



# Death in American Texts and Performances: Corpses, Ghosts, and the Reanimated Dead

*Mark Pizzato*

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How do twentieth and twenty-first century artists bring forth the powerful reality of death when it exists in memory and lived experience as something that happens only to others? Death in American Texts and Performances takes up this question to explore the modern and postmodern aesthetics of death. Working between and across genres, the contributors examine literary texts and performance media, including Robert Lowell's *For the Union Dead*, Luis Valdez' *Dark Root of a Scream*, Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*, Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, John Edgar Wideman's *The Cattle Killing*, Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*, Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and *Falling Man*, and HBO's *Six Feet Under*. As the contributors struggle to convey the artist's crisis of representation, they often locate the dilemma in the gap between artifice and nature, where loss is performed and where re-membering is sometimes literally reenacted through the bodily gesture. While artists confront the impossibility of total recovery or transformation, so must the contributors explore the gulf between real corpses and their literary or performative reconstructions. Ultimately, the volume shows both artist and critic grappling with the dilemma of showing how the aesthetics of death as absence is made meaningful in and by language.



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