

ഇശൽ വൈദ്യകം

ത്രൈമാസിക ലക്കം: 40

Ishal Paithrkam

Online issue 25 print issue 40 December 2024



Mahakavi Moyinkutty Vaidyar
Mappila Kala Akademi
Department of Cultural Affairs
Government of Kerala-India
December 2024

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2024 ഡിസംബർ

പകർപ്പാവകാശം: പ്രസാധകർക്ക്

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Ishal Paithrkam

ISSN: 2582-550X

Peer-Reviewed

UGC CARE indexed

Quarterly

Bilingual

Issue: 40

Online issue: 25

December: 2024

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Individual Price : Rs.600/-

Editor

Dr. Shamshad hussain. KT

Printed @

LIPI Offset

Malappuram

Publisher

Mahakavi Moyinkutty

Vaidyar

Mappila Kala Akademi

Kondotty, 673638

Ph: 0483-2711432

പ്രസാധകർ

മഹാകവി മോയിൻകുട്ടി വൈദ്യർ

മാപ്പിള കലാ അക്കാദമി

കൊണ്ടോട്ടി: 673 638

ഫോൺ: 0483 2711432

www.mappilakalaacademy.org

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When Death Dictates Life: Poetics and Politics of Death in the Web series *Death's Game*

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Death's Game is a South Korean fantasy mystery thriller web series written and directed by Ha Byung-hoon that premiered on December 15, 2023, and is available for streaming on Amazon Prime Video. The series produced by SLL, Studio N consists of 8 episodes and features a blend of drama and fantasy elements. The storyline follows Choi Yee-jae, a young man who commits suicide after enduring years of unemployment and despair but is confronted by Death. Due to his indifference to life and the trivialization of death, he is tasked by Death with navigating twelve different lives and deaths, with the potential to earn a fresh start if he manages to survive in one of those reincarnations. The series delves into themes of reincarnation, the value of existence, and the repercussions of choices. The paper intertwines classical mythological interpretations of Thanatos with Achille Mbembe's contemporary theoretical framework of necropolitics to scrutinize the character of Death and its deviation from traditional representations in mythology and literature. Furthermore, it delves into cultural attitudes toward life and death and how societal structures dictate the value of individual lives. By integrating thanatology into the analysis, the paper illustrates how *Death's Game* reflects broader societal concerns surrounding mortality and the human experience, serving as a stark commentary on the challenges of contemporary life.

Keywords: Web series, Necropolitics, Thanatology, Death

When Death Dictates Life: Poetics and Politics of Death in the Web series *Death's Game*

Death's Game is a South Korean fantasy mystery thriller web series written and directed by Ha Byung-hoon. This original drama produced by TVING is available for streaming on its platform and, in select regions, on Amazon Prime Video, excluding South Korea and China, premiered on December 15, 2023. It consists of 8 episodes and features a blend of drama and fantasy elements. It garnered positive reviews, with an IMDb rating of 8.5/10, indicating a strong viewer reception. Critics praised its fresh storyline and engaging execution, highlighting the blend of fantasy with real-life struggles. The series stars Seo In-guk and Park So-dam in the leading roles and is adapted from the webtoon *Lee Won-sik and Ggulchan*, which was serialized on webtoon Naver in 2019. The series is divided into two parts, comprising eight episodes: Part 1 was released on December 15, 2023, followed by Part 2 on January 5, 2024. The plot centers around Choi Yi Jae, a young man who, after struggling for seven years to find a job, commits suicide to escape from his terrible life. However, upon his death, he encounters a personification of Death, who punishes him for his indifference towards dying. Yi Jae is forced to play a game where he must experience twelve different lives and deaths. If he can survive in any of these near-death incarnations, he will have the chance to continue living in that incarnation. This premise explores themes of reincarnation, the value of life, and the consequences of one's choices. This paper aims to analyze the web series *Death's Game* by synthesizing classical mythological interpretations of Thanatos and contemporary theoretical perspectives, particularly those articulated by Achille Mbembe in his work *Necropolitics*. It also will examine the personification of Death in the series and how the character of Death challenges traditional representations of death in mythology and literature. Lastly, it seeks to explore how the series serves as a commentary on the cultural attitudes toward life and death in South Korea, particularly considering the country's high suicide rates. By incorporating the framework of thanatology—the study of death and dying in the analysis, the paper will reveal how *Death's Game* reflects broader societal concerns regarding mortality and the human experience.

Thanatos, in Greek mythology, is the personification of death, characterized by a gentle demeanour that contrasts sharply with the violent aspects of death represented by his sisters, the Keres. He is the offspring of Nyx and Erebus, who are Night and Darkness, and he shares a twin bond with Hypnos, who is better known as Sleep (Tauseef, 2021). Thanatos is often depicted in mythology as a benevolent figure, embodying non-violent death, distinguishing him from the more fearsome and aggressive representations of death found in other mythological traditions. His role as Psychopomp involves guiding souls to the underworld, ensuring a peaceful transition from life to death. This portrayal emphasizes his function as a harbinger of a serene end rather than a bringer of chaos or destruction. Thanatos plays a minor yet significant role in various myths, including his involvement in the tales of Sisyphus and Alcestis where he portrays a powerful and yet sometimes vulnerable figure. He serves as a crucial element in the Greek understanding of mortality, embodying the duality of death as both an end and a transition, reflecting the ancient Greeks' views on life, death, and the afterlife. Thanatos provides a lens through which to examine cultural attitudes towards mortality, especially within the framework of thanatology and necropolitics (Thanatos - Greek God of Death and in Roman mythology, Mors).

The etymology of “Thanatos” reflects its Greek roots, where the term has evolved to encompass broader interpretations of death and dying. The suffix “-ology,” derived from the Greek “-logia,” indicates a field of study, thus giving rise to thanatology—a discipline that investigates human attitudes toward death, grief, and the rituals surrounding mortality. The term “thanatology” was first recorded in English in the mid-1800s, marking the beginning of a formalized study of death in a scientific context. Thanatology serves as a critical framework for understanding how societies perceive and engage with death. This scientific inquiry encompasses various aspects, including psychological responses to death, cultural rituals surrounding mourning, and the sociopolitical dimensions of mortality. By examining these elements, one can uncover the underlying power dynamics that shape societal attitudes towards death.

Thanatology can offer insight into literary themes surrounding mortality, grief, and existential dilemmas. By examining how death is portrayed, how characters navigate their grief, and what perspectives the author presents regarding the afterlife, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the text's tone and intent. For example, Leo Tolstoy's novella, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, explores existential questions about death and the dying experience. Through the protagonist's confrontation with mortality, the narrative highlights emotional and psychological struggles, prompting readers to reconsider their perceptions of life and death.

Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics is an interesting perspective that one can use in tandem with thanatological studies, for it offers a lens through which to examine the broader implications of dying in contexts where political agendas govern life and death. Necropolitics examines how power structures influence the conditions of death and dying, particularly in contexts of war, colonialism, and systemic violence. Mbembe by furthering Foucault's concept of biopolitics reveals how sovereign powers govern through the management of death and the conditions of life. In his essay *Necropolitics* (2003), he says, "...the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die (27). He speaks about how certain populations are deemed disposable, subjected to violence and neglect, and how their deaths are politically and socially orchestrated, and highlights the selective elimination of groups considered redundant or resistant by state mechanisms. This perspective aligns with thanatology's exploration of how societies perceive and manage death, particularly in contexts where certain lives are undervalued. The interplay between life and death underlines the existential implications of mortality as it is linked to power structures. While thanatology often focuses on individual and collective responses to death, necropolitics shows how systemic violence and state policies shape these experiences. For instance, marginalized communities may face compounded grief due to the socio-political contexts that render their losses invisible or unacknowledged. The narratives surrounding death, in both necropolitics and thanatology, reveal much about cultural

attitudes toward mortality. Mbembe's analysis of how death is politicized and can be a weapon in the hands of the sovereign can inform one of the societal attitudes toward mortality and the ethical considerations surrounding grief and loss. One can see how death is not merely a personal experience but also a reflection of systemic inequalities and power dynamics in society.

In this context, it is also interesting to see how death is often viewed in Western cultures as a definitive end to life, a stark contrast to the living. The notion of death as absolute is a contrast to the Eastern philosophies and culture where death is part of a cyclical process of rebirth and reincarnation. Death is not the end but a transition to a new form of existence. The idea of death is rich in symbolism, often representing broader themes such as social justice, cultural identity, and the struggle against oppression. Death can be used to comment on social issues, reflecting the impact of turmoil or crisis on individuals or communities. In many fantasy Korean dramas and web series, the personification of death as a character is a trope that adds depth and intrigue to the narrative. In Korean culture, the Grim Reaper is referred to as Joseung Saja, a term that encompasses various meanings, including "lion," "herald," or "messenger," but fundamentally translates to "reaper." Unlike the traditional depictions of Grim Reapers in many cultures, which often portray them as malevolent figures associated with death and destruction, the Korean representation diverges significantly in both appearance and function. Korean Reapers are classified as Psychopomps, entities whose primary role is to escort newly deceased souls to the afterlife. This characterization emphasizes their function as guides rather than judges or executioners. Rather than instigating death, Joseung Saja serves a compassionate purpose, facilitating the transition of souls and ensuring their safe passage to the next realm. This distinction highlights a more benevolent interpretation of death in Korean folklore, contrasting sharply with the often-sinister connotations associated with Grim Reapers in other cultural contexts. (Hemenway & Bruce)

However, in *Death's Game*, the character of Death, portrayed by Park So-dam is a little different from the Joseung Saja we see in series like *Goblin* (2016-17), *Doom at Your Service* (2021), and

Tomorrow (2022) where they have more humanized personalities and are more approachable. Death in *Death's Game* wields immense power over the protagonist Choi Yi Jae. Eastern philosophy and especially in Buddhism, the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth is known as samsara. The idea of death is tied to a forgetful transition and that individuals do not retain memories of their past lives and this allows them to engage fully in their present lives. However, in *Death's Game*, when Death punishes Yi Jae for his suicide by forcing him to play a game where he experiences twelve different lives and twelve different deaths, each more painful than the last one, she does not wipe out his memories of the previous lives. Forgetful transition, which allows individuals to engage with their current life without the burden of previous life memories is denied to Yi Jae, and he is driven to make choices based on his past mistakes rather than his current experiences. This reflects Mbembe's idea of sovereignty as the "capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not" (27). Death, one can interpret here as a personification of necropower, for she decides Yi Jae's fate and the value of his life. She holds complete power over him and his choices.

Choi Yee Jae represents individuals who have lost hope after numerous failed attempts and painful waiting to turn their lives around. When the series opens, the viewer sees Yi Jae, a man consumed by obeisance, pain, grief, and fear, choking on the air he breathes and shedding tears profusely. His anguished scream in the first episode, "What did I ever do? Why do I have to go there when I haven't done anything wrong?" underscores his sense of injustice and despair(0:0:43). Yi Jae's painful reaction and the series' exploration of mortality suggest that this moment may allude to a hellish afterlife. Yi Jae's fear and immediate gesture of putting his hands up in a plea for mercy when confronted by a woman with a loaded pistol highlight his desperation to avoid death which ironically, he was not scared to do when he was living. As the scene unfolds, Yi Jae finds himself plummeting from an airplane, thinking, "I wanted a clean death. That was the only thing I ever wanted in my life. To be able to do that, I can't let myself die like this" (1:1:55). This thought encapsulates his desire for a dignified end to his suffering, emphasizing the idea of mortality and the consequences of one's actions.

The complex portrayals of death within the series, emphasize its representation as both a process and a form of punishment. The series opens with the significant quote, “The most painful death to a mortal is one that is foreseen” setting the tone for a narrative that grapples with the psychological and emotional weight of anticipated mortality(ep1,0:0:04). The violent deaths serve as a deliberate mechanism to reprimand the protagonist’s soul, illustrating the series’ exploration of death not merely as an end but as a transformative experience. The characters’ experiences of sorrow and mourning are central to this analysis, as Thanatology allows for a deeper understanding of the psychological, emotional, and social dimensions of grief. The protagonist’s girlfriend and mother both struggle to move on from their losses, and it is the mother’s profound grief that ultimately awakens the protagonist to the severity of his transgressions. The series examines the mourning in detail and in the most heart-wrenching way, revealing how characters navigate their grief and seek reconciliation with their losses. Notably, the protagonist delays the twelfth death, which was meant to occur within his mother, highlighting a critical moment of introspection and moral reckoning.

Yi Jae’s life had been defined by a single chance event that cost him seven years, plunging him into a pit of despair. Through his narrative, the viewer discovers the psychological and emotional turmoil experienced by those who have lost hope and are confronted with the harsh realities of mortality. His plight can be seen as a necropolitical theme, where his suffering and eventual confrontation with death are shaped by external forces beyond his control. His sense of injustice and despair—exemplified by his question, “What did I ever do?”—reflects a broader critique of how individuals navigate oppressive systems that dictate their fates. In this context, one can see that his suicide was a consequence of societal neglect and the failure of structures that never gave him a chance despite his good education and desire to work hard.

Yi Jae’s initial encounter with death during his job interview at Taekang serves as a critical juncture that reveals the fragility of life and the arbitrary nature of societal success. The shock of this event not only disrupts his ability to perform in the interview but also

symbolizes how the unexpected nature of death can undermine individual aspirations. In this sense, Yi Jae becomes a victim of a necropolitical environment where the stakes of life and death are intertwined with economic survival and social mobility. One of the most prominent societal pressures depicted in the series is the intense academic and professional competition prevalent in South Korea. Yi Jae faces immense pressure to succeed, which leads to feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness. The relentless pursuit of academic excellence and career success creates an environment where failure is not an option, contributing to anxiety and depression. This pressure is further exacerbated by societal norms that equate success with personal worth, leaving individuals trapped and overwhelmed. As he stands atop a building, he is confronted by the advertisement of his university, which boasts a high employment rate, symbolizing the futility of his education in the face of his current plight. This scene encapsulates the profound sense of meaninglessness that can accompany personal crises, as Yi Jae reflects on the societal narratives that often accompany such despair. He articulates his thoughts in a suicide note in the first episode;

“Looking back, the reason I am standing here is the man from seven years ago. My life ended up this way because of that bastard. There is no further hope for me. It’s life that I am afraid of. I am not afraid of death at all. Death is merely the means to end the pain I am in. I refuse to struggle to survive anymore” (0:17:36).

Yi Jae’s resolution reveals several critical issues: the inclination to adopt a victim mentality by blaming another individual for his circumstances, his false bravado regarding his courage in the face of death, and his trivialization of death as merely a means to escape suffering. Most significantly, his actions reflect a broader societal phenomenon where individuals, feeling overwhelmed by personal crises, perceive their lives as devoid of value. The intensity of Yi Jae’s final moments can be analyzed through the lens of thanatology, the study of death and dying. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross’s seminal work, *On Death and Dying* (1969), identifies five stages of grief in response to death: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Over the years, Kübler-Ross expanded these stages to encompass various

forms of grief, including the loss of employment, romantic relationships, and other significant life setbacks (8). This framework remains a widely accepted tool for understanding the emotional responses individuals experience in the face of profound loss. In Yi Jae's case, the journey through grief is marked by a transition from despair to a grim resolution, illustrating how personal tragedies can lead individuals to contemplate their existence in stark terms, pointing to fragile mental health and the societal structures that contribute to such crises.

It is pertinent to note the setting in his final moments before the suicide. The setting of the building top serves as a reflection of Yi Jae's emotional state, encapsulating his feelings of despair, isolation, and hopelessness. This elevated location symbolizes both a physical and metaphorical threshold between life and death, highlighting the precariousness of his situation and the weight of his emotional turmoil. He is physically removed from the world below, which mirrors his emotional detachment from society and the people around him, including his beloved mother who calls him on his phone moments before he jumps. The height of the building creates a vivid contrast between his current state and the life he once envisioned, reinforcing feelings of being trapped in a cycle of failure and loss.

Through his suicide Yi Jae also fails Jung Ji Su who unconditionally loved him throughout his seven-year struggle. His suspicions of her infidelity complicate their relationship, as he fails to recognize the depth of her commitment. Yi Jae remains oblivious to the emotional turmoil his potential death inflicted upon her. Additionally, Yi Jae's insensitivity extends to his relationship with his mother, highlighting a significant aspect of filial connections. Until he is brought to his mother's home, he remains largely unaware of her suffering. Yi Jae's reincarnation as his mother in his 12th life serves as a means of confronting the devastating consequences of his suicide. By experiencing life from his mother's perspective, Yi Jae is forced to confront the pain and anguish he has caused her through his actions. This cyclical return to the maternal role can be interpreted as a lesson in empathy, compelling him to recognize the emotional impact of his decisions on the people who loved him even in his depths of failure.

Thanatology serves as a valuable framework for examining the characters' responses to death, the narrative structure surrounding death-related events, and the symbolic representation of death within the story. In this context, death acts as a crucial lesson for Yi Jae, urging him to cherish life while he still has the opportunity. Yi Jae grapples with an internal struggle characterized by a conflict between his intellectual arrogance and emotional awareness. Despite his university education, he fails to evade the tendency to shift blame onto others, specifically attributing his miseries to the man who jumped in front of him. His dismissive remark that death is easier and more bearable than his current existence offends Death who informs him he will be punished for his mockery. As a form of punishment, Yi Jae is condemned to experience death repeatedly. He is told, "You are now going to die 12 times. Your soul will enter the bodies of 12 people facing imminent death, and you will end up dying regardless of which body you wake up in" (0:23:50). The only exception to this cycle is that if he can manage to avoid death in any of the twelve lives, he will be allowed to continue living in that body. He is cast into an abyss of death where a multitude of demonic creatures wait to tear him apart. But before his body hits the watery grave, he wakes up on a plane as a chaebol Park Jin Tae, in whose body he spends a very short time. A memory orb from Park Jin Tae reminds him that he is the CEO of the company he aspired to serve. A flicker of hope and joy momentarily appears on his face, but death orchestrates his initial demise. The engines catch fire, leading to his burning in his seat. The camera focuses on his face as flames engulf his body, capturing his agonized screams. Following this traumatic experience, Yi Jae's soul returns to the dark chamber, where Death inquires, "How did it feel to die again?" (0:32:57). He faces a new ordeal, with twelve bullets awaiting him, each poised to be fired at his temples. He will be sent into the body of another individual whose death is imminent yet potentially alterable based on his actions.

The depiction of hell is not merely a physical space but a manifestation of Yi Jae's internal struggles and the weight of his past decisions. His next incarnation begins with a harrowing experience during a free fall, live-streamed globally, which highlights society's

fascination with extreme sports and the morbid curiosity surrounding death. The incident, which culminates in his crash landing and subsequent death, is met with a disturbing sense of jubilation as the ratings soar to 30%, showcasing the public's callousness towards tragedy. Yi Jae's initial encounter with death is marked by excruciating pain, as he vocalizes in the second episode, "My head bursts and my damned neck snapped" (0:02:12). This reaction serves as a prelude to a deeper exploration of his sins, particularly the mockery of death itself. Death confronts Yi Jae, suggesting that his transgressions extend beyond mere defiance; he must confront the impact of his actions on others. Yi Jae's shallow understanding leads him to dismiss Death's inquiry, opening a dialogue on the ripple effects of an individual's death on their loved ones.

The narrative then shifts to Yi Jae's next incarnation as Kwon Hyuk Soo, a seventeen-year-old high school student who succumbs to relentless bullying, ultimately leading him to contemplate suicide. Yi Jae's interactions with Kwon's mother evoke memories of his birth mother, highlighting the emotional connections that transcend life and death. This connection is further emphasized when Kwon Hyuk Soo's bullying culminates in a traumatic encounter, resulting in Yi Jae awakening with the lingering pain of his death (episode 2, 0:32:49).

As Yi Jae navigates his subsequent life, he inhabits the body of Lee Joo Hoon, a gangster embroiled in betrayal and greed. The narrative illustrates the cyclical nature of violence, as Yi Jae grapples with the consequences of his actions. His next life as Cho Tae Sang, an impoverished MMA fighter, further highlights the theme of exploitation and the dire choices faced by those in desperate circumstances. Tae Sang's decision to take the blame for a hit-and-run case, motivated by financial desperation, ultimately results in his imprisonment and a tragic encounter with Lee Jin Sang, a self-proclaimed psychopath who revels in violence (episode 3, 0:20:19).

Yi Jae's reflections within the prison setting reveal a sense of regret, as he states, "At first, it felt so unfair. But now I regret being trapped in a prison called death... Now that I've seen what hell is like, I've realized that being alive in itself is a chance" (episode 3, 0:30:33). This acknowledgment of life as a precious opportunity serves

as a pivotal moment in his journey. The emotional climax occurs when Yi Jae attempts to guide Tae Sang toward a better life. In a bid to change his trajectory, he faced a brutal confrontation when the father of the deceased girl attacked him in a dark alley and a heart-wrenching betrayal by his inmate friend for money. Despite Tae Sang's assurances he was stabbed, illustrating the harsh realities of trust and betrayal in his desperate circumstances. Yi Jae's awakening in hell, filled with tears and a longing for his mother, marks a significant shift in his emotional landscape, as he begins to confront the softer aspects of his humanity.

In the next episode, Yi Jae is reborn as an infant, and subjected to abuse and neglect by his parents. The episode opens with an unsettling image of a mutilated doll, foreshadowing the grim realities of child abuse. The radio broadcast in the episode serves as a sad reminder of November 19, the World Day for the Prevention of Child Abuse, with the speaker addressing the grim realities of child maltreatment, foreshadowing the tragic fate that awaited the child. He was violently thrown to the floor and suffocated to death. The camera captured the scene from the victim's perspective, yet, unlike previous deaths, this one unfolded in eerie silence, devoid of bloodshed or sound. Overwhelmed with sorrow for the child, Yi Jae condemned the parents for their neglect and indifference, Yi Jae's accusation is met with a dismissive statement; "No one is guaranteed anything in life. You have just been taking everything for granted," resonates deeply as he recognizes the foolishness of his own choices (episode 4, 0:07:00).

Jang Geon Woo, Yi Jae's next host, is a model who encounters the antagonist of his narrative at a party and reunites with Lee Ji Su, his former lover, at a café where he assists his brother. Ji Su becomes a pivotal figure, distracting him from his quest for revenge. From this point onward, his materialistic pursuits and desire for vengeance are supplanted by feelings of guilt toward his girlfriend and mother. The first accidental meeting with his mother after his suicide occurs at a columbarium, where Yi Jae observes her wiping dust from the glass. Overcome with emotion, he watches as she struggles to contain her grief, ultimately retreating to the restroom in distress. Her cries resonate with Yi Jae, prompting him to break down in tears outside.

This interaction highlights the themes of thanatology, particularly the grief that death inflicts on those left behind and their coping mechanisms. In this scenario, all three individuals—Yi Jae, his mother, and Ji Su—struggle to navigate their grief, each feeling a sense of personal responsibility for the death.

As Yi Jae walks Ji Su home, he reflects on the human fear of death, acknowledging that “there will be no tomorrow” (ep 4, 0:49:22). His constant confrontations with death enhance the value of the time he has left in his current life, as the fear of death imbues life with meaning. Aware that he may not survive the night, he uses this moment to seek Ji Su’s forgiveness. However, revealing his true identity is abruptly followed by a car crash, cutting short this crucial moment. In his final moments, he sees the man responsible for orchestrating his previous deaths.

Yi Jae’s next reincarnation is Jeon Gyu Cheol, a painter notorious for killing fifteen people to create realistic artwork. Both Gyu Cheol and Park Tae U exhibit a disturbing obsession with death, deriving pleasure from witnessing their victims’ final moments. Gyu Cheol recalls, “He was begging me with his eyes. To this day, I remember how electrifying it was” (ep5,0:51:01). One character identifies himself as a proponent of euthanasia, while the other revels in the act of murder, seeing beauty in the bloodshed. They both derive a perverse thrill from the suffering they inflict, capturing the vivid expressions of pain and horror in their art. Gyu Cheol manipulates Tae U into committing murder, secretly recording the act to heighten its brutality. Yi Jae ensures that Gyu Cheol experienced a painful death, enduring significant suffering himself to secure a confession.

An Ji Heyong, a police officer, becomes Yi Jae’s next host and plays a crucial role in seeking justice against Tae U. However, he sacrifices his life to save a fellow officer, believing that the act is worth the cost but realizes that he only brought a sense of sadness and guilt to his partner whom he had saved. When Death then places Yi Jae in the body of a beggar he realizes that his previous life’s sacrifice was not worth it. His life was of more worth to his colleagues rather than his death. His death comes quickly in this incarnation and he then finds himself in the body of the person he blames for ruining

his life by dying before him on his way to the interview. In this incarnation, Yi Jae does not alter the course of the man's actions as he is now frustrated by his inability to effect change, Yi Jae hastens through his final reincarnation, declaring that he will not cling to life at any cost. However, when he enters his mother's body, he realizes that his mother has endured greater suffering than he has and has not succumbed to despair. In episode eight, for the first time, he witnesses her memories of grief over his death, leading to the profound realization that "Death is contagious. As I disappeared from the world, my death remained behind with those who loved me" (0:06:45). This insight emphasizes that the grief experienced by the living can be more painful than the process of dying itself. Inhabiting her body, Yi Jae strives to fulfill the promises he made to her, exerting every effort to ensure her safety. When she falls while trekking Mount Obong, he uses all his strength to crawl to safety. Having lived in constant fear of death for thirty-two years, he manages to protect her from unnatural death until the very end of her natural life. Yi Jae's journey through different reincarnations leads him to appreciate the beauty of life and the pain his suicide would have caused his loved ones. Mbembe's necropolitics suggests that under certain conditions, death can be seen as a form of agency and negation of the state's power. In the series, Yi Jae's decision to live his mother's life until the end represents a redemption of sorts, where he takes control of his mortality and finds meaning in life. In the closing moments, Yi Jae kneels before Death, pleading for another chance at life. He is granted one more bullet from Death, symbolizing a new opportunity to live as Yi Jae.

The series is uniquely narrated from the perspective of the deceased, presenting a challenging and unconventional viewpoint. Each death Yi Jae witnesses and experiences serves to reinforce the notion of fate's supremacy, with some deaths occurring swiftly while others are long drawn out. The central narrative of *Death's Game* revolves around the concept of reincarnation, wherein Yi Jae cycles through different lives and deaths. Mbembe's notion of necropolitics involves the creation of "death-worlds," which he defines as "new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead" (40).

The series presents these “death-worlds” through Yi Jae’s various reincarnations, where he experiences the struggles and challenges of different lives. Yi Jae’s initial suicidal thoughts are triggered by his inability to find a job and the societal pressures he faces. Mbembe’s concept of necropolitics is concerned with “the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations”(14). The series highlights how societal structures and expectations can lead individuals to contemplate suicide, reflecting the instrumentalization of human life.

The narrative encapsulates the tension between individual choices and divine will, with Yi Jae’s soul subjected to the whims of fate, as he is pushed in and out of the lives of twelve near-death victims, leaving him with no control over his existence. Through the various interconnected narratives, the series delves into the complexities of life, death, the consequences of human actions, and the lack of choice and free will that individuals have in the course of their lives. By applying Mbembe’s concept of necropolitics, we can uncover the series’ exploration of power dynamics, the instrumentalization of human existence, and the creation of “death-worlds”.

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