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HUM324 – Polar Imagination

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Final Paper Topic Proposal – Revised

I want to study the notion of death for the native people of the Arctic. We have encountered human mortality in the Arctic many times, both in fiction (Shelley) and nonfiction (failed northern expeditions, Kpomassie). In particular, Kpomassie brings up many haunting images of death, not only of humans, and in ways that range from horrifying to vibrant. Importantly, death appears to live much closer to the average person, and there seems to be a greater detachment between the native people and others in order to better prepare themselves for death.

Also in Kpomassie's paper, I was inspired by the image of elderly Inuit hunters performing "suicide" by walking out into the cold, never to return, or staying behind in an igloo, never to leave. It is silent and accepting, haunting and noble, and I would like to investigate what other sources have to say about this custom. You mentioned in class a film about "preparing for death" – that may be an interesting parallel, albeit in a different culture.

There are many aspects of death, apparently mostly accidental, so that may be too broad a topic. I think I would like to focus on the views of death by the elderly population. But if this yields too little information, I may broaden my search. This may involve anything from the language relating to death, rituals and stories relating to death, statistics on the age demographics, etc.