



ELLE'S ACTING EDITOR-IN-CHIEF LOTTE JEFFS TAKES **A SIDWAYS LOOK** AT A WORD THE FASHION WORLD CAN'T STOP SAYING AND ASKS: 'WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN?'

## LEXICON

# 'I DIE'

*Verb: The absolute pinnacle of cool*

**A**nthony Vaccarello's Yves Saint Laurent? DEAD. New season of *Stranger Things*? DYING. Drake and JLo? IDIE. Gucci's gold loafer? LITERALLY DEAD.

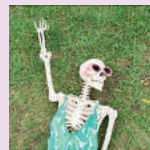
But before you dust off that vintage black Givenchy veil, no one has actually died, silly. By 'literally' I mean metaphorically (do keep up), and by 'dead' I mean all these things make me happy; I can't imagine anything better. Confused? I can explain, but you'll need to concentrate.

You know how bad is good and wicked is great and sick is amazing? Well, using antonyms like this is a way of implicitly adding emphasis to the word's opposite, which is what I really mean. So the more someone or something kills me, the more I'm enjoying it. We have super-stylist Rachel Zoe to thank for bringing the eschatological into popular fashion speak. Her ridiculous 2008 'reality' TV show saw Zoe and her team dressing celebrities and flicking through rails of designer clothes, sending everything major to the morgue. 'I die' was her catchphrase, and it works as the ultimate last word. As in, there are literally no remaining superlatives to describe how spectacular this shoe is, so we might as well all just die. That didn't stop Zoe getting creative with the concept: 'I'm having a fucking Chanel heart attack right now' was one of her most memorably morbid exclamations of delight.

I wonder whether Zoe realised she wasn't the first to equate death and joy in this way? Even before the Eighties' love of the phrase 'to die

for', a certain William Shakespeare had fun with it as one of his favourite metaphors for sexual pleasure. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Benedick tells Beatrice: 'I will live in thy heart, die in thy lap, and be buried in thy eyes' (text translation: 'ur bae'), and *la petite mort*, French for 'the little death', has been an idiom for sexual climax for more than 150 years. So why am I talking about all this now?

While the millennial fashion world is busy dying over handbags, we are also asking ourselves what *literally* dying means today. After 2016, a year in which we lost some



### 'THE MORE SOMEONE OR SOMETHING KILLS ME, THE MORE I'M ENJOYING IT'

of our most-loved pop-culture icons, public outpourings of grief on social media have become de rigueur. But as the writer Claire Wilmot argued in a brilliant piece for *The Atlantic* last summer, 'Social media often reproduces the worst cultural failings surrounding death, namely platitudes that help those on the periphery of a tragedy rationalise what has happened, but obscure the uncomfortable, messy reality of loss.' She gives the example of an old classmate of her recently deceased sister Lauren, who hadn't kept in touch over the past few years but had found 'perhaps the only photo of the

two of them together and posted it on Lauren's [Facebook] timeline. Beneath it, she wrote "RIP" and something about heaven gaining an angel.' Wilmot, while grieving for her sibling, wished she hadn't.

Death in the age of social media is a *Black Mirror*-like conundrum, rich with the possibility of interpretations neither William Shakespeare nor Rachel Zoe would know what to do with. As long as our Facebook and Instagram profiles live on, in some ways so do we. There are even services now that will post to social media on your behalf after your death. Oh, and let's take a moment to reflect on what could be the ultimate millennial response to FOMO: the London teenager who, last year, knowing she didn't have long to live, successfully argued for her body to be cryogenically frozen so that, when medical science catches up, she may be brought back to life.

I can't help but admire the linguistic longevity of 'dying': from the theatres of the 1600s to fashion shows in 2017, it's been used to describe a kind of ecstasy – what other slang word has had such staying power? But this month, I hope you'll join me in saying RIP to 'I die' for good (or at least until we really mean it), because in its place is my new favourite internet phrase, 'Giving me life', which, in a brilliantly contrary turn of events, means the exact same thing as dying (I said you'd need to pay attention). And I think we can agree that living for fashion is always better than dying for it. Literally.

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