncannily presented as the main desire of Nobody and many of the other characters. It appears that he is now staying alive and shooting those that approach him due to the influence of Nobody and he chooses the identity Nobody which has given him that of a revolutionary poet over that which he has previously built for himself, a subservient accountant. His new identity drives him on to attain greater mortality, not necessarily immortality.

The psychotherapists are caught up in contemporary culture and are forced to be a part of it. Commercial industrialism promised Western man a paradise on earth,

¹²Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973), p. 12.

¹³Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence From Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*, (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 287.

¹⁴Becker, p. 14.

¹⁵Becker, p. 181.

¹⁶Becker, p. 27.

¹⁷Becker p. 57.

¹⁸Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, p. 175.

described in great detail by the Hollywood Myth that replaced the paradise in heaven of the Christian myth. And now psychology must replace them both with the myth of paradise through self-knowledge.¹⁹

8. "It is preferable not to travel with a dead man." Henri Maraux is quoted at the start of the film. Given the conversation the engine man on the train has with William Blake, it could be assumed that the whole film is a purgatorial experience where Blake must relive his previous life's encounters until he is made aware of their significance. This man reveals to Blake many things about his future. Death, as evidenced on numerous gravestones, is often equated with sleep, this being the prevailing influence of the particular Greek tradition initiated by Socrates. Socrates saw death as a dreamless sleep and as the migration of the soul to another world.²⁰ This latter belief is incorporated within the narrative but under the guise of Native American religion.
9. To understand *Dead Man* as a cyclical repetition of events, a dream or a purgatorial experience would not be inaccurate, and this follows Nietzsche's philosophy of "the eternal recurrence of the same events".²¹ Death relates to aspects of repetition and the double. Both of these are key elements within *Dead Man* and the Western genre in general, with the repetition of formulaic narrative structures and set pieces forming a major part of this medium. Black and white photography also adds to this 'doubling', given the prevalence of shadow, the darkness of this lack of light being as present within the film as that of the physical presence of the characters illuminated by light. The film balances both the present and the absent, revealing the latter to be no less real.
10. Maurice Blanchot has noted the similarity between the image and the cadaver, both operating as doubles, occupying two places, here and the nowhere, being neither in the world nor totally absent and therefore mediating both worlds.²² The ever present dead man, in the form of the dying or perhaps already dead William Blake and his victims, emphasises this in the extreme. The notion of intermediary correlates to filmic representations of the 'Indian' as child, devil and angel, all three of which are mediating between two worlds. But in this instance, it is the dead white man, William Blake, who is shown to be the link between the worlds, Nobody being more than this.
11. The mirror that Nobody speaks of is the lake where the sky and water meet, and it is here that William Blake will return to his true home, that of the spirits. The body is returning to its cause and thus the cyclical pattern is complete and everlasting, given that it is through the mirror that the next life will be revealed, that true identity results. With Lacan it is the 'mirror phase' that is supposed to bring self-awareness or at least self-identity, only here the mirror does not necessarily bring awareness of self-identity, it actually metamorphosises the subject. Whilst appearing to be a purely metaphysical phenomenon, it is significant that when Thales wrote, 'water is the cause of all things', pre-Socratic thinking moved into a more scientific view of origins; combined with this was the view that 'all things are one' which in itself takes away the power of death.²³

¹⁹Baudrillard, p. 271.

²⁰Choron, p. 43.

²¹R.J. Hollingdale in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 23.

²²Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen, eds., *Death and Representation* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 11.

²³Choron, p. 33.

12. Referring to art in general, Sarah Kofman determines that a representation always has death as one of its signifiers due to its nature of resemblance and doubling.²⁴ Notions of the mirror, the double and the shadow are all, Metz maintains, intrinsic to the cinema. He writes that cinematic perception is not exactly false but,

the activity of perception which it involves is real (the cinema is not a phantasy), but the perceived is not really the object, it is the shade, its phantom, its double, its *replica* in a new kind of mirror.²⁵

13. Previous to the contemporary world 'non-natural' death was the norm and contemporary society has a fascination with this. Where the individual in general exists primarily as a consumer of objects, death is seen as an unnecessary waste.²⁶ What is avoided via drugs, alcohol, work, religion or any other so called diversion, still persists, but death in its cinematic form experienced voyeuristically is permitted and indulged, particularly within this genre. Not only this but, in Lacanian terms, 'the symbol or image leaves an empty place in its wake, thus making absence the condition for meaning'.²⁷ In art, as in life, loss and death bring meaning and are of central importance and in life, for most psychologists, the loss of the mother is of the greatest significance.

In Lacanian teaching representation and the death drive are connected by a fundamental link. All perceptions and thoughts are, according to Lacan, representations constituted around originary losses such that loss itself takes on a central, even centering function in life.²⁸

14. As Margaret Higonnet comments, in relation to death in war, 'the young man's corpse guarantees authentic virility'.²⁹ The value that Blake attains in the eyes of others, that which philosophers such as Levinas, say is greater than self-value, is economic, in that the reward for his capture rises from \$500 to \$2000. Blake's life takes on value due to the monetary label placed on him, but it is his death that is sought by those that seek to gain the reward. If he is captured before Nobody has taken him to the lake/mirror, which will transfer him to the next world, he will not attain this higher level.
15. The only reason why this man's life is seen as valuable to Nobody, so precious he is to die along with many others in assisting his process of re-birth in the spirit world, is because of his mistaken identity. As a child Nobody was taken to England and found that the words of the poet William Blake spoke to him. When he believes this man to be the real William Blake he quotes the poetry. 'Every night and every morn, some to misery are born, and every morn and every night some are born to sweet delight, some are born to sweet delight, some are born to endless night.' Both Blake's poetry and Nobodys' misunderstanding show the absurdity of life, which is identical to the conclusions many philosophers have come to concerning death. However, despite Nobodys' appreciation of this poetry, he still lives without despair and the process of killing takes on a sublime dimension. Poetry gave Nobody a meaning for living while in England and he transfers this to Blake, giving him a purpose in the process of his

²⁴Goodwin, p. 12.

²⁵Christian Metz, p. 44.

²⁶This is confirmed by a consideration of the recent introduction of cardboard coffins and cut-price funerals.

²⁷Ellie Ragland, 'Lacan, the Death Drive, and the Dream of the Burning Child', in Goodwin, p. 86.

²⁸Ragland., p. 80.

²⁹Goodwin, p. 15.

dying through the death of other white men. Just as the poet is guided by the muse at the moment of murder, the killer is guided by a divine force outside his control. At every point where humans congregate, death is presented as an overbearing force, animal and human skulls littering the landscape. Prior to Blake's rebuttal at the metal works, he is narcissistically self-important. After this penultimate loss, all he has left is his life. His existence then takes on absolute meaning and the threat to his life adds to this, thus Choron's quotation at the start of this section is confirmed.

The real and fake William Blake - Dead Man__: An Examen Of Unconsciousness_³⁰

The question is, does it matter if this Blake is not the 'real' William Blake? That is, Blake is who Nobody wants him to be, his identity is made up by another which one can argue is the case for everyone, people becoming who they are through relationships.

-
16. In *Dead Man* there is a conscious attempt on the part of the filmmakers to construct a dream like narrative. The spectator experiences a cyclical narrative made from distinct parts, each segment operating as a minor dream within the whole. The mirror mentioned by Nobody, which Blake must cross, can be compared to the mirror of the screen. The spectator can then be vicariously and 'sonariously' entering with Blake into the dreaming of the events. In Greek mythology the brother of the God of death, Thanatos, was the God of sleep, Hypnos. Psychoanalytic psychotherapy uses dreams as a key to unlocking the secrets of the individual psyche. Myths are used to understand ancient cultures.³¹ Films are often analysed in order to reveal elements concerning contemporary culture. Both death and the unconscious are by definition unknown thus there is a definite connection with 'madness'. *Dead Man* specifically elaborates upon 'madness' and 'the savage'. It does so by directly examining the American unconscious.
 17. Johnathan Rosenbaum points out that throughout Jarmusch's films, such as *Down By Law* (1986) and *Night On Earth* (1992), the following are the essential elements: the idea of the 'foreigner', the use of an episodic structure, linked to the start-stop rhythm punctuated by fade-outs and a pre-occupation with death.³² This pre-occupation does not take the form of heroic violence, as with many other popular American directors such as Sam Peckinpah, Oliver Stone or Quentin Tarantino. Jarmusch had a desire to re-write the portrayal of Native Americans so that they were neither savage nor noble but in this case it is white America that is presented as a 'primitive anarchic world', reflecting the contemporary state of the USA.³³
 18. Those who failed to understand the symbolism of his poetry thought of Blake the poet as 'mad'. With death, the theme of 'madness' in *Dead Man* is also highly visible. On the train there are 'fur-clad crazy men' and throughout the film there is 'a posse of inspired and deranged cameos'.³⁴ It seems appropriate that these 'mad-folk' exist in such a strange world, their 'madness' taking on normality in this environment, with the presence of death

³⁰This section is titled thus, as opposed to 'an examen of consciousness' (a spiritual exercise taught by the Jesuits), as often the film is presented as an examination of myths stemming from the unconscious.

³¹Ken Dowden, *The Uses of Greek Mythology* (Routledge, London: 1992), pp. 22-38.

³²Dowden, pp. 22-38.

³³Dowden, pp. 22-38.

³⁴Ben Thompson, p. 41.

causing pretence to cease, bringing about a 'sanity' within the 'madness'. It has been argued that 'Depp's otherworldly charisma' is ideal for the film.³⁵ But the character he plays is not obviously otherworldly, that is, from the other side of the mirror through which he will pass with the help of Nobody. Blake, as played by Johnny Depp, is more an example of a psychologically repressed urban dweller entering a mythical dream landscape, unconscious of his own urges and unaware of his environment. The fact that he passes in and out of sleep on the train, the passengers changing with this rhythm as fadeouts constantly present a black screen, suggests the whole film is one long restless dream, or an interval between this world and the next. Just as the world presented is invented from the imagination of Jarmusch, the whole film can be judged to be Blake's mind. But this ignores his simplicity and lack of imagination, his whole essence being that of a *tabula rasa*.

19. Blake is a type of nobody himself. The actor Johnny Depp often plays this type of role, witness his character Donnie Brasco in the film of the same name where his identity is formed by both the Mafia and the FBI. In *Dead Man* Nobody places an identity on to him. Depp's appeal, it could be maintained, lies in his ability to remain blank. Historically, in terms of 'star' actors, there has been a process where the 'average' became the ideal.³⁶ But Depp's characters often seem below average, as if part of him is missing. With regards to the far from conclusive relationship between spectator and film, Depp's character, by being a type of nobody, can be equated with the anonymity of cinema viewing. In Lacanian terms, Blake is a void who unwittingly encounters others, thus preventing himself from fully encountering the void in himself.³⁷ For Lacan, an encounter with this loss, with the void, is only reached through nightmares or psychosis.³⁸ This equates with Jung's belief that 'madness' is the cure.³⁹ This encounter relates to the desire to obtain the 'other', part of this loss or void, which links with the mother, which in William Blake's case is Nobody.
20. Overall, the film is concerned with Blake's passage towards the after life. He appears to have already entered the void thus making this journey successful. It can be argued that Blake has already passed through the mirror to the next world, and this explains the repetition and foresight of some of the characters, in particular Crispin Glover as the railway employee. This reading of the film, emphasising a theory that the narrative is a replay of events, far from causing each situation to lose its significance, gives each moment greater weight in that Blake must learn so he can leave purgatory and fully enter into the next world. H.H. Price has illuminated how the existence of other worlds beyond death is reasonable and does so by making analogies with dreams. He concludes that people could be living in this other world now, as well as the world of sense-perception.⁴⁰
21. Price's thesis, concerned with ideas and 'imaging' as opposed to the visual and images, may appear anomalous given the concern here with a visual medium, but it partly explains the purpose and influence of the many completely black frames that appear in the film. Within these moments the spectator is made aware of memories and personal images and fantasies. This relates to a connection with the abyss, typified by the 'Death Mother', Nobody, and

³⁵Thompson, p. 41.

³⁶Dyer, p. 25.

³⁷Ragland, p. 86.

³⁸Ragland, p. 86.

³⁹C.G. Jung, *Analytical Psychology. Its Theory and Practice (The Tavistock Lectures)* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, first delivered 1935), p. 187.

⁴⁰H.H. Price, 'Survival and the Idea of 'Another World'', in *Language, Metaphysics and Death*, ed. John Donnelly (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), p. 300.

connects to the issue of the observer. If, according to Hume and later Sartre, the 'I' is merely that which is manifested, that which is observable,⁴¹ where is the 'I' in these moments? In phenomenological terms the self as it manifests itself to itself, is all that is knowable, not the self as it is in itself.⁴² If the 'I' is merely that which it observes, then these moments of complete fades add to the spectator's experience of their own inner world, which relates to Price's other worlds.

22. Blake is the void itself, outside existence, and his journey involves a negation of the accepted path of the common protagonists in mythical folklore.⁴³ This negation of the usual rites of passage framework is in itself not necessarily negative. For Lacan, an individual awakes from the dream when the fragmented self, the root, is encountered.⁴⁴ Collectively, as stated, with reference to Baudrillard, this is the age of fragmentation. The number of times Blake has had to repeat this journey is not certain but it is clear that this is a repetition. This is a form of what Baudrillard terms the 'fractal stage', which he explains as being where there is 'no law of value, merely a sort of *epidemic of value*, a sort of general metastasis of value, a haphazard proliferation and dispersal of value'.⁴⁵ All of this is true for the world which both creates Blake, from accountant to suspected, nearly-killed poet to killer poet. It is also enlightening in relation to the character Nobody, as it is Nobody who turns Blake into a killer, raising his son in the manner of a 'Death Mother', spawning, or in Baudrillard's terms, proliferating, this offspring.
23. This is the end of the line, literally, for William Blake. Here the linear nature of his life will alter forever, if it has not done so already given the railway worker's comments and the emphasis on eternal recurrence taking place at every moment. One might deduce that his later murder spree is related to earlier events, which cause him to attempt to reap vengeance on the people of this 'no-man's land' but this would be misleading. He has no money except a small sum to buy the tiniest of bottles in the town bar, and by luck he meets an ex-whore who sells paper flowers and appears to like him. It is when her lover, Dickinson's youngest son, finds the two in bed that the death count commences, but in the way which Blake handles a gun emphasises his weakness and vulnerability. The two lie in bed in their undergarments, the only suggestion of sex so far being the brief focus on Thel's breasts when they discussed her paper flowers. The real William Blake's *The Book of Thel* with its flower designs can be read as a parable of the pre-existence of the soul,⁴⁶ as can the film. In the film these flowers appeal to Blake and signify qualities equivalent to himself: blankness, fragility and nothingness. Blake discovers a gun under her pillow and asks her what she has the weapon for. She replies 'because this is America' in a Marilyn Monroe style which sounds forced. At this moment, just as on the train when there is mention of Blake's grave and the hunters start shooting, Thel's lover returns. Because she tells her lover she never loved him he goes to shoot Blake, but Thel throws herself in the way and the bullet penetrates her breast, the very spot which was previously focused on by Blake himself. It takes Blake three shots to kill Charlie Dickinson, the man not moving from the room and obviously wanting to die. The action does not take place in 'real time' but, as with the rest of the film, events take on a heightened significance given the augmentative

⁴¹Roderick M. Chisholm, 'On the Observability of the Self', *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁴²Eric Matthews, *Twentieth Century French Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 58-84.

⁴³Documented by, amongst others, Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (London: Fontana Press, 1993).

⁴⁴Ragland, p. 95.

⁴⁵Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*, p. 5.

⁴⁶William Blake, ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto, (London: B.T. Batsford, 1965), p. 21.

filming of main moments. This emphasis is increased by use of dialogue, which communicates both complete meaning, as if divine revelation, and the lack of meaning, concurrently.

24. From the moment Blake steps off the train (and even on the train if the hunters are deemed dangerous), every scene contains the potential for murder: the gun shot outside the saloon where Blake meets Thel; the double death in her room; Nobody nearly piercing Blake's heart; trying to remove the bullet; Dickinson threatening his hired killers; Johnny 'The Kid' Pickett almost being shot by Conway Twill for trying to steal his teddy bear; Conway Twill nearly being shot by Cole Wilson for talking too much; the death of Salvatore 'Sally' Jenko, played by Iggy Pop, and his crew and the later attempts to kill William Blake. The threat of death is ever present, as it is in the lives of every living creature to a degree, but here it is maximised to a level that gives each event a hyperreal significance.
25. "Stupid fucking white man," is a catch phrase often exclaimed by Nobody and the comedy of this comment is due to its juxtaposition with other dialogue which appears to be Native American in style, although presented in English. Despite Nobody speaking in four languages, the proverbs in English are in fact mainly quotes from the poet Blake. Blake the accountant believes this talk to be 'Indian malarkey', despite the words being those Blake of another incarnation has written. On one level the film breaks all ties to reason, given the ambiguous status of Blake. Is he alive or not? Can life and death be separated? When Nobody first finds him, he attempts to cure him but in the next scene he asks, 'did you kill the white man who killed you?' When Blake protests that he is not dead, Nobody utilises his catch phrase. Again, Price's work is relevant given this dual status of Blake. It is unclear whether he is dying and therefore talked about as dead, or already dead and therefore immortal and Nobody (who is possibly a spirit, having no body, despite his 'death' at the 'end' of the film) is concerned with teaching him not to fear, given his indestructible status. Combined with this there are the continual killings that take place in an almost leisurely manner.⁴⁷ 'The mystery of death even more than that of birth, is bound to invalidate all the false convictions which survive from the Age of Reason.'⁴⁸ The relationship between death and 'unreason', death and 'madness', is intimate, and *Dead Man* examines this nexus with the Native American Nobody seemingly being the only person who understands the nature of life and death, one explaining the other. The reality of nature is derived 'from the separation of man and nature, of a body and a non-body, as Octavio Paz put it'.⁴⁹ It seems that because Nobody is no body, he creates the 'real' within the film.
26. When asked by Blake why he is not with his tribe, Nobody relates that as a child different tribes shunned him because of the mixture of his parent's blood but soon he won the respect of the 'elk people'. He was then hit on the head by an English soldier and taken in a cage to England. The white actor Gary Farmer is Nobody and he plays the role in the manner of self-conscious parody. In terms of authenticity one might question this casting, but the film works on the level of that of a dream and is total myth, existing in an ahistorical period. This is despite the reference to 'one million buffalo shot last year', which dates the film's period at around 1875. Other elements, such as the presence of the English soldier when Nobody was a child, give an indication as to the age of Nobody which does not fit his bodily appearance and thus confirms the ambiguity theory and 'no body' status.

⁴⁷One critic has referred to the film in general as 'like overdosing on Mogadon'. Ryan Gilbey, review of *Dead Man*, *Premiere*, vol. 4, no. 6, July 1996, p. 15.

⁴⁸Paul Roubiczek, quoted by Paul Edwards in 'Existentialism and Death', in *Language, Metaphysics and Death*, p. 73.

⁴⁹Baudrillard, p. 133.

27. Both actors playing the young Nobody, Thomas Bettles and Daniel Chas Stacy, are Native Americans. The reminiscences are presented with white covering the border of the frame, a circle in the middle presenting the action suggesting the past but also resonant of dream, revealing a connection between the past, memory, dream and the unconscious, suggesting that all stories, fiction and non-fiction have the same quality. The film's segmented structure adds to the floating nature of fact and fiction. As Rockwell puts it:

'Real' reality can not be apprehended as it is: an infinite, equally existent number of discrete and ever-changing entities and events. To see the universe in those terms might be accurate, but would be impossible to absorb, and meaningless in human terms.... information about reality has been presented to and by the human species in forms of narrative fiction known as History, Law, Religion, Epic Poetry, the Novel, the Drama, and the statements of politicians and journalists. In one sense, everything is fiction; in another fiction is reality.⁵⁰

28. Nobody remarks that in England he tried to mimic the people to escape their attention but this only made them more interested in him. They placed him into their schools and he is shown as a young man turning the pages of a book by William Blake. Escaping back to America, he sees the devastation of the various tribes of native people and that disturbs him. However, his tribe rejects him, calling him 'he who talks loud saying nothing' and now he walks alone; which is often the case in Westerns, the 'Indian' being outside a tribe so a balance can be made with the white loner. At this moment, as day turns into night, he quietly says he now is Nobody, indicating that without a tribe he does not really exist and he is condemned to wander the world alone. Previous to these revelations, Conway Twill has given 'The Kid' the true story behind 'the legend' Cole Wilson and his parents. 'I'm tellin' ya', he killed them, he fucked them, he cooked them up and he ate 'em' he explains, in his attempt to get 'The Kid' to win glory by shooting Cole as Conway has just been nearly shot by the man himself. Cole has broken the two most extreme taboos in 'Western' society, while Nobody, through his experience of England, has broken cultural taboos and is also a pariah. It is these two who meet at the close of the film after William Blake has left to cross the mirror. Not merely equating two outsiders this emphasises the core similarities between the radically different.
29. Conway's incessant chatter is comic, obscuring the content of his monologues. Following Nobody's revelations, when the action fades to another part of the woods with the three killers in pursuit, Conway makes the seemingly banal comment about how it is good that the sun goes down gently, as it would be awful, for one minute, to be able to see and then be in total darkness. This is a less than subtle metaphor concerning death but his two companions are dead to his wisdom. Only William Blake is fully prepared for his death, despite being unaware of this, having the wisdom and mothering of Nobody in the twilight of his life to enter into the next world. Even with this preparation he is not conscious of what is happening and he may have to repeat his life in 'this world' once more. While the sun might be lenient to man, going down slowly, in *Dead Man*, in all cases bar one, death comes without warning, especially for Nobody and it is the certainty of this that breaks through the ambiguity, creating reason and 'sanity'. It seems that he is talking to himself, but given the lack of response of his companions, it is revealed that Conway should have listened to himself, as he ends up being roasted and eaten by Cole.

⁵⁰Joan Rockwell, *Fact in Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p. viii.

30. What is also telling about Conway's comment is the notion of total blackness following light, as this is viewed at the end of each scene, or even within scenes to mark a point of change. As has been explained, this darkness allows the visual action to pause, allowing the spectator to encounter his or her psyche. The fade into black gives no visual sense, that is, a mini-death that again involves the spectator within the main content of the film. These exist as a valediction, a form of abandonment to the darkness, where reflection can take place, making the film radically different from the formulaic Hollywood box office successes. Each scene becomes a self-contained world, giving each a semi-independent existence, causing the spectator to become immersed in the immediate, while collectively each moment is repeated within the world/worlds presented.
31. In the scene with Big George Drakoulous, Jared Harris and Salvatore 'Sally' Jenko, all of the points mentioned above are exquisitely presented. A view from over both their shoulders shows their position on top of a hill observing the antics of the 'stupid white man'. During their conversation the voice of 'Sally' is in the background, telling an altered version of 'The Three Bears', culminating in a girl having her head torn off. Death dominates all narratives. While Nobody continues his observance, finding the "stupid" antics of the white man both repulsive and fascinating, Blake returns, asking how to make the journey down. Ordering him to be quiet and go, once more Nobody chides him in the manner of an irate parent. The action cuts to the camp of these three men, one of whom is dressed as a woman. 'Sally' sits in the middle of the men telling a story about the Emperor Augustus who crucified and burnt Christians, while sowing others up in sacks with 'garlic and aromatic herbs'.
32. This is a comic scene, primarily due to the idiosyncratic nature of Big George and the 'mad' nature of the whole group. As with the bear story, George comments that it is "terrible" and proceeds to mention that his 'old gut' is unable to take whiskey any more and he just gets "the shits". Sally, the mother figure, dishes up the beans saying she hopes this will sort his "old gut" out, but their companion now talks for the first time saying the beans are 'shit'. The animosity between the two men is revealed when Big George tells Benmont Tench to eat his beans and shut up, appearing to be offended by the latter not appreciating the cooking of his 'wife'. George then asks for Sally to say grace. The 'good book' is opened randomly and Sally begins to read the supposed *Old Testament*, being concerned with smiting and decapitating and feeding corpses to the earth, far from the spiritual future preached by Nobody. However, this is actually a quotation from William Blake, again emphasising the ephemeral nature of narratives.
33. These verbal narratives parallel events in the film; soon all three are murdered, but the absurdity and comedy of the scene is partially due to their outward condemnation of the horror of these stories whilst relishing the details. This can be read as an attack on contemporary views on violence in cultural forms, suggesting that it is due to a still prevalent taboo that fetishism of violence and death in art arises. The bodily nature of the characters and their pre-occupations are emphasised and paralleled with their attempt at spirituality. They are therefore closer to the philosophy of the real William Blake than Nobody, who, however physical, over emphasises the spiritual creating a division. Nobody not only misunderstands the Blake he is with but also Blake the poet. 'Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.'⁵¹ Ironically, those who are so comical within this scene are closer to the truth Nobody

⁵¹William Blake, 'The Voice of the Devil', in *William Blake*, ed. by Vivian de Sola Pinto (London: B.T. Batsford, 1965), p. 98.

adheres to. Like the fools in Elizabethan theatre, they possess truth. It is essential for Blake and Nobody to kill them all, in order to absorb this.

34. Blake enters the scene during their repast, in desperate need of sustenance. In appearance, Big George is a rough wild man, similar to the uncouth buffalo hunters Blake has already encountered. The incongruity of asking Blake how he gets his hair so soft is amusing. Within all the chatter, the threat of death is present as the gang member with a pointedly cockney accent asks him to feel the point of his very sharp knife. When this same man touches Blake's hair it causes Big George to lose his temper and results in the latter being shot in the foot. The whole nature of this scene is theatrical, akin to pantomime, the skins of animal and pots being the only props, and Nobody is the audience observing their antics. They live so close to nature and death that only stories of death communicate anything to them and only by using the threat of death can they gain anything, that is, communicate their desires. Big George states that Blake belongs to him, despite the claims made by his adversary that he had the last 'Philistine' and this one is his. The phrases Big George uses combine repetition, incorrect use of tense and exclamations that present him in a burlesque manner, similar to a cartoon character.⁵²
35. The two men of this hokey tribe stand facing each other, the camera showing them both in frame and then individually, again the whole manner being theatrical. After being shot in the foot, 'by golly', Big George reacts in a seemingly nonchalant manner but says he must now kill. For Big George this must be the 'Philistine', so pointing his gun at Blake he declares, "God damn it, I guess nobody gets you". At this point Neil Young's sound track starts up once more in a slow quiet rhythmic pulse comparable to a heartbeat, bringing a physicality to the attempted rationalisation and near hysteria. This double entendre results in George's comment coming true (using the word Nobody as a proper noun), prophecy resulting through accident.
36. A shot of the sky reveals a crack of lightning, then with William Blake whispering, Nobody appears as if from nowhere and cuts the throat of Big George. There is a form of cleansing that takes place. Nobody, while being the 'Death Mother', is Nietzsche's 'superman', 'he is this lightning, he is this madness!'.⁵³ William Blake faces Big George and Nobody is nowhere to be seen and then appears thus suggesting he is some form of spirit. However, this contradicts the fact that he is slain by Cole in the final moments of the film. It is feasible that Nobody can exist as both a body and a spirit, thus making movement easier, although his spiritual essence is far from that of the representations identified in the previous chapter, where Native Americans exist primarily as the spiritual side of the white protagonist. This is due to the physical nature of Nobody's role as 'Death Mother'.
37. In saving Blake's life he must take that of another. Benmont Tench's bungling after shooting Big George's foot and now wanting to kill the latter's murderer, again emphasizes the non-heroic nature of killing, as if bringing about death is almost a paralysing experience. Strictly speaking, the deaths themselves are not comical, but their pointless nature emphasises the 'insanity' of the group, which fights over the 'Philistine'. Blake, quivering, manages to shoot the man just in time and while Nobody 'plays' with Big George's gun, this 'accidentally' shoots 'Sally', who has remained outside the main frame of action. With Nobody appearing with

⁵²His speech impediment is not as severe as Elmer Fudd's, but he has a type of sincerity and innocence identical to many children's cartoon characters of this ilk.

⁵³Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 43.

the lightning and not even aiming at 'Sally' but still killing her/him, it can be assumed that supernatural forces are blessing his actions. Nobody has said this whole experience is a test for Blake, and this he passes, receiving a gun from Nobody and self-consciously eating the beans at the close of the scene, both acting as a type of reward. With this courage he is now worthy of the help of Nobody, who in fact was protecting him anyway, but this is a first step for the child.

38. The 'Death Mother' child relationship continues in the following scene, where Blake, having had a temper tantrum, destroys the wanted posters. He rages but Nobody calmly tells him his actions are pointless, saying approximately 'you can not stop a clock by building a boat'. The first part of this sentence is obscured, leaving us in a similar situation to Blake, who does not understand. Blake is protesting about being named Thel's murderer on the wanted posters and the theme of death and responsibility is continued after this, the lives of the hunters and hunted being paralleled. Cole in the next scene comments on the absolute nature of physical death, as if those who die instantly via gun shots have no possibility of another existence. Warning 'The Kid' not to drink contaminated water, 'The Kid' says "fuck you" so Cole takes his life, Conway chastising the killing legend by saying he was just a kid. To this Cole replies he is not a kid now, just a Navajo mud toy, having no illusions about life after death and no remorse. This murder is presented as justified to a degree, given the young man's lack of desire to preserve his life in the first place. Cole's initial concern is admirable, introducing redeemable qualities into a character that of all the three 'legends' is supposedly the most 'evil'.
39. Despite this, generally, Cole is shown without emotions, while Conway is garrulous and always in the mood for playacting. 'The Kid' is disturbed by finding a wanted poster, and knowing they are not the sole hunters of Blake he begins to rant about being 'stuck in the middle of nowhere with two lunatics'. This adds to Cole's anger, but Cole's cannibalism and his general ease in relation to death give his 'madness' a level of 'sanity' and normality, turning the extraordinary into the mundane, just as the hyperreal quality of the film gives each segment a heightened reality. In the previous chapter, it was explained how mysticism is incorporated into life and thus becomes the norm. Here, cannibalism and communicating via the gun are represented as usual, given the circumstances. Conway's incessant talking is enough to drive the most 'sane' man 'mad'. Cole's activities are not necessarily condoned, but black humour dominates the scene when he eats Conway's arm, his gold teeth causing him problems, while the rest of the body roasts on the spit. Conway has made an attempt to go beyond their present circumstances by discussing the past but Cole has had enough. This scene is of vital importance, as just as many elements of the film reverse commonly accepted myths. Here it is not the indigenous people who are the cannibals, but Cole, probably of German or Austrian descent, according to his now cooked feast.
40. Nobody mentions his 'Southern brothers', the people most popularly regarded as cannibals in the Americas, while conducting a peyote ceremony, stating that 'the Spanish devils' banned them from consuming 'the food of the great spirit'. He explains that in the north two tribes carry on the tradition of seeking sacred visions through ingesting peyote. In this manner Nobody guides Blake, educating him in the essentials. His sacred vision is of Blake as a skeleton but this does not disturb him, in fact it entertains him and he dons a wry smile when Blake, his head now a skull, asks him what he is staring at. With the power of sacred visions, those who are possibly alive appear dead, and those who are possibly dead behave as if alive, the two worlds being crossed and combined with peyote. Still Nobody is a mother to Blake,

saying that the sacred visions are not for him at this time. Both appear to misunderstand each other, in that Blake obviously wants to eat the peyote, not to obtain visions but to curb his hunger but Nobody then tells Blake that the quest for a vision is a great blessing. This can also be gained by fasting, in which Blake takes part but against his will.

41. Nobody is concerned with the next world while Blake is absorbed within the present, becoming worried when he can not find his glasses. The pair here form a crucial human conflict, that of the physical versus the spiritual, but at various points Nobody is far from spiritual. Unlike an overbearing mother, but in the manner of a good parent, Nobody leaves him to sleep, once he is assured that his child has chosen the right path. Blake seems totally lost while Nobody still finds it astounding that a dead poet is in his company. Their complete misunderstanding of each other appears at this stage perhaps more natural than a mutual sharing and communion of cultures but it is 'uncanny' and comic. The multiple confusions take both out of the rational world and into a world of the nothing. This is the same nothing that Sartre believes can disconnect us from the past and lead to freedom; *Dead Man*, with Sartre, maintains 'man is wholly free or wholly determined'.⁵⁴ There is a meaningful 'madness', where even the borders between mysticism and 'madness' are traversed. Both mysticism and 'madness' occasionally occur simultaneously, in a manner that fulfils the real poet Blake's desire to unite body and soul, unreason and reason, mysticism and 'madness'. Death may seem the ultimate absurdity and absolute 'madness', but its very significance reveals the 'madness' of obsessions with contemporary concerns, thus there is a 'sanity' which death brings within each of the scenes where it occurs.
42. Blake shoots the two law men, asking them whether they know his poetry before killing them and then quoting "some are born to endless night" as he shoots again, and it is clear he has absorbed Nobody's message. After Conway crushes one of these men's heads, Jarmusch juxtaposes two deaths caused by 'Indians' to balance this atrocity in terms of 'Indian'/white violence. At night Blake sits alone repeating the words he had said to Dickinson's secretary: 'I insist I see Mr Dickinson', his attempt at increasing himself, only resulting in a deflation. This may be interpreted as him now being on the verge of psychosis but it is more like an expurgation of his past self, as he comes closer to his journey across the lake. He is aware of his former acting, to try and obtain a job that resulted in mockery from the rest of the staff and now he mocks himself. At this moment four faces appear in the bushes, all 'Indian' and all covered with white make up, but once he looks again they have vanished. This maybe a vision but it seems they are possibly responsible for the two dead men Blake comes across in the snow. Alternatively, they may be the result of Blake fasting, four spirits leading him on to his true home.
43. 'Death Mother' and son ride through the forest followed by Cole and the contrast between Nobody and the assassin is stark. Nobody is at peace, admiring the rays of light streaming through the trees, whilst Cole is in a state of deep anxiety. Now, Nobody tells Blake that he must enter the next world where the water touches the sky. Again, Nobody informs Blake of the evil of the white man by telling him how traders infect the blankets they sell to 'Indians'. His practicality is typical of a mother when after this speech he pragmatically murmurs 'we need a canoe' and wanders off to the trading post. All the various Blake reward posters are here and this becomes another occasion for confusion and double meaning. Nobody says 'not bad' after Blake has read out the list of all the people he has supposedly killed, Blake thinking

⁵⁴Passmore, p. 493.

he means the deaths when he is actually talking of the illustration. Like a child presenting a gift to his parent, Blake gives him the picture, having just previously presented him with a Winchester rifle.

44. Inside the trading post the absurdity of a particular brand of Christianity is derided with the sycophantic trader possessing the heinous qualities of the worst aspects of salesmanship and religiosity combined, still widespread in contemporary America.⁵⁵ 'Work out your own salvation' says the message on the door, and this is focused on, just prior to Blake shooting the man who enters the trading post to kill him, after he has killed the salesman. The poetry of the gun is Blake's salvation. The fact that he kills the salesman fulfils his duty to the 'Death Mother' given that, as Nobody predicted, the man tries to sell him an infected blanket or beads instead of tobacco, and preaches a religion that has oppressed the indigenous people. 'God damn your soul to the fires of hell' he tells Blake in his dying moments, to which he replies he already has, meaning he already is in hell.
45. Once in the canoe that will take them to the elk people, Nobody sings 'William Blake is a legend now, he is a good friend of mine' but throughout the film their relationship is more than friendship. Nobody is part of Blake, that part which is aware of the spirit world but also totally practical, totally bodily and connected to life and death, that is, a 'Death Mother'. On this stage of the journey it is Nobody who experiences a form of d'j' vu, presented as analepses. The same images from when Nobody related his return from England of burnt out 'Indian' villages are shown. This time more detail is given, shots showing the carnage from behind as well as in front and the remains of a burnt skeleton make up part of the set. Although Nobody is not part of a tribe he has not lost his affinity for his brothers and this emphasises Nobody's precarious existence in a hostile white dominated world.
46. Nearing the village, Nobody spots an elk, animals having a spiritual significance within the film. In the scene when Blake lies down with a small deer, the whole experience gives him strength. When they leave the trading post Blake's pinto follows them some of the way, this breaking into Blake's mournful spirit. The appearance of the elk makes Nobody realise they are close to their final destination together in this world. These people are supposed to be 'Indians' from the Pacific Northwest who, according to Jarmusch have not been represented in film. Due to their isolation, which therefore led to less time being needed for warfare, plus their abundant food resources, they could spend time on cultivating their crafts and spiritual culture, evident within the film.⁵⁶
47. One of the first people he focuses on is a mother nursing her child, as with his walk through Machine, but in this instance there appears to be less distress in the face of the parent. In both places the mother and child are the precedent for his role as child in the care of Nobody. Blake's eyes wonder to a totem pole and to the crafts of the people, the camera wobbling, giving the vision of the scene through Blake's eyes, so the spectator becomes one with Blake. While the villagers observe him in a non-intrusive manner, his eyes waver, coming across a burnt out tepee still containing a burnt skeleton. This is in contrast to the undertaker's, seen when he walks through the town of Machine. Death is not denied with bodies quickly encased in wood, but used as a reminder with rituals that reconcile the dead and the living. Death is here part of the social, not the absolute 'imaginary'.⁵⁷ Baudrillard asserts: 'it is ourselves

⁵⁵See Malise Ruthven, *The Divine Supermarket. Shopping for God in America* (London: Vintage, 1991), pp. 255-277.

⁵⁶Rosenbaum, p. 23. That is, other than in early Edward Curtis films.

⁵⁷As in the 'civilised world'. Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, p. 133.

and ourselves alone who are full primitives (which nickname we attach to the primitives in order to exorcise it)'.⁵⁸ Contemporary white 'Western' societies are obsessed with the 'evil spell'; all accidents must be seen to have a cause, a reason, otherwise 'madness' results from the absurdity of their irrationality. Like death, politically, they are viewed as a 'breach of the social order'.⁵⁹ In *Dead Man* death is both planned and accidental, thus breaking through the 'insanity' and 'sanity' of death; 'madness' challenges 'madness'.

48. It is here that his canoe to cross the mirror of water to the next world is made, and the people of this world are inspecting the man who is nearly fit for the next. In this manner, there is again a reversal, in that it is the white man who is the bridge for the 'Indians'. In the canoe, Blake is surrounded by objects that will help him into the next world. One of these appears to be a small modern picture of the leader Geronimo, thus confirming the theory that there is no one time period in this film but it transcends various eras, containing a myriad of myths and truths of the West. When Nobody tells him he is going home, he says 'Cleveland?', showing he still has not really reached enlightenment, but this lack of rational understanding maybe enlightenment itself. There is a deep irony here in that the real Blake would have understood the mystical significance of this journey but here all Nobody's efforts are wasted. Both the lake and the sky are at peace, only at one point rays break through the cloud offering an indication of the world Blake is entering into. When Cole shoots Nobody, Nobody shoots Cole, both falling to the ground at the same moment as Blake tries to lift himself up in the canoe to warn Nobody, who thinks he is just waving goodbye.
49. Their final communication with each other is a misunderstanding, and is comic and tragic. Because both physical good and evil are gone, Blake can now go beyond the bodily world to the land of the spirits but is he continually doomed to traverse the globe in his canoe having entered the liquid form? Art is a flight from liquidity and can make sense of death but in this final scene there is no death, this ultimate scene mentioned within the film's early train sequence, therefore existing, as the soul, prior to its occurrence. There is no death, as all is death, there is no poetry, as all is poetry, the mirror of art, of the screen, taking fantasy for reality, just as the poet as Wallace Stevens put it is the priest of the invisible, incarnating the metaphysical.

Notes

C. Jason Lee teaches in the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Central Lancashire, UK. Recent publications included *The Day Elvis Died* and *God's Potato Peeler*.

Copyright © held by the author(s). 2002 Ethan Frome. All rights reserved.
 Updated .
jcrt.org/archives/03.2/lee

⁵⁸Baudrillard, p. 161.

⁵⁹Baudrillard, p. 161.