CHAPTER 1

Of Corpses, Constables and Kings:
The Danse Macabre in Late Medieval and Renaissance Culture

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The origins of the danse macabre, or Dance of Death, are still obscure, but the popularity of this theme in the late Middle Ages and beyond is undeniable. From the first half of the 15th century, it spread rapidly through European art, literature and drama. Visual examples are found in murals, stained-glass windows, illuminated manuscripts, early printed books, and sculpture. It continued to enjoy great popularity amongst artists and patrons long after the medieval period. Perhaps the most famous danse macabre is the series of woodcuts by Hans Holbein the Younger, published in 1538, inspired by medieval examples but characterised very much by a Renaissance approach. Centuries later the danse macabre inspired composers such as Franz Schubert, Franz Liszt and Camille Saint-Saëns, the film director Ingmar Bergman, and even the animator Walt Disney.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE DANSE MACABRE

Despite the popularity it once enjoyed here, the danse macabre seems to be regarded in Britain nowadays as rather a European affair or, more specifically, something for scholars on the Continent to occupy themselves with. Whereas there are thriving societies devoted to the study of this theme in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, France and Italy, there is no British counterpart, nor has there been an English monograph for over half a century. As a result, there is now in Britain a fairly limited understanding of what the danse actually represented, or what (if anything) Britain contributed to this theme. When pressed, most people are likely to associate the term danse macabre either with the music of the French composer Camille Saint-Saëns, who conjured up a vision of dancing skeletons fleeing back to their graves only at the break of day in his 1874 symphonic poem La Danse Macabre, or with Walt Disney’s first Silly Symphony animation The Skeleton Dance of 1929, which presented a similar scene, albeit with different music. The fact that this musical version was composed nearly five hundred years after the first mention of the danse, highlights its enduring popularity. However, the theme has undergone many changes over the centuries, and the original danse macabre was a far more serious and complicated affair.

The term danse macabre implies both dancing and music, and these were originally crucial ingredients. Of course, there is a firm link between music and death that dates
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back to Antiquity. Music often played a role in funeral rites, and musical instruments have been found in ancient tombs, presumably for use or entertainment in the afterlife. Tales were also told of creatures who used music to lure the living to their deaths, from the sirens whom Odysseus successfully resisted, to the more modern legends of the Pied Piper and the Lorelei. The skeleton itself is an obvious emblem of death, but the musical skeleton can already be observed in ancient art, a striking example being a number of such figures on two silver modiolus cups found in the Boscoreale treasure near Pompeii and probably datable between 100 BC and the 1st century AD. Another famous example of a stucco relief with dancing skeletons was discovered in a tomb at Cumae in 1869. Yet the musical or dancing nature of these animated skeletal figures served a different purpose in Graeco-Roman art, as they must be interpreted within the context of other such carved or bronze figures depicted as attending or serving at a banquet in parody of the living; some appear to have been actually used at banquets as a reminder of the fact that all earthly pleasures are but short-lived, while others can be found in funerary art. The nature of these skeletal figures is thus moralising: they do not personify Death, nor do they threaten the living. Intriguing though these classical examples are, any direct link with the medieval danse macabre is highly unlikely, as the skeleton fell out of favour in Early Christian art, only to reappear in a different context in the Middle Ages.

Oddly, the very meaning of the word ‘macabre’ is unclear. The earliest known use of this term occurs in Jehan Le Fèvre’s 1376 poem Respit de la Mort, which contains the lines:

Je fisst de macabree la dance
Qui toutes gens mène à la tresse
Et à la fosse les adresse
Qui est leur deraine maison...

I made/did the dance of Macabree
who leads all people to the dance
and who adress them at the grave
that is their last abode...

It remains uncertain whether Le Fèvre was referring to a theme already known at the time, or whether he himself wrote an earlier danse macabre poem that has since been lost; the answer to that question, and the meaning of the word ‘macabre’, depends on how one interprets the first line and especially the word ‘fisst’. Of course, there was an earlier medieval theme with obvious ‘macabre’ overtones: the tale of the Three Living and the Three Dead. In this story, three proud young noblemen — sometimes presented as kings — are out hunting when they meet three corpses, who warn them against the vanity of all human endeavour. The theme is obvious: memento mori — remember that you must die! The late medieval preoccupation with ‘the macabre’ has often been viewed in the light of the recurring plague epidemics, but long before the Black Death first arrived in Europe, artists already depicted the encounter of the Three Living and the Three Dead in murals and manuscript illuminations. The theme first appeared in French poetry in the 13th century, but it is based on a much older oriental tale. In art, the original confrontation appears peaceful, though obviously frightening; only later do the Three Dead adopt a more menacing stance, at times even threatening the Three Living with spears, darts or spears. In England the theme proved quite popular from the 14th century on, whereas most French wall-paintings date from the 15th century. Surviving English murals can be found in churches across the country, including the chapel of St Nicholas at Haddon Hall (Fig. 1), but also at Longthorpe Tower near Peterborough.

One famous English example of the Three Living and the Three Dead can be found in the early-14th-century Psalter of Robert de Lisle (British Library, MS Arundel 83,
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Fig. 1. The Three Dead, mural painted in the 1420s or 1520s, Haddon Hall chapel, Derbyshire

Fig. 2. The Three Living and the Three Dead, c. 1310, from the Psalter of Robert de Lisle
(London, British Library, MS Arundel 83, pt. II, f. 127v)

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Here, a French poem with Latin headers is accompanied by a miniature of three startled kings opposite three decaying corpses (Fig. 2). Each of the six characters has his own short line in Middle English, starting with the Three Living on the left:

Ich am afer.
Lo whet ich se.
Me thinketh hit beth dezeles thre.

Ich wes wel fair.
Such schelteou be.
For godes loue be wer by me

This dialogue is continued in the poem itself, which is a shortened version of a French poem of the 13th century. The third corpse in particular paints a telling picture of his earlier existence:

leo fu de mon lynage chief.
Princes reys et conustables.
Beals et riches ioyanz mes tables.
Ore su si hidosus et si nue.
Ke moy uer ne deigne nuls.

I was the chief of my lineage.
Princes, kings and constables,
fair and rich enjoyed my tables.
But now I am so hideous and naked
that even the worms scorn me.

The remark about princes, kings and constables almost hints at the theme of the danse macabre, in which a skeletal figure forces people from all ranks of society to take part in his dance. However, this by itself should not be regarded as an early reference to the danse macabre, for medieval authors had a fondness for listing ranks and characters, especially if they were alliterative as well.13

Within the context of the medieval preoccupation with death and the macabre, the theme of the Three Living and the Three Dead was followed in the later 14th century by the cadaver or transl tomb. The cadaver effigy can be found either on its own or in ‘double-decker’ monuments, and in many varieties, from relatively fresh corpses in their shrouds to near-skeletal or even vermin-infested human remains, just as the Three Dead often show different stages of decomposition; similar variations of dead and decomposing figures can be observed in the danse macabre from the 13th century on. One well-documented example of a cadaver tomb with moralising verses aimed at the beholder is the monument to the merchant John Baret (d. 1467), which is situated in the south aisle of St Mary’s church at Bury St Edmunds (Suffolk).14 This macabre tomb iconography also appealed to the clergy, as suggested by examples found in various cathedrals, such as the chantry at Lincoln of Richard Fleming (d. 1431), bishop of Lincoln and subsequently archbishop of York (Fig. 3).15 The ideas underlying cadaver effigies appear to have changed over time and are too complex to discuss here at length. Some authors have interpreted these monuments as signs of religious piety and humility, or even as deliberate anti-decorum or anti-tombs compared to the idealised norms of effigial display, while others have emphasised their moralising message to the viewer.16

One important issue here is that the cadaver effigy looks forward to the resurrection, when the dead body will rise to be reunited with the soul, as described in Job 19:26: ‘And I shall be clothed again with my skin: and in my flesh I shall see my God.’ In contrast, as we shall see, the characters in the danse macabre tend to look back at the lives that they have lived up to the moment of death, with their skeletal companions reminding them of their mistakes and sins that may have cost them their salvation.

Whence the very idea of the danse macabre came, if not from Antiquity, is also still a matter for debate: it may stem from an old folklore belief that the dead may leave their
graves to roam or dance at night, and thus have moved upwards in a different form into the realm of literature and art, or it may have been inspired somehow by liturgical or other processions, such as those by the flagellants in the 14th century. Some scholars have suggested that the danse may have developed from the type of masque or musical performance that was popular throughout the medieval period, and there are indeed a few records of such performances, albeit that all but one postdate Jean le Fèvre's poem. The one possible and intriguing exception is a performance at Jedburgh in October 1285, a description of which was quoted by Clark from the Scoticchronicon by the Aberdeen chronicler John of Fordun (d. c. 1384). The event is said to have taken place at the wedding celebrations of Alexander III of Scotland and Yolande de Dreux, when a musical procession was brought to an abrupt end by a phantom-like character gliding like a shade amongst those present before vanishing from sight, thereby causing music and song to cease and the dancers to freeze, much to everyone's dismay. Contemporaries clearly considered the event all the more memorable because of the
unexpected death of the king only a few months later in March 1286. The question of whether this performance at Jedburgh was really related to the later danse macabre remains to be answered, and one must resist the temptation of drawing comparisons with the use of skeletal figures at Roman banquets. Obviously, there must have been visual precursors that influenced the depiction of the skeletons in the danse, but it is futile to try and pinpoint any indisputable prototype. From a literary point of view, mention should be made of the Latin Vado Mori poem, which emerged in France in the 13th century and in which different figures from society, from pope to pauper, complain that they are about to die; yet these are monologues instead of dialogues, and again no direct link with the danse has so far been established. There may well be links between drama and the danse macabre, but as one expert recently declared, any claims about the origins of the danse remain hypothetical through lack of firm evidence. Whatever its origins, the danse macabre was to become a major theme in the 15th century at a time when the late medieval preoccupation with death was also catered for by manuscript copies and subsequently printed editions of other moralising works in the Ars Moriendi vein.

The earliest known monumental danse was to be found in Paris, but only some fifty years after Le Fèvre’s poem. The so-called Bourgeois de Paris recorded in his diary that the famous mural on the walls of the cemetery of the Franciscan convent Aux Saints Innocents was painted between August 1424 and Easter 1425, during the English occupation of the French capital. The cemetery already featured another piece of macabre decoration: only a few years earlier, Jean, duc de Berry, had commissioned a sculpted tympanum above the doorway to the cemetery illustrating the story of the Three Living and the Three Dead. The cemetery at Les Innocents was undoubtedly one of the most sought after burial places in Paris, as well as a popular meeting place where one could stroll around the various market stalls and listen to open-air sermons, or pick up a prostitute (or a client). Preachers may well have used the wall-painting and its surroundings as a visual aid to point out to their audiences the vanities of this earthly life, and the fact that death is inevitable yet often unexpected.

The mural in Paris was destroyed many centuries ago, but an idea of its text and overall composition has been preserved for posterity in a printed edition with woodblock illustrations first published in 1485 by the Parisian printer Guyot Marchant (Fig. 4). In as far as this printed edition is to be relied upon as a faithful record, the mural probably comprised some thirty characters who each held a dialogue with Death, or possibly their own dead counterpart. Marchant’s original texts refer to ‘le mort’ (the dead person) rather than to ‘la mort’ for Death itself, which leaves it unclear whether the Parisian mural showed a dance of the living with the dead, or one in which Death was presented as the overall orchestrator; Marchant’s subsequent use of ‘la mort’ in the Grant danse macabre des femmes of 1491 further obscures the issue. (The same problem applies to the German term Totentanz, which literally means ‘dance of the dead’.) The victims in Marchant’s 1485 edition are all male, and they belong to all ranks of society from the very highest to the lowest: the pope, emperor, king and cardinal, but also the burgher, scholar, usurer, labourer, hermit and even the infant in his cradle. Printing a book version of the Parisian mural forced Marchant to introduce one important change: in contrast to the mural, which depicted a continuous chain of living and dead figures, Marchant’s edition just showed two pairs per page, usually a juxtaposition of one religious and one lay character. The woodcut illustrations present Death (or the dead) as a putrid corpse, either naked or half-covered by a shroud, sometimes even worm-infested, and often holding a typical attribute: a large dart, a
spade, a coffin, or a scythe. The *danse* contains a moralising prologue and epilogue by the *acteur* or author, which reinforce the overall message: Death will come to both young and old, rich and poor, so it is better to eschew earthly pleasures and focus on good deeds in order to attain heaven.

Nobody has yet been able to propose a satisfactory explanation for the five decades of apparent silence between the mention of a dance ‘de macabre’ in Jehan Le Févre’s 1376 poem and the painting of a *danse macabre* mural at Les Innocents, which is generally regarded as so sophisticated that it cannot have been an early prototype. The French text of the mural is often attributed to Jean Gerson, chancellor of the university of Paris, but it is yet possible that it was inspired by an earlier Latin poem on the *danse macabre* by an unknown author. However, no such prototype is known today, and earlier theories about a supposed mid-14th-century textual genesis are now considered highly conjectural. Whatever the origins may have been, the mural in Paris seems to have formed the start of the *danse*’s real advance across medieval Europe.

**The Spread of the *Danse Macabre***

Within a decade of the completion of the Parisian mural, the Bedford Master and his workshop appear to have produced an extensively decorated book of hours that includes, amongst other themes, a *danse macabre* in its margins. The manuscript survives in two parts, but it is the first part in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New
York that contains the marginal scenes relevant to this paper.\textsuperscript{30} Amazingly, although its proposed date of c. 1430–35 would make this manuscript the earliest extant visual cycle, it has so far received relatively little attention. Illuminated in Paris while the English occupation of the city continued, the manuscript features an ambitious range of vignettes that do not show an actual dance, but rather, in each case, an independent encounter between a living representative of society and one or two skeletons. It is also the sheer number of danse macabre scenes that causes surprise: whereas the wall-painting at Les Innocents may not have contained more than thirty pairs, the decorated outer margins of fols 123\textsuperscript{v}–151\textsuperscript{v} of MS M.359 show fifty-seven individual scenes, including one of the traditional ‘doctor’ or author at the very beginning of the series.

All living figures are male, and the scheme starts with the quite traditional order of pope-emperor-cardinal-king, yet many other characters are unusual and do not occur in Marchant’s edition, such as the Knight Templar, the Trinitarian and the goldsmith. In fact, the series appears to contain an unusually large variety of monks and friars, although religious and lay figures do not always alternate. There is some further variation: some scenes are shown as roundels with the living flanked by two skeletons, but there are also some half-roundels with just one skeleton pulling at the victim. Furthermore, whereas most figures are simply standing while skeletons caper on either side of them, others are being dragged from their own typical environment, such as the money-changer (f. 144\textsuperscript{r}) and the goldsmith (f. 145\textsuperscript{v}) from behind their tables, the farmer (f. 146\textsuperscript{v}) from behind his plough, or the swaddled infant from his cradle (f. 151\textsuperscript{v}). The patron who commissioned this particularly rich manuscript is unknown, and a recent suggestion that it must have been the Duke of Bedford himself cannot be substantiated.\textsuperscript{31} Further research is required before a proper assessment of this particular scheme can be published.

Even without MS M.359 and its proposed date of c. 1430–35, it is obvious that the danse soon exerted a strong influence on the arts and on literature. There are other pre-Marchant manuscripts that purport to be copies of the poem accompanying the wall-painting at Les Innocents, while it has also been argued that several poems by François Villon (1431–after early 1463) drew some of their inspiration from the Parisian mural, with which the poet must have been familiar.\textsuperscript{32} Unfortunately, for every example of danse macabre iconography that does survive, there must have been several that have since been lost or destroyed. One intriguing case is the altarpiece of the Life of St Bertin painted between 1455 and 1459 by Simon Marmion for the abbey of St Bertin at St Omer, which features in the background of two of the panels now in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin a danse macabre wall-painting in a cloister with accompanying verses underneath the figures of the dead and the living (Fig. 5).\textsuperscript{33} Whether the wall-painting in the St Bertin altarpiece was based on an existing scheme that the artist had actually seen, is a question that cannot be answered. None the less, it is a typical example of a danse macabre mural with verses and skeletal figures paired with male representatives of society, several of whom can be identified, and it must have been a familiar enough theme for the artist to include it in a commissioned altarpiece. Marmion had previously been active in Amiens, where the cathedral is believed to have had its own mural, albeit not until later; apparently, sources testify to the inclusion of female figures at Amiens, which would have been highly unusual in a French scheme before the end of the 15th century.\textsuperscript{34} Marmion completed the St Bertin altarpiece while resident in Valenciennes, where he died in 1489.

Meanwhile, it was an English visitor to Paris who helped the danse macabre cross the Channel. John Lydgate, a monk and poet from Bury St Edmunds, composed the
first Middle-English version of the Parisian poem before 1430, possibly while he was still in Paris. In his introduction, Lydgate referred his readers to ‘the example whiche that at Paris I fownde depicte ones on a walle’, but his concluding ‘envoys’ explains that his is clearly a relatively free translation.\textsuperscript{38}  

\textit{Oute of the frenshe I droue hit of entent  
Not worde be worde but foluyng the substaunce}

There are a number of remarkable differences between Lydgate’s poem, which survives in two distinct versions, and the record of the French mural that has come down to us through Guyot Marchant’s 1485 edition. For example, Lydgate originally followed the order and range of the Parisian characters in his earlier version, the six known manuscripts of which constitute Group A, but in a subsequent revised and expanded version (B) he added a number of female characters, which vary per manuscript version: the empress, the ‘lady of great estate’ (also sometimes described as the princess), the abbess, and the \textit{gentilwoman ameorous} (also described as the young gentlewoman).\textsuperscript{39}  No women appear in Marchant’s all-male version of 1485, which has always been regarded as an indication that they were absent in the Parisian mural, too. Other textual similarities with the German \textit{Totentanz} tradition may suggest that Lydgate was familiar with a possible Latin prototype underlying both French and German \textit{dans macabre} versions, but this remains hypothesis.\textsuperscript{37}

Lydgate’s poem obviously made an impression back home in England, for in 1430 a request was made that his verses should be incorporated into a newly commissioned
Dance of Death scheme in the medieval cloisters of Pardon Churchyard at Old St Paul’s Cathedral in London. The patron responsible for this danse was the wealthy London town clerk John Carpenter (1371/2–1442), a close friend of the famous Lord Mayor Richard (Dick) Whittington and also of Reginald Pecock, who was himself a scholar and author as well as chaplain to Henry VI in the 1430s before being elected bishop of St Asaph in 1444. Carpenter’s new danse macabre scheme in London was probably painted onto wooden panels rather than onto the walls of the cloisters. Just like the cemetery of Les Innocents in Paris, the cemetery of Old St Paul’s was a ‘pardon churchyard’ and thus very popular. The paintings in London were destroyed when the cloisters were demolished in 1549, as recorded by John Stow in 1598. However, the programme in London became so well known that danse macabre schemes elsewhere in England were often described as the ‘Dance of Poulis’, or dance of [St] Paul’s. Its fame is vividly illustrated by the 1573 will of Thomas Cooke Esq., which stipulated that a brass near his chantry chapel in the parish church of St Laurence in Ludlow was to feature, besides images of himself and his wife Isabel, a third figure ‘after the mortal after the daunce of powles’, holding the text:

Man behold so as I am now, so shalt thou be
Gold and silver shall make no plea
This daunce to defende, but follow me

This brass image of a Death-like figure, the reference to the uselessness of gold and silver, and its proximity to Cooke’s chantry chapel provide an interesting comparison with two early-16th-century painted panels of Death and a young gallant on the stone screen of Robert Markham’s chantry chapel in the church of St Mary Magdalen at Newark-on-Trent (Notts.), which show the elegant youth vainly dipping his hand into his purse as Death holds out a flower to him with his right hand in a parody of courtship, while ominously pointing to the earth below with his left. Yet the danse was not only found in a cemetery or tomb context. Murals were painted in other parts of churches, such as in the nave or choir, or near the church door, and the theme also existed in other media. We know that, beside other danse macabre wall-paintings outside London, Britain once boasted examples of the theme in stained glass, sculptural schemes, stained and painted cloths, and possibly also tapestry. Unfortunately, most of these have been lost over the centuries. Only the north wall of the Guild Chapel in Stratford-upon-Avon still retains a complete medieval danse macabre mural with accompanying verses, as recorded by John Stow in 1576, but this scheme has remained hidden from view behind oak panelling since the early 1930s (Fig. 6), and one can only speculate about its present condition. Interestingly, it is likely that the Guild Chapel scheme at Stratford was financed with a bequest in the will of Sir Hugh Clopton, a former Lord Mayor of London, who retired to Stratford and lived in the vicinity of the chapel until his death in 1496; Clopton would obviously have been familiar with the famous danse macabre scheme at Old St Paul’s Cathedral in London.

Despite the loss of these known examples, there remains sufficient evidence to attest to the theme’s former popularity in the British Isles. Apart from the fairly large number of surviving manuscript versions of Lydgate’s poem, there are examples of the theme in late medieval art to be found across the country, such as a large series of sculpted pairs of c. 1460 across the ribbed vault of the Lady Chapel in Rosslyn Chapel, Scotland (Fig. 7a, b); one remaining scene of Death and the Bishop in a stained-glass panel of c. 1500 in the north aisle of St Andrew’s Church at Norwich; four danse macabre pairs on the late medieval painted screen of c. 1500 at Hexham Priory in Northumberland (Fig. 8);
and the two painted panels at Newark mentioned earlier.\textsuperscript{45} There is also still a misericord in St George’s Chapel, Windsor, which was carved between 1477 and 1483 with one central scene of Death capturing a rich man, flanked by two supporters showing Death paired with a labourer and (possibly) a gardener; three more 15th-century misericords with danse macabre supporters flanking scenes from the Seven Acts of Mercy at St Michael’s church, Coventry, were destroyed in World War II.\textsuperscript{46} The diversity of media in which British artists depicted the danse macabre in the second half of the 15th century is quite striking. The theme also inspired other authors, such as the Scottish poets William Dunbar and Robert Henryson, and references to the danse have been identified in two of the Chester Cycle plays.\textsuperscript{47} From the late 15th century on, the danse also came to influence tomb iconography, both in its use of dialogue between Death and the viewer on the 1481 brass of John Rudying at Biggleswade ( Beds.), and in the ironical depiction of Death simultaneously despatching both the park-keeper James Gray and his prey on his 1591 brass at Hunsdon (Herts.).\textsuperscript{48}

The theme also spread rapidly across France. Wall-paintings, or fragments of such schemes, can still be found in the churches of Kermaria and Kernacleden (Fig. 9) in Brittany, and in the abbey church at La Chaise-Dieu in Auvergne, but we know that there were once more such murals, some with and some without accompanying texts.\textsuperscript{49} One may also find the danse macabre combined with the tale of the Three Living and the Three Dead, as in the village church at Meslay-le-Grenet near Chartres.\textsuperscript{50} By serving as models, illustrated editions by Guyot Marchant and other publishers helped the danse to spread even further; the wall-painting of c. 1500 in the nave of the church at
FIG. 7. *Danse macabre* carvings, mid- to late 15th century, Rosslyn Chapel: a, View of the vault of the Lady Chapel; b, Detail of the *danse macabre* carvings on the rib springing from the north-west corner of the vault

*Mr Stuart Beattie, Project Director, Rosslyn Chapel*
La Ferté-Loupière is quite clearly based on Marchant’s woodcuts and also features the Three Living and the Three Dead.\footnote{31}

Outside France and England, there was a distinct German *danse macabre* or *Totentanz* tradition, which may be based on an originally Latin prototype. A Latin-German version survives in a manuscript with texts compiled in Augsburg between 1443 and 1447 for Margaret of Savoy; although this does not feature illustrations or a proper dialogue between Death and his victim, it contains a scribal reference to what may have been an earlier *Totentanz* version in an illustrated codex.\footnote{32} A faded set of wall-paintings can still be seen just inside the west entrance of the Marienkirche in Berlin, and there were once other schemes in Lübeck, Ulm, and even two in Basel where Holbein is known to have lived and worked in the 1510s and ‘20s. Unfortunately, these latter four have all been destroyed, but some further offshoots are still extant in Metnitz (Carinthia), Beram and Hrastovlje (both in Istria).\footnote{33} The *danse macabre* also reached other parts of Europe. In modern-day Italy, there remain several macabre wall-paintings, for example, in Clusone (Bergamo) and Carisolo (Trento), although Italian artists appear to have preferred a variation on the theme, usually known as the *Trionfi*.
Fig. 9.  Death and the Cardinal, mid- to late 15th century, fragment of a danse macabre mural in the south transept of the church at Kernascleden (Brittany).

In what is now Spain, a mural of eight dancing dead figures probably dating from the 16th century can still be found in the Capilla del Santo Cristo at Javier (Navarra), and there is also the Danza general de la muerte, a 15th-century poem containing a dialogue between Death and originally thirty-three characters. The danse macabre also made its way to Denmark, as one can still see in the church at Nørre Alslev with its mural of c. 1480. Only the Netherlands and Belgium now have little left to offer, although a sculpted danse macabre from the mid-15th century can still be observed on the south wall of the nave of the church of Notre-Dame du Sablon in Brussels; the cemetery chapel of Saint André in Binche also retains two wooden sculptures of 1537 showing Death with the emperor and Death with the pope, and there may once have been a danse macabre at Ypres, if a Dutch proverb can be relied upon as evidence.

One curious survival is the ensemble of two wooden figures of Death pursuing a youth of c. 1580 in the Noordbrabants Museum in 's-Hertogenbosch (Bois-le-Duc), which once formed part of the famous late medieval mechanical clock of the Last Judgement in the cathedral of St John in that city.

The danse macabre was to become a popular subject for printmakers and publishers, especially on the Continent. Guyot Marchant was not alone in recognising its commercial scope, for other French printers soon followed his example. Nor was
Marchant the first; in Germany, the so-called Heidelberg blockbook with illustrations was printed in 1465, its text an expanded dialogue version between Death and his victims based on the earlier Latin-German poem that survives in a single manuscript copy in the same University Library at Heidelberg. Other versions soon followed, such as the illustrated edition Der döten dantz mit figuren clage und antwoord schon von allen staten der weltt attributed to the publisher Heinrich Knoblochzter and probably printed in Heidelberg around 1487/88, the text of which was to some extent based on Marchant's edition. Illuminators and engravers also applied images of the danse to the margins of books of hours as a decorative motif (Fig. 10). It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the German painter and draughtsman Hans Holbein the Younger was inspired to create his own versions in the 1520s. Most famous is his series of woodcuts published as Les simulachres & historieres faces de la mort at Lyon in 1538, in which he shows the encounter between Death and the living as separate vignettes, sometimes with references to the traditional musical theme, but also with a clear sense of irony or even violence (Figs 11, 12). Holbein also designed a danse macabre alphabet and a silver dagger sheath with the same motif.
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**Fig. 11.** Death and the Empress, woodcut from the series *Les simulachres & historiees faces de la mort* by Hans Holbein the Younger, first published in Lyon, 1538

**Fig. 12.** Death and the Nun, woodcut from the series *Les simulachres & historiees faces de la mort* by Hans Holbein the Younger, first published in Lyon, 1538
FROM the start, the medieval danse macabre incorporated people from all walks of life, although they were mostly male; only Lydgate and some of the German versions also included a handful of women, such as the empress and the noblewoman. Touchingly life-like are the Latin-German manuscript text and the Heidelberg blockbook, which not only feature the infant calling in vain for help from his mother, but also the mother herself mourning the fact that both she and her son are forced to join Death’s dance. If one can trust the evidence of Matthäus Merian’s 1621 engravings, the famous lost Totentanz mural of c. 1440 on the cemetery wall of the Dominican convent at Basel also included the mother, whose whole family is taken by Death: both her husband and her infant in its cradle.

The crucial message of the danse is that everyone must die; Death makes no distinction between rich or poor, young or old. This is emphasised in the final words of the infant in the versions of Marchant, Lydgate and Knoblochtzer, respectively:

... Aussi tost meurt ienune que vieux
... As some dyeth a yonge man as an olde.
... As wol stiveth das ünge als das alde.

It is the actual moment of death that is often emphasised, rather than the hereafter. Death is merely an intermediary, and not a messenger from either heaven or hell; God will decide the ultimate fate of each mortal, whereas Death is merely responsible for delivering the fatal summons. This is confirmed by Death himself to the ‘Amme’ or nurse in the 1520 printed Lübecker Totentanz, when he tells her that he takes ‘Oth, junck, quaden unde ock de besten’; God ‘wylyk rekht na den werken lonen’ (God will reward each justly according to their deeds). The theme fits in well with the 15th-century obsession with the process of dying, as we know it from such late medieval morality plays as Everyman and The Castle of Perseverance, or the popular Ars Moriendi texts that offered instructions on how to die a ‘good death’.

Many participants of the danse prove through their final speeches that they are ill prepared for Death, who usually arrives as an unwelcome spectre. Some resign themselves to their inescapable fate, like the infant in his cradle. Others show not merely surprise but even indignation, sometimes because their social positions forbid them to take part in such an uncivilised dance, as the king exclaims in Marchant’s edition: ‘Je nay point apris a danser / A danse et note si sauiage’ (I have never learnt such a wild dance with such savage music). His reaction is somewhat understandable: Death is invariably shown playing the types of musical instruments more suitable for entertaining the lower classes than for court dances, and his accompanying capers are anything but elegant. Various high-ranking figures in the 1465 Heidelberg blockbook complain about this final indignity that they are forced to suffer, an example being the bishop who bitterly remarks how he is being dragged along ‘als eynen affen’, like a performing monkey. In general, Death seems to enjoy such reactions and he mocks his victims mercilessly in return. Thus, the cook in the Heidelberg blockbook is urged to ‘heat up’ the sluggards amongst his fellow-dancers with a spicy pepper sauce. It is one of many examples of Death’s little ironies. In the Knoblochtzer edition of c. 1487/88, Death invites a young man to apply his fancy manners and paces in this final danse, while the cardinal is told that his red hat and gown no longer impress anyone. Death’s grinning skull and his preposterous capers reaffirm his cruel mockery in the various medieval depictions of the danse.
There is unmistakable social criticism in the *danse macabre*. The mightiest on earth are usually the first to encounter Death: the pope tends to open the procedures, forced to submit to the *danse* despite his dignity. The emperor and the king follow. Together with the cardinal, they form the four sole survivals on the Hexham screen (Fig. 8). Death often criticises his victims for their former ways of life. In Knoblochtes’s edition, the count is reminded of how notoriously arrogant he always was in his treatment of both the clergy and the laity; on the other hand, the artisan should have devoted more time to his soul’s salvation instead of spending all day and night on his craft. Unable to escape Death, many of the dying themselves lament their former sins. Knoblochtes’s bishop recognises too late that he will have to face the consequences of the many taxes he used to levy, and of his cruel oppression of the poor (Fig. 13). Similarly, the duke acknowledges that he would have served God better in poverty, and the abbot also admits that he probably would have lived a more pious life if only he had remained a poor monk:

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Wote ich ein arm der monch gewesen
Gott gediene mit syngen und myt lesen
Vnd hette myn sele wolff bewart
Frolich fur ich diße leste fett
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Had I been a poor monk,
and served God with singing and with reading
and carefully guarded my soul,
then I would have cheerfully made this final journey.

The ‘amptgeselle’ or young journeyman from Flanders in the 1520 Lübecker Totentanz edition, meanwhile, is equally unprepared for Death’s summons, exclaiming that he would much rather accompany his mates to the pub, ‘To der wytten Ulen etfe
to deme Roden Hanen’ (to The White Owl or to The Red Cock). Yet money and covetousness perhaps constitute the main root of all evil, according to the *danse macabre*; this certainly seems to be the message of the misericord at Windsor, the painted panels at Newark, and the lost brass of Thomas Cooke at
Ludlow, as mentioned earlier. One of the most despised characters in the Middle Ages was the usurer, who is told in Knoblochter's edition that he has willfully squandered his salvation for gold and silver — a poor exchange! In his desperation, the usurer offers to build churches and return his ill-gotten wealth, if only he might have a little more time to show his remorse, but it is too late.\textsuperscript{75} And there is the rub, for Death always arrives unexpectedly in the \textit{danse macabre}, before his victim has another chance to do penance for his sins or gain absolution at the last minute. Dying a sudden death without receiving the last sacraments was every medieval person's nightmare — one that only St Christopher might protect one against. Marchant and Lydgate both present the usurer as being upbraided not only by Death, but also by a pauper who reminds him that usury is a grave sin that will cost him dear.\textsuperscript{76} It is quite in character that the money which the usurer manages to slip into the pauper's hand at the last minute is intended as a loan, rather than as alms (compare Fig. 10).

Yet perhaps the most cynical picture of contemporary life can be found in Holbein's woodcut series, which was created in the mid-1520s during the artist's stay in Basel, a city that once housed two famous \textit{danse macabre} murals.\textsuperscript{77} With this series, first published in 1538 with numerous new editions thereafter, we have obviously entered the Renaissance. Holbein does not present the theme as a continuous chain of dancers, but as a series of independent scenes in which Death surprises one victim after another, sometimes quite subtly, but often in a very violent manner. Wearing a cardinal's head, he hides behind other dignitaries while approaching the pope, and in another scene he acts as a cup-bearer to the king (a portrait of King Francis I of France). Other victims, however, are simply dragged off: the monk, the abbes, and the fat abbot. The nun is another target of Holbein's irony: kneeling in her cell before a small altar, she ogles the handsome young man playing a lute while seated on her bed. Her thoughts are clearly fixed on earthly pleasures, and she is blind to the fact that Death is about to snuff her candle (Fig. 12). The withered pendulous breasts that Death displays both here and in Holbein's woodcut of the empress (Fig. 11) emphasise once more the folly of female vanity.\textsuperscript{78}

Whilst there were a few female characters both in Lydgate's poem and in various German \textit{Totentanz} versions, the French \textit{danse macabre} was originally an all-male affair. However, the success of his 1485 edition probably encouraged Guigot Marchant to add a special female \textit{danse} to his 1486 edition, followed by a fully illustrated new edition in 1491.\textsuperscript{79} The text of the \textit{Danse macabre des Femmes} is usually attributed to the poet Martial d'Avvergne; the earliest known manuscript is dated 1482.\textsuperscript{80}

Compared to the all-male version, the author of the \textit{Danse macabre des Femmes} clearly faced a much more difficult task trying to find a sufficient number of female characters. After all, there were far fewer female professions than male. Consequently, many figures in the female \textit{danse} simply mirror their male counterparts or otherwise derive their status from their husbands: thus, the queen, the duchess, and the wives of the knight and the squire.\textsuperscript{81} Marital status is another distinguishing factor in the female \textit{danse}, resulting in such types as the virgin, the bride, the newly-wedded wife, the pregnant wife, the spoilt housewife, the old spinster, and the widow. The most striking omission is, oddly enough, the mother, who does occur in the German tradition but not in Lydgate's version, either. The infant was apparently regarded as male by default, for the youngest participant in the female \textit{danse} is the \textit{jeune fille} or little girl.\textsuperscript{82}

Despite these limitations and a degree of stereotyping, the chosen professions paint a fascinating picture of medieval womanhood. Besides women in service, such as the wetnurse and the chambermaid, the female \textit{danse} also presents us with a range of
independent businesswomen, including a landlady and two types of tradeswomen: the _marchande_ and the _revenderesse_. A very unusual type is Margot, the _sotte_ or female fool with her fool's cap and staff, who ends Death's procession of female characters (Fig. 14). Inevitably, there are also a number of negative stereotypes, such as the prostitute and the witch. They all have to join the _danse_, headed by the queen. The wetnurse dies together with her infant charge, both falling victim to an 'epidimie' (probably bubonic plague).

Perhaps the best-known character in the _Danse macabre des Femmes_ is the little girl, whom the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga cited as one of the most touching examples of medieval childhood:

1. _Je voug mère je suis truppee_  
   _Vécy la mort qui me transporte_  
   _Pour dieu quon garde ma poupee_  
   _Mes cing pierres ma belle cotte_

   Oh, help, mother, I have been caught.  
   see how Death is taking me away.  
   For God's sake, take good care of my doll,  
   my five stones, my pretty dress.

The girl's words may seem touchingly childlike, but it is not unlikely that there is a sting in the tail. Whilst it is quite natural for a small child to worry about her beloved toys, her concern for her pretty clothes is one of those typical traits of female vanity that medieval (male) authors enjoyed citing to criticise women, and the author of the _Danse macabre des Femmes_ is no exception, as we shall see.

It is true that many (but not all) women in the _Danse macabre des femmes_ are characterised as frivolous and vain; the duchess who thinks of little but her wealth and jewellery; the socialising _regente_ who specialises in feasts and dancing; the abbess who
hates to leave her silver and gold cross to her successor; the bourgeoise or towns woman lamenting her pretty clothes and accessories; or the squire’s wife who regrets not being able to wear her green dress on New Year’s Day.65 Quite appositely, Death reminds the latter: ‘Par hab it mainte femme peche’ (many a woman commits sin by her dress). The wife of the knight is ordered by Death to strip quickly to take part in his danse; after all, the dead were buried simply in a shroud in the Middle Ages, as burial scenes in medieval art often illustrate. Yet in this instance, Death’s words also carry strong sexual overtones, as well as a pun on the fact that the hunting-mad lady has now become the hunted herself.66

A few women are treated with a little more consideration. The prioress and the cordeliere (Poor Clare) are treated respectfully in view of their religious virtues, with only the slightest question about their true devotion; the bigote or religious hypocrite, on the other hand, is mocked for her sham behaviour (Fig. 14).67 The young virgin, whom Death addresses as ‘douce fille et belle pucelle’ (sweet girl and pretty maiden), is offered the comfort that ‘virginité plaist bien a dieu’ (virginity pleases God).68 Likewise, the pregnant woman is advised not to worry, because God has good reasons for everything; Death may even show some consideration for her condition in his words ‘Allons pas a pas bellement’ (let us go nicely, step by step).69 Quite poignant is the fact that the dying pregnant woman commends both her soul and her unborn child to God; the ultimate fate of unbaptised children — both born and unborn — was still a matter of great concern and dispute.70

Few of the women express any concern for their husbands, in the way the male author presents them, although admittedly none of their male counterparts seem to worry about their wives, either. The femme mignote or spoilt wife remembers her husband mainly for his material success in providing her with rings and dresses, whereas the shepherdess has more sentimental regrets about having to leave her lover behind, together with the pretty fields and flowers.71 There are also vociferous complaints from the chambermaid, whose mistress had promised to marry her off with a dowry, but it would appear to be the marital status she craves as a just reward for her services, rather than any particular husband.72 The widow alone is anxious about her young children, who will be left orphans by now being robbed of both parents; all she can do is hope that God will look after them.73

On the whole, it is earthly concerns that occupy most women even on the verge of death, according to the author of the Danse macabre des Femmes, and thus the reader knows that their souls’ salvation will be in jeopardy. The marchande still worries about her shop and the fact that her employees will merely play away time in her absence. Only her final words show an inkling of remorse: ‘Avarice decoit les gens’ (avarice deceives people) — the warning that so many versions of the danse contain.74

CONCLUSION

It will have become clear that the danse macabre was a highly influential theme in late medieval and early Renaissance culture, both for artists and authors as well as for the wider circle of patrons. The famous murals in Paris, London and Basel must have attracted many visitors, while the printing press helped to spread the theme even further. Sir Thomas More referred in one of his works to the famous danse at St Paul’s Cathedral, which was to be destroyed some fourteen years after his death at the hands of Henry VIII’s executioner.75 More’s words clearly suggest that he expected his readers to be familiar with its theme and appearance.
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Such was the appeal of the danse macabre that it remained popular throughout the following centuries, albeit that its style and emphasis changed according to the spirit of the times.\textsuperscript{96} One can already detect more than a hint of double entendre in Death's words to the wife of the knight in the Danse macabre des femmes, and not long after Death and the Maiden developed into an independent and erotically charged theme that was to inspire artists such as Hans Baldung Grien and, much later, Edvard Munch and the composer Franz Schubert.\textsuperscript{97} Nor were danse macabre murals a typically medieval phenomenon; new versions were painted Luzern and Bleibach, to name but two, while earlier murals were either restored or completely repainted by later artists, which is what happened in Lubeck.\textsuperscript{98} Holbein's series of woodcuts was copied decades later by the painter Rubens,\textsuperscript{99} and in 1707 a Dutch physician called Salomon van Ruyting published a moralising version entitled Het schouwoneel des Doots, of Dooden Dans, which was subsequently translated into German (Fig. 15).\textsuperscript{100} Just over a century later, Thomas Rowlandson designed a large series of prints that were published between 1814 and 1816 as The English Dance of Death, in which Death preys on people in a contemporary setting, often with tragi-comical results. One example from this series is the print of Death and the Antiquaries, which was published in 1816 (Fig. 16) with the caption 'Death, jealous of his rights, stands sentry / Over this strange, burglarious entry'. It shows a group of scholars around the opened tomb of a king; a macabre scene that may have been inspired by the famous opening of the coffin of Charles I at St George's Chapel, Windsor, in April 1613, when some royal bones were apparently removed. Rowlandson's thoughts on the subject may be gauged from the handwritten text attributed to him on the back of a preparatory drawing for this print in the Huntington Library, which shows the background as an open ruin:

\begin{quotation}
And questionless here in this open Court
\[\ldots\] some men be entered
Loved the Church so well & gave so largely to
They thought it should have canalied their bones
Till Domesday, but all things have their end\ldots
\end{quotation}

Thus, for the body, there may not be eternal rest even after death, but Rowlandson wickedly shows Death preying upon the oblivious antiquaries too focussed on the corpse before them to notice the skeletal threat behind their backs.

Rowlandson, Schubert, Saint-Saëns, Munch, Disney, the Swedish film-director Ingmar Bergman with his 1956 film Det sjunde inseglet (The Seventh Seal), and many others — all have been inspired in different ways by an originally medieval theme that continues to fascinate people. The reason is obvious. We may not like it, but we all must face Death sooner or later.

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NOTES

1. The German Europäische Totentanz-Vereinigung is particularly active with an annual conference and proceedings, a monthly Newsletter entitled Totentanz Aktuell, and a homepage at <www.totentanz-online.de>. Francis Douce was one of the earliest scholars in Europe to study the danse macabre; he published his findings in The Dance of Death, exhibited in elegant engravings on wood with a dissertation on the several representations of that subject, but more particularly on those ascribed to Macabre and Hans Holbein (London 1833); see also The Douce Legacy: An Exhibition to Commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Bequest of Francis Douce (1727–1814), exhibition catalogue (Oxford 1994), esp. 101–07. The 1935 Reginald Taylor Prize Essay was by E. Carleton Williams, 'The Dance of Death in Painting and Sculpture in the Middle Ages', JBAAD, 3rd ser., 1 (1937), 229–57. The last overall study in English is J. M. Clark, The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Glasgow 1950), although there has since also been an English edition of the French Danse macabre des femmes in A. T. Harrison ed., with a chapter by S. L. Hindman, The Danse Macabre of Women: Ms. fr. 953 of the Bibliothèque Nationale (Kenton London 1994). Short sections on the Dance of Death can also be found in P. Binski, Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation (London 1986), 153–59, and E. Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580 (New Haven/London 1992), 303–08. Otherwise, the main literature on the subject is either in German, French or Italian, including Jean Batany's article 'Une image en négligé du fonctionnalisme social: les Dançes Macabre', in J. H. M. Taylor ed., Dies Illa: Death in the Middle Ages, Proceedings of the 1983 Manchester Colloquium (Liverpool 1984), 13–27.

2. An example of this is a recent article by H. Kokott, 'Todeserebenen und Totentanz im Mittelalter', Der Deutschbunttirritt, 1 (2002), 11, which lists Bohemia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Poland, in addition to the more obvious countries, but fails to mention Great Britain. This all too common omission was acknowledged by H. Schulte Herbrüggen, 'Der Totentanz von Rosslyn (Scoziand), Ein Beitrag zu einem neuen Forschungsvorhaben', Jahrbuch der Universität Düsseldorf 1983–84 (Düsseldorf 1986), 165. "Während der kontinentaleuropäischer Totentanz durch eine Fülle hervorragender Studien weithin als erforscht gelten darf, herrscht gegenüber dem britischen Totentanz selbst in Fachkreisen verbreiteter Unkenntnis." Herbrüggen himself did devote a number of articles to the danse macabre in medieval England, but typically these were all published in German. One recent Italian volume on death (including some essays on the danse macabre) has, however, been translated into English: Humana Fragilitas: The Themes of Death in Europe from the 13th to the 18th Century, ed. A. Tenenti (Clusone 2002). It contains a chapter on macabre themes and the Dance of Death in England by Maria Ghiraldi, but this unfortunately relies heavily on Douce and on Clark's book, and contains several incorrect interpretations and dates.


5. Meyer-Baer, Music of the Spheres, fig. 135; also K. M. D. Dunabin, 'Sic erimus cuncti ... The Skeleton in Graeco-Roman Art', Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, 101 (1986), 185–235, esp. 224–28 and figs 37–42. I am very grateful to Dr Martin Henig for the reference to Dunabin's article.

6. Dunabin, 'Sic erimus cuncti', 190, 239–40 and fig. 49.


8. A. Corvisier, Les danse macabres (Paris 1998), 20. There are often small but crucial differences in the ways the first line is quoted in the literature, e.g. 'Je fis de macabre la danse' or 'Je fis de Macabre la danse'. One interpretation, which seems the most likely one, is that Macabre was originally the name of a person. John Lydgate refers in his Middle-English poem to 'Macabrees daunce' and to 'Macabre the doctoure'; see the version in MS Eslemere 26/A.13 in F. Warren, The Dance of Death, Early English Text Society, 1st ser. 181 (London 1951), 1–24 and scans at LDOCR.


10. A recent book on this theme is Vifs nous sommes ... morts nous serons. La Rencontre des trois morts et des trois vifs dans la peinture murale en France, ed. Groupe de Recherches sur les Peintures Murales (Vendôme 2003). See also H. Utzinger and B. Utzinger, Itinéraires des danse macabres (1996), 64–72, 201–02, and B. Terrier, Le Dict des trois morts et des trois vifs et sa représentation murale dans le centre de France, Arts Sacré 14: Du gothique flamboyant à l'Art de la Renaissance, Cahiers de Rencontre avec le Patrimoine religieux (2001), 128–43, with thanks to Dr Paul Cockerham for alerting me to this article.


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15. Cohen, Metamorphosis, 17–18, 67 (n. 67) and 68, and figs 14–15. It is interesting to note that King Edward IV also originally stipulated a cadaver effigy for his own tomb, although this wish was never fulfilled: see Cohen, Metamorphosis, 21.


18. Clark, Dance of Death, 92–93 mentions a record in the church archives at Caudebec in Normandy of a drama performed in the church in 1591, as well as evidence of performances at Bruges in 1449 and Besançon in 1493, see ibid., and Corruiter, Les danses macabres, 21. One much later performance in 1639 in Berne is of interest not only because it is well documented, but also because some of the costumes are preserved in the Historisches Museum; see A. Tamboer, ‘Doodsmaskers en amaskotstum’, Een dodendansoproeping in 1639, in De dodendansen in de kunsten, ed. L. P. Gripp, A. Tamboer and E. Hock (Utrecht 1999), 37–39, and L. P. Gripp and A. Tamboer, Dodendansen in leven en lier (Dieren: Wittenborg: Dansen met de Dood: De dodendansen in boek en prent, ed. L. Kerssemakers, P. van Pagée and P. Visser (Amsterdam 2000), 48–67.


Ubi in nuptis regalibus dum omnia nite furent, factum est tale simulacrum per modum processionis inter catervas discantionem, praecedentibus in arte illa doctis, cum multimodis organis musicae et tragediae instrumentis organici, aliquem post eos secundum et interpolatam choream militarem pompaticium agentibus, insecutae est unus, de quo pesti dubitabat potui utrum homo esset, an phantasma: qui, ut umbra, magis labi videbatur quam pedestrum transire. Quo quasi occulti omnium evanescenti, quieti tuebatur illa processio phainatica, melius reput, musicum dissonanum est, et chorealis phalanx dirigitur cito impetra. Risus dolore miscetur, et extrema gaudi lucut occupat, et post tantam gloriam regnum inglori utulat, dum postmodum in brevi seipsum perdedit, et consequenter regem.

I am very grateful to Dr James Binns and Mr Reinhard Lamp for elucidating this rather difficult text for me.


22. There has been some confusion about the much earlier date of 1312 for the Klingenthal mural in Basel, which one finds in Warren, Dance of Death, 97, and elsewhere; however, this is based on the misreading of the
date of 1512 commemorating some minor repainting work done to the mural. See R. Hammerstein, Tanz und Musik des Todes: die mittelalterlichen Totenmünze und ihr Nachleben (Bern/Munich 1980), 188–89; also William, 'The Dance of Death', 249.


26. Scholars appear to be divided on the date of its destruction, for example, G. Kaiser ed., Der tanzende Tod: Mittelalterliche Totentanz (Frankfurt am Main 1988), 73, claims it happened as early as 1520. Instead, Utzinger and Utzinger, Itinéraires des danses macabres, 81, and Clark, Dance of Death, 24, suggest the mural was lost in 1669 when its wall was demolished in order to widen the rue de la Fermonerie, which Hammerstein, Tanz und Musik des Todes, 167, claims to have happened in 1634. Most sources agree that the cemetery itself was destroyed in 1787; Couzy, 'L'Eglise des Saints-Innocents', describes the destruction of the church in 1787.


28. Worm-infested figures of Death or the dead can be found in some German versions, e.g. the Knobloechter edition. The scythe was traditionally the attribute of Satan and of the Greek god Chronos, through whom it became the attribute of Father Time. In post-medieval iconography, Death and Father Time often share the same attributes, including the hour-glass. The spade and the coffin are the types of grave-digger symbols that can be found especially in such late medieval French cemeteries and charnel-houses as the Abbé Saint-Maclou in Rouen, which features below a wooden frieze of such symbols the remains of a sculpted danse macabre series. Iconographical contamination also saw these same symbols become the attributes of the Three Dead. I am grateful to Mr Simon Watney for sharing some of his ideas about the iconography of Father Time and his attributes with me.

29. See note 27 above. Also compare Rosenfeld, Der mittelalterliche Totentanz, esp. ch. III and his 'reconstruction' of the so-called Würzburg Totentanz text, and the comments in Kaiser, Der tanzende Tod, 276–77 and n.1.

30. Extensive information on manuscript M.355, including a bibliography, can be found on the CORSAIR website of the Pierpont Morgan Library. The preliminary observations in this paper are based on a study of a microfilm of the manuscript.

31. Camille, Master of Death, 119–60 and fig. 114, claims that the manuscript was 'made for the Englishman John, Duke of Bedford, while regent of Paris in the 1420s', which is reflected in the bibliographical entry on the CORSAIR website by the Pierpont Morgan Library.


33. Hammerstein, Tanz und Musik des Todes, 166–67 and figs 3, 34, 243; also Clark, Dance of Death, 84–85; Varty, 'Villon's Three Ballades du Temps Jadis', 78 and pl. 1. According to Rosenfeld, Der mittelalterliche Totentanz, 102, the scheme at Amiens Cathedral was destroyed in 1817.


35. See Warren, Dance of Death, stanza III in LXXXIV.


37. For example, there are strong textual resonances between the verses of Death and the Child in both Lydgate's poem and the Latin-German and Heidelberg blockbook versions. See S. Oosterwijk, 'Muss ich tanzen und kann nit gan?' Das Kind im mittelalterlichen Totentanz', in U. Wunderlich, L'Art macabre 3,
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162–80; a revised and expanded English version of this paper is due to appear in a volume of essays edited by J. Rosenhal. Further study into possible links between Lydgate’s poem and the Latin-German Totentanz tradition is required before any firm conclusions can be drawn.


42. See M. C. Gill, ‘Late Medieval Wall Painting in England: Content and Context (c. 1350–c. 1530)’, unpublished PhD thesis (Courtauld Institute 2002), 401, 405 and pl. 6.8. Although the flower could be a mockery of clothing, roses or flowers were often used allegorically as a symbol of transitoriness and the brevity of life. A comparison could be made between the Newark paintings and the late-15th century painted roodloft in the parish church at Sparham (Norfolk), where an elegantly dressed female skeletal figure holds out a flower to a male corpse, although in this case one cannot describe the pair as a proper danse macabre because there are no living figures combined with the dead; see D. Turner, ‘Roodloft in Sparham Church, Norfolk’, Gentleman’s Magazine, 26 (1846), 135–36. Mention should also be made of the carved danse macabre scene on the chantry chapel of Lord de la Warr (d. 1528) and his wife (d. 1532) in the church of St Mary and St Blaise at Boxgrove (Sussex), but this will be discussed in a future publication of danse macabre iconography on tomb monuments based on papers given at conferences at Libeck and Rouen in 2001, a preliminary version of which appeared as ‘The sodeyne vyolence of cruel dethe’: Death and Danse Macabre Iconography on Tomb Monuments’, in the Actes du Congrès, 209–22.

43. Clark, Dance of Death, 7–21. Stained and painted cloths at Long Melford, Bristol and Salisbury are discussed in F. Kloppenhorn, ‘Totentänze in der religiösen Gebrauchs kunst Englands’, in L’art macabre 1, ed. U. Wunderlich, Jahrbuch der Europäischen Totentanz-Vereinigung (Düsseldorf 2000), 53–67. For Long Melford, see also D. Dymond and C. Paine, The Spoil of Melford Church: The Reformation in a Suffolk Parish (Ipswich 1996), 21 and n. 78; Duffy, Stripping of the Altars, 304. Francis Duce and James Clark both claimed that Henry VIII’s inventory in BL MS Harley 1419 listed a danse macabre tapestry amongst the ‘hangings of Arras’ in the Tower, but this ‘one piece of Macabre lyned with canvas’ was instead interpreted as referring to Judas Macabaeus in D. Starkey ed., The Inventory of King Henry VIII Society of Antiquaries MS 129 and British Library MS Harley 1419, vol. 1 (London 1998), 180, item 8995, without further explanation.

44. W. Puddiphatt, ‘The Mural Paintings of the Dance of Death in the Guild Chapel of Stratford-upon-Avon’, Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society, 76 (1958), 29–35; C. Davidson, The Guild Chapel Wall Paintings at Stratford-upon-Avon (New York 1988); Gill, ‘Late Medieval Wall Painting’, 403–04 and pl. 6.9. According to Davidson, p. 11, Stow added a mention of the Stratford scheme in his copy of Leland’s Itinerary: ‘About the body of this chaple was curiously paynted the Dance of Death commonly called the Drainnt of all souls, because the same was someytyme there paynted abowe the clouders on the north-west syd of Powles cloysters, pulld downe by the Duke of Somarsete, tempore Edward 6.’

45. For the Roslyn Chapel carvings, see Herbrickgen, ‘Der Totentanz von Rossllyn’. The Norwich panel was illustrated and briefly discussed in R. Marks, Stained Glass in England during the Middle Ages (London 1993), 84 and pl. 67, although not identified as a danse macabre scene. However, it was clearly part of a larger scheme, as proved by the antiquarian John Kilpatrick who in his Church Notes for St Andrew’s church dated September 1712 (now in the Norwich Record Office, NRO, MC 5000/14) described the window as showing the emperor, pope, cardinals, and ‘all degrees of professions to carpenter and other mechanical trades’, adding that ‘ye greater part of ther figures are quite defaced’. I am extremely grateful to Mr Fred Kloppenhorn for sharing this information with me.

46. For the Coventry misericsords, see M. Dormer Harris, ‘The Misericords of Coventry’, Birmingham Archaeological Society Transactions and Proceedings, 50 (1927), 246–66, but esp. 262–64 and pl. XXXI v–vii. It is highly probable that there were originally seven misericsords showing the Acts of Mercy, of which the lost four may also have featured danse macabre pairs. The author is preparing a publication on danse macabre iconography on medieval misericsords and choir-stalls, based on a paper given at the International Misericord Conference held in Sheffield in July 2003.

47. Oosterwijk, ‘Lessons in “Hopping”’.

48. See Oosterwijk, ‘The sodeyne vyolence’, and also the examples in the author’s contributions to the Picture Library of the Monumental Brass Society at <www.mbs-brasses.co.uk>.
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48. Hammerstein, Tanz und Musik des Todes, 162–66; see also Uztinger and Uztinger, Itinéraires des danse macabres. It is impossible to give an accurate number of lost danse macabre schemes, as records are sometimes confusing or are simply no longer extant, although there may be good reason to believe that a scheme once existed. See also the example of Ypres in note 57 below, or the case of the St Bertin altarpiece by Simon Marmion discussed earlier.

50. Hammerstein, Tanz und Musik des Todes, 175–76; Uztinger and Uztinger, Itinéraires des danse macabres, 147–49. The scheme at Meslay-le-Grené was clearly based on a printed danse macabre version.

51. Hammerstein, Tanz und Musik des Todes, 176–77; Uztinger and Uztinger, Itinéraires des danse macabres, 151. This church also features a painted scene of the Three Living and the Three Dead.

52. Rosenfeld, Der mittelalterliche Totentanz, 44–117; Hammerstein, Tanz und Musik des Todes, esp. 31–39, 119. For the German Totentanz, see Neumann, Tanz der Toten—Todeanz, also Ihr müßt alle nach meiner Pfeife tanzen.' Totentänze vom 15. bis 20. Jahrhundert aus den Beständen der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel und der Bibliothek Otto Schäfer Schweinfurt, exhibition catalogue Herzog August Bibliothek, 16 (Wiesbaden 2003).


54. For a recent survey of the theme in Italy, see P. Scaramella, 'The Italy of Triumphs and of Contrasts', in Tenenti, Humana Frailitas, 25–98.

55. Clark, Dance of Death, 41–59; F. Whyte, The Dance of Death in Spain and Catalonia (Baltimore 1931; J. Sauvigneux, Les Danse Macabres de France et d’Espagne et leurs prolongements littéraires (Lyon 1972; E. Zara Merlo, Death and Disillusion. An Iconographic and Literary Itinerary in Christian Spain', in Tenenti, Humana Frailitas, 219–50. For the Javier mural, see Uztinger and Uztinger, Itinéraires des danse macabres, 222. Of course, Navarra was not yet part of Spain at the time this mural was painted.


57. D. Th. Enkaart, De dodendans: Een cultuurhistorische studie (Amsterdam 1950), 12–13. The sculpted danse macabre in the church of Notre-Dame du Sablon in Brussels is discussed in I. Hans-Collas, 'Les écoinçons sculptés du XVIe siècle de l'Église Saint-Martin de Hal et de Notre-Dame du Sablon à Bruxelles: les Trois morts et les trois vifs et la Danse macabre', in Actes des Congrès, 325–37, esp. 334–56 and fig. 7. For Brusse, see also Uztinger and Uztinger, Itinéraires des danse macabres, 219. The Dutch expression 'bij ziet er uit als de dood van leperen' (he looks like Death from Ypres), which is used to describe an extremely thin person, is interpreted by some as a reference to the plague that struck that city. However, a comparison with the German variant 'er sitzt als der Tod von Lübeck' suggests that both may refer to danse macabre wall-paintings that once existed in the city. See A. Stobbe, Nederlandse spreekwoorden, spreekwoorden, uitdrukkingen en gezegden, naar hun oorsprong en betekenis verklaard (Zutphen 1915), part 1, 155 and notes.

58. A. Lehr, 'Het Oordeelspel in de Sint-Jan', in In Buscoducis. Kunst uit de Bourgondische tijd te 's-Hertogenbosch. De cultuur van late middeleeuwen en renaissance. Wetenschappelijke Bijdragen, ed. A. M. Koklewew (Maarssen 1990), 403–10 and pl. 6. The Last Judgement clock is usually dated around 1513, which would make the two sculptures a later addition. There are currently plans to reconstruct the whole clock. Another painted danse macabre scheme of c. 1620 occurs on the cathedral organ. See also C. Peeters, De Sint-Janskathedraal te 's-Hertogenbosch (The Hague 1984), 363, 366. I am grateful to Mr Fred Kloppeinborg for this second example.

59. Kaiser, Der tanzen Tod, 276–326. See also Hammerstein, Tanz und Musik des Todes, 132–33, 189–92 and pl. 100–15, 117.

60. Kaiser, Der tanzende Tod, 108–93, and also the facsimile edition with transcriptions by M. Lemmer, Der Heidelberger Totentanz von 1485 (Frankfurt am Main/Leipzig 1991). Although the Knoblochitz text seems to echo Marchant's in many places, e.g. in the words of the infant, there are distinct differences in the order and choice of characters between both versions, most notably the inclusion of three female types: the mug, the bürgerin, and the maiden.


63. This 'Großbaseler Totentanz', as opposed to the somewhat later 'Kleinbaseler Totentanz' in Klingenthal, is usually regarded as a commemoration of the major outbreak of the plague in the city in 1439; only a few
fragments of the mural are still preserved in the Historical Museum at Basel. See Kaiser, *Der tanzende Tod*, 194–97, and Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes*, 183–88 and pl. 113. The lost Klingsenthal mural featured the infant and the mother separately, in accordance with the 'Oberdeutsche' tradition of the Latin-German and Heidelberger blockbook text versions.

64. For Death and the infant, see Oosterwijk, 'Muss ich tanzen und kann nit gant?', and also 'Litel enfault that were but late borne': The Image of the Infant in Medieval Culture in North-Western Europe (in progress), ch. 5.


73. Kaiser, *Der tanzende Tod*, 130, 138; Lemmer, *Der Heidelberger Totentanz*, 14, 18, 58–60, 64. The abbot's words actually echo the sentiments expressed by the bishop, who also regrets not having remained a poor monk all his life.


76. This group is unusual in having more characters rather than the usual two of Death and his victim; the pauper serves both as a chorus and as a foil for the usurer. Instead, the Klobuchter edition shows just the usurer, still clutching a bag of money while casting a mournful look towards his treasure chest.


78. Holbein also shows Death with ragged long hair when confronting the duchess, just as Death adopts other attributes appropriate to each of his victims, perhaps indicating that this skeletal figure is not so much Death himself but everyone's dead counterpart, after all. However, Death also sports breasts when claiming the nobleman in the Heidelberg blockbook, while the priest in Nikolaus Manuel's lost mural of c. 1516–20 in the Dominican cemetery in Berne is dragged off by a long-haired Death with breasts, if we can trust the 1649 water-colour copy by Albrecht Kauf; see Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes*, 233–38 and pl. 188. The woodcut of dancing skeletons near the end of Hartmann Schedel's 1493 *Nuremberg Chronicle* also features on the far right a putrid long-haired corpse with one remaining breast; see J. Tomasek, 'Der Tod, die Welt (eit)alter und die letzten Dinge. Bemerkungen zum 'Tanz der Skelette' in Hartmann Schedels Welchronik von 1493', in *Den Tod tanzent*, ed. R. Hauser and W. Schwab, Tagungsband des Totentanzkongresses Stift Admont 2001, Im Kontext: Beiträge zu Religion, Philosophie und Kultur, 19 (Salzburg 2002), 239–49. Although the dansa macabra may originally have been a dance of the dead and the living, it seems that some artists became confused about the nature of the dancing corpse and identified him as Death instead.

79. A discussion of different dansa macabre editions by Marchant and other French printers can be found in Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes*, 171–75, 177, 179–83. Of course, Holbein's famous woodcut series was published in Lyon.


81. Compare the words of the 'Lady of gret astat' in Lydgate's A Version: 'For there [n]is queene / Countesse ne duchesse [. . .] That she of deche / mote dethes trace sewe'; see Warren, *Dance of Death*, stanza XXV, ll. 196, 198.

82. Of course, the infant is also a common figure in the popular medieval theme of the Ages of Man, in which all characters are traditionally male. See also Oosterwijk, '‘Muss ich tanzen und kann nit gant?’.”

83. The wetnurse complains of a swelling (boce) between her arms; see Harrison, *Danse macabre of Women*, 91, and compare Marchant's text, ibid., 36. The word boce can refer specifically to a swelling caused by the bubonic plague.
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84. Huizinga, Waning of the Middle Ages, 145. For the little girl’s words, see Harrison, Danse macabre of Women, 107, albeit that the transcription here does not wholly follow the version offered by Harrison.

85. Harrison, Danse macabre of Women, 55, 57, 61, 66, and 69. The squire’s wife’s obsession with fashion is also evident from her regret about the cloth that she had bought at the lendit or annual June fair at Saint-Denis, and that she intended to dye scarlet.

86. Harrison, Danse macabre of Women, 59.

87. Harrison, Danse macabre of Women, 65, 87, 121.

88. Harrison, Danse macabre of Women, 77.

89. Harrison, Danse macabre of Women, 83.


91. Harrison, Danse macabre of Women, 115, 93.

92. Harrison, Danse macabre of Women, 117.

93. Harrison, Danse macabre of Women, 71.

94. Harrison, Danse macabre of Women, 73.


96. Warren, Dance of Death, Appendix IV, 100–07, speaks of a ‘degeneration’, but there is no denying that in England from the late 16th century onward the Dance of Death became a subject for broadsheets and ‘ditties’. As England was a relative latecomer in the art of printing, its publishers seem to have missed the heyday of the danse macabre, only catching up when the theme was already somewhat on the wane, although the allegorical figure of Death still continued to feature on tomb monuments.

97. This development can be observed in Albrecht Kauw’s copy of Niklaus Manuel’s destroyed danse macabre mural of c. 1516–20 at Berne, where Death embraces the maiden in an overly sexual manner; see also Kaiser, Der tanzende Tod, 17–21 and figs 2–8; L. P. Gripp, ‘De dood en het mesje. Eros en Thanatos in het lield’, in Gripp, Hock and Tamboer, De dodendans in de kunsten, 64–71; J. Wirth, La jeune fille et la mort. Recherches sur les thèmes macabres dans l’art germanique de la renaissance (Geneva, 1979).

98. See Hammerstein, Tanz und Musik des Todes, 220–23, 224–25. The Lübeck Totentanz was originally painted in the 1460s in egg tempera onto canvas, rather than onto the wall; they are attributed to Berni Notke and were ‘restored’ first in 1526, with a new copy made subsequently in 1700/01. See also Clark, Dance of Death, 78–82; Hammerstein, Tanz und Musik des Todes, 154–56; H. Freytag, B. Schulte and H. Vogeler, ‘Der Totentanz der Marienkirche in Lübeck von 1463 und seine Weiterwirkung bis in die Gegenwart’, in Ihr müßt alle nach meiner Pfeife tanzen, 85–135. The main study on the Lübeck Totentanz is Freytag, Totentanz der Marienkirche in Lübeck. The paintings were destroyed in March 1945 during the British air raids on the city. On 3 May 2003, a modern version by the Austrian artist Herwig Zens was inaugurated in the same location in the Beichkapelle in the Marienkirche; see H. Zens, Der neue Lübecker Totentanz (Vienna, 2003), with contributions by, among others, H. Freytag and H. Vogeler.


CORRIGENDA

Since publication of this article I have discovered that Les Saints Innocents in Paris was not a Franciscan convent, as claimed on p. 66 and in some of the danse macabre literature; this error has been rectified in chapter 2. My translation of the verses from Jehan le Fèvre’s poem Respit de la Mort on p. 62 also needs amending to read as follows:

Je fis de Macabré la dance
qui toutes gens maine a sa tresche
et a la fosse les adresche,
qui est leur derraine maison

I made the dance of Macabré
who leads all people in his train
and directs them to the grave,
which is their last abode.

Note 48 should read:
See S. Oosterwijk, ‘“The sodeyne vyolence of cruel dethe”: Death and danse macabre iconography on tomb monuments’, Actes du 11e Congrès International d’études sur les Danses macabres et l’art macabre en général (Meslay-le-Grenet, 2003), 209-22, and also the examples ...