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'Fro Paris to Ingland'? The danse macabre in text and image in late-medieval England

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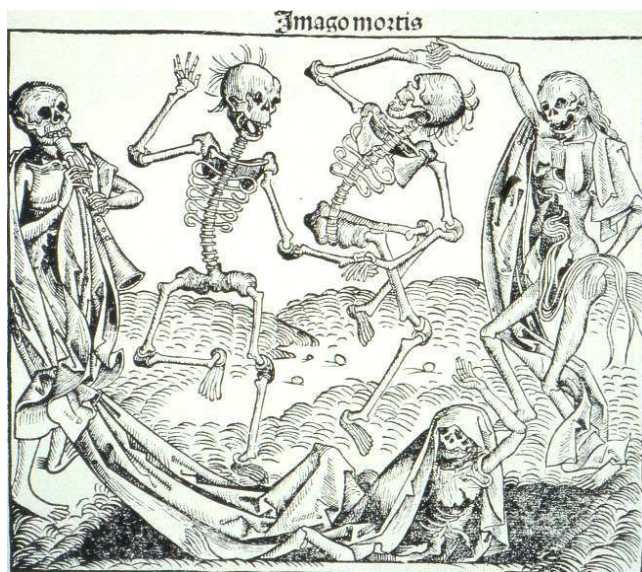
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a collection of eight essays, six of which have previously been published.¹ Together they constitute a wide-ranging investigation into the arrival, development and importance of the *danse macabre*, or Dance of Death, in late-medieval English literature, drama and art. The *danse* appears to have been introduced from the Continent into England in or shortly after 1426 by the poet John Lydgate (c.1371-1449). He translated the poem that was incorporated in a new mural scheme on the walls of one of the charnel houses in the cemetery of Les Saints Innocents in Paris, and his poem in turn became part of a painted *Dance of Death* scheme in Pardon Churchyard at Old St Paul's, London. The theme soon spread across the country and into Scotland, where it can be found in the carved vault ribs of Rosslyn Chapel (see chapter 1) and in the work of the later 'Chaucerian' court poet William Dunbar (1465?-1530?) whose elegiac *Lament for the Makaris* contains the memorable refrain 'Timor mortis conturbat me' (fear of death disturbs my mind) from the Office of the Dead (see chapter 7).² Yet in essence the *danse* is a combination of text and image, demonstrating how all ranks of medieval society are summoned to their deaths either by Death personified or by representatives of the dead.

1. (Left) 'Imago mortis', woodcut from the *Liber Chronicarum* or Nuremberg Chronicle published by Anton Koberger in 1493.



2. (Right) The apothecary flanked by two dead dancers, danse macabre medallion accompanying the Office of the Dead in a Parisian book of hours of c.1430-35 (New York, Morgan Library, MS M.359, fol. 142r).



As the *danse* did not originate in England, it is necessary to consider the theme in its wider European context. An image that is frequently used as an illustration of a medieval *danse macabre* is the 'Imago mortis' woodcut by Michael Wolgemut and his workshop in the 1493 *Liber Chronicarum*, better known as the *Schedelsche Weltchronik* or *Nuremberg Chronicle* (Fig. 1).³ This picture of dancing skeletons with musical accompaniment from a dead flautist might seem the perfect illustration of a theme that is often associated with the Black Death, even though when this epidemic first hit Europe in 1347 there was already a long tradition of death-inspired literature and imagery (see also chapter 7).⁴ In fact, the woodcut does not illustrate a true *danse macabre* as there is no encounter with the living, nor is it an illustration of the

Resurrection, as is sometimes claimed.⁵ Instead, Wolgemut probably intended this woodcut to represent a more generic image of death as one of the Four Last Things, for it was placed towards the end of the Seventh Age, just before a full-page miniature of the Last Judgement.⁶ This woodcut and the way it is so often misinterpreted as a *danse macabre* illustration thus raise a number of important points: the question whether the theme is about Death or the dead; the role of music in the *danse*; and finally the present lack of understanding of what was once a well-known theme in medieval culture. The last point begs the question: was the *danse* really such a familiar theme in Britain if it is so little known or understood nowadays?

The idea of who summons the living in the *danse macabre* was interpreted differently almost from the start. Lydgate opted for 'Death', as indicated by the title of his composition. However, the French poem used in the scheme at Les Innocents appears to have had *le mort* (the dead man) rather than *la mort* (death) as the protagonist. This raises an interesting point about the origins of the *danse* (see also chapter 2), as well as about the nature of any performances based on it. Admittedly, *le* is a feminine article in some French dialects of the period, so that *le mort* may still refer to Death. The text still has *le mort* in Guy Marchant's printed *Danse Macabre* edition of 1485, which was based on the mural, and *la morte* (the dead woman) in his 1486 *Danse Macabre des Femmes*, although various manuscript copies of both poems substitute *la mort* throughout.⁷ Despite what the term seems to imply, the German *Totentanz* also has *der Tod* (Death) yet the bishop in the Latin text complains about being constrained by 'distorti' (Appendix 6).⁸ Yet whereas it makes good sense to juxtapose the living with Death in a dialogue poem, in murals that present an alternating chain of dancers the interaction must be between the living and the dead in order to make visual sense. Any *danse* performance would thus require either separate exchanges between Death and each living individual, or multiple dead characters to engage the living in a joint dance, yet perhaps with Death as overall director (**Fig. 1**).⁹

The idea of a confrontation with the dead, rather than with Death, is illustrated by isolated scenes of a living character being flanked by two *morts*. Examples occur in the marginal decorations of a Parisian books of hours illuminated not long after the creation of the mural at Les Saints Innocents (**Fig. 2**), but also in the much later woodcut series by Hans Holbein the Younger published in 1536. This type of encounter also brings to mind the earlier tale of the Three Living and the Three Dead, which first emerged in French poetry in the mid to late thirteenth century and which is often cited as a possible precursor of the *danse macabre* (see chapter 1). Here, too, the dead are counterparts of the living but they merely engage in a dialogue, issuing warnings about the inevitability of death and the vanity of earthly pleasures. The Three Dead do not summon the living to join them; their ominous appearance instead brings a reprieve that is not offered to the living in the *danse*.

While Lydgate's interpretation of *le mort* as Death personified shows how the *danse* lent itself to adaptation by authors and artists, his poem also fits into a native literary tradition on the theme of death. Some authors found their inspiration in what happens to the body after death, such as the anonymous author of the fragmentary poem known as *The Grave* in the twelfth-century manuscript Bodley 343 (Oxford, Bodleian Library) with its graphic warning that 'wurmes þe to deleð'.¹⁰ Another explicit example is *A Disputacion betwyx þe Body and Wormes*, an illustrated copy of which survives in the so-called Carthusian Miscellany manuscript of c.1435-40 (see chapter 7, col.pl. 4).¹¹ Others instead chose to focus on the process of dying, such as Thomas Hoccleve (c.1370-1440) in his poem *Learn to Die*, which contains the dying

man's telling line 'Let me be your ensaumple and your mirour'.¹² It is interesting that Hoccleve's hypothetical dying man, conjured up by Wisdom for the benefit of her disciple, is described as 'Thymage of deeth' (l. 337), rather like a cadaver effigy addressing the living from a tomb monument (see chapter 7). These *contemptus mundi* texts were meant to show that there are different lessons to be learnt from each part of the process (from dying to burial and putrefaction), from the dead, and from Death itself.

The summons in the *danse macabre* was thus supposed to come from either Death itself or from the dead, depending on the interpretation favoured. The living characters in the medieval *danse* are predominantly male, hierarchically presented in an alternating sequence of clerical and lay characters, and their dead opponents likewise appear to be male, insofar as decaying corpses still show signs of gender; rarely do we find the dead displaying female characteristics, and then only in late depictions such as Holbein's woodcuts (see chapter 1, figs 11-12).¹³ Yet was Death itself perceived as male or female in medieval culture? Hoccleve appears to have veered towards the latter view in his poem *Learn to Die* where the dying man explains:

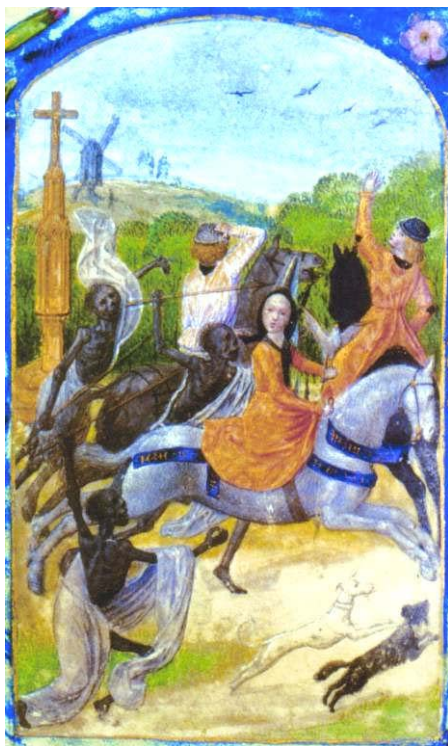
Deeth fauorable is to no maner wight;
 To all hir self shee delith equally;
 Shee dredith hem nat þat been of greet might,
 Ne of the olde and yonge hath no mercy;
 The ryche & poore folk eek certainly
 She sesith shee sparith right noon estaat;
 Al þat lyf berith with hir chek is maat. (ll. 155-61)

This view also matches the gender of Death in the alliterative debate poem *Death and Liffe*, which may originally date from the fourteenth century. It presents the opponent of 'Dame Liffe' as a horrifying female, 'long & leane, & lodlye to see'; 'Shee was naked as my nayle, [the navele] aboue; / & below she was lapped about in linenn breeches'.¹⁴ A well-known example in medieval Italian art is the long-haired female death demon wielding a scythe as she flies over a heap of corpses towards a group of blissfully unaware noblemen and -women who are enjoying themselves in courtly pursuits; this scene forms the right half of the fourteenth-century fresco presenting on the left the story of the Three Living and Three Dead in the Campo Santo in Pisa, nowadays attributed to the painter Buonamico (Buffalmacco).¹⁵ Traditionally the 'Grim Reaper' is presented as male, however, and this is what the servant boy towards the start of Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* understands Death to be.

The medieval *danse macabre* was thus a predominantly male-oriented affair with living and dead male protagonists. The absence or presence of female characters in the *danse* varies between regional traditions, with a handful of women appearing in the German *Totentanz* but none in the Spanish *Danza General de la Muerte* (see chapter 2 and Appendices); until the composition of the *Danse Macabre des Femmes*, the inclusion of a single female figure in the fresco at La Chaise-Dieu was rather an exception in France. Although the *acteur* (author) in the prologue to the French poem warns his readers that death 'A homme et femme est naturelle', the sequence of characters that follows consists solely of men. Yet Lydgate chose to introduce a few female characters, which is another deviation from his French model (see chapter 3).

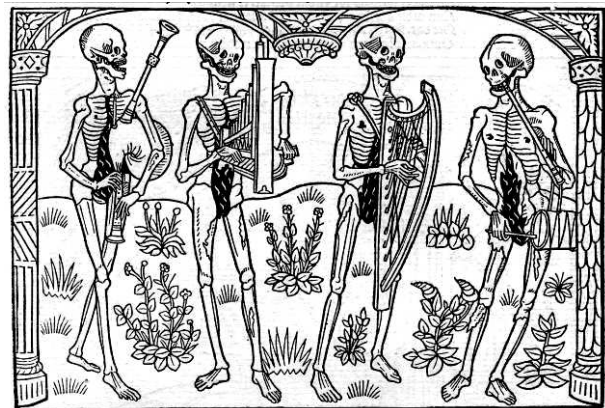
The focus on male representatives is, of course, the norm in medieval culture: women are similarly absent in depictions of the Ages of Man. The Three Living are

also traditionally presented as male nobles. An exception is a miniature of Mary of Burgundy on horseback with two male companions who are being pursued by three corpse figures armed with darts. This scene occurs in the Flemish Hours of Joanna of Castile (London, British Library, MS Add. 35313, fol. 158v), but it was probably based on an earlier miniature in the Hours of Mary of Burgundy and Maximilian (Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, ms. 78 B 12, fol. 220v, **Fig. 3**).¹⁶ The original must have been painted after Mary's early death in 1482, caused by a fall from her horse during a hunt. This unusual inclusion of a real-life figure is important in view of the new interpretation of some of the characters in the Paris *Danse Macabre* mural that are discussed in chapter 2: contrary to common belief, the living in the *danse* are not always anonymous stereotypes, as is demonstrated by Lydgate's introduction of the named character 'Maister Jon Rikelle some tyme tregetowre / Of noble harry kynge of Ingelonde / And of Fraunce the myghti Conquerowre' (E:513-15).¹⁷



3. (Left) Mary of Burgundy as one of the Three Living being attacked by the Three Dead, miniature in the Book of Hours of Mary of Burgundy and Maximilian, late fifteenth century (Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, ms. 78 B 12, fol. 220v).

4. (Below) Four dead musicians, additional woodcut introduced by Guy Marchant in his 1486 *Danse Macabre* edition.



Another regional difference is the element of music, which would seem to be implied by the term *danse macabre*. Music and capering cadavers indeed proliferate in the German *Totentanz*, but not in the French or English traditions where the dead are instead armed with burial-related attributes such as coffins, spades and pick-axes. Marchant's woodcut of the four dead musicians, which was added as an introduction to his 1486 *Danse Macabre* edition (**Fig. 4**), is very much the exception, although their choice of instruments is curious: a bagpipe and a combination of pipe and tabor, but also the more elevated harp and portable organ. There is a strong suggestion in *danse macabre* texts that the music is of a 'lowly' type, as the bagpipe also indicates (see chapter 1, fig. 13).¹⁸ This would explain the complaint by Lydgate's king about this 'daunce [...] of fotyng so sauage' (E-114), although in the French mural the same phrase may have held a very different meaning for contemporaries (see chapter 2).

Despite the absence of musical instruments in Marchant's other woodcuts, music is hinted at throughout the text whenever *le mort* invites his victim to the dance. Music was regarded in very different ways in medieval culture: although there was

believed to be music in heaven played by angels, the church tended to decry music and dancing as sinful.¹⁹ This attitude is evident in the well-known story recounted in the *Nuremberg Chronicle* (and earlier in Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* of 1303) about the dancers of Kölbigk in the diocese of Magdeburg, who had the audacity of singing and dancing in the local churchyard on Christmas Eve.²⁰ The local priest prayed that they remain dancing for twelve months, after which period all twenty-eight dancers died.

If worldly music was considered sinful, hellish music was far worse. According to theological tradition, as discussed by Kathi Meyer-Baer, 'In hell itself there is no music [...]. In hell there is only noise'.²¹ Devils may be observed in medieval (and later in Protestant) art playing often 'lowly' instruments such as bagpipes either as a means towards temptation or – most notably in the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch – as part of eternal torment in hell.²² Interesting in this context are the words of the preacher to the reader in the prologue of the Latin-German *Totentanz*, 'Fistula tartarea vos iungit in una chorea' and 'Mit seiner hellischen pfeifen schreien / Bringt er euch all an einen reien', referring purportedly to Death playing a hellish flute but at the same time implying that death will mean hell for many sinful mortals.

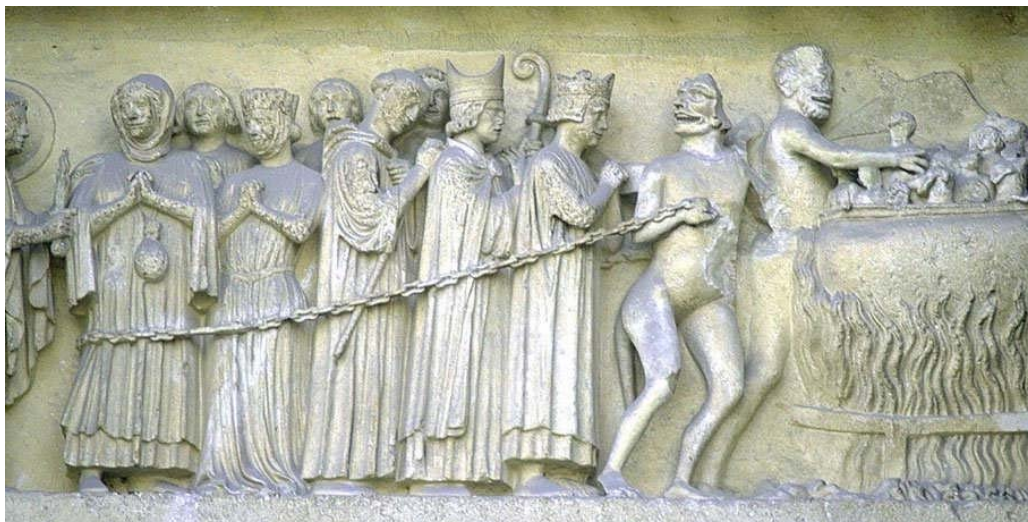
The reference to Death's 'fistula tartarea' is reminiscent of the legendary Pied Piper who first led the rats, and then the children of Hamelin to their doom.²³ Yet in principle the dead figures in the *danse macabre* are merely messengers of death; they are not supposed to judge their victims or deliver them to hell, unlike the devils with whom they yet share similarities. In some medieval Massacre plays (see chapter 4) Herod is carried off not by Death but by devils, who were traditionally depicted as black – the archetypal colour of evil. When Hoccleve's hypothetical dying man in the poem *Learn to Die* exclaims in his death agony that 'The blake-faced ethiopiens / me enuyrone' (ll. 673-74), he refers to the devils waiting to seize his soul, as his subsequent lines make clear. Devils are described in similar terms in another of Mannyng's exempla where a sick boy cries to his over-indulgent father: 'blake men, blake, / Are aboutē me to take; / Me, wyþ hem, wyl þey lede, / Y ne shal skapē for no nede'.²⁴ In contrast, when the child in the Latin-German *Totentanz* cries to his mother that 'me vir trahit ater' or 'ein swarzer man ziuht mich dahin' (see chapter 5), he is referring to Death whose colour is probably that of the putrefying corpse (see chapter 7). Some woodcuts in printed *Kalendrier des Bergers* and *Danse Macabre* editions even depict Death as a Moorish figure blowing a trumpet – a curious example of cross-fertilisation of both colour and musical imagery.²⁵ Of course, the trumpet is also reminiscent of the Last Judgement where angels blow trumpets to raise the dead.

If music was meant to be an essential aspect of the *danse*, does this tell us anything about the origins of the theme? There is an intriguing allusion in the Middle English morality play *The Castle of Perseverance* where two lines describe how Mankind 'wende that he schulde a levyd ay, / Tyl Deth trypte hym on hys daunce'.²⁶ If the date of c.1400-25 that has been assigned to the play is correct, this reference to Death dancing would predate both Lydgate's poem and the mural at Les Innocents. Some apparent references to the *danse* in French sources similarly predate the mural in Paris.²⁷

Yet the poem that was used in the Parisian scheme is in any case unlikely to have been a *danse macabre* prototype. As explained in chapter 1, the earliest known occurrence of the term is the enigmatic verse 'Je fis de Macabré la dance [...]' in Jehan Le Fèvre's poem *Respit de la Mort* of 1376.²⁸ Although no *danse macabre* texts survive for nearly half a century until the creation of the mural in Paris between

August 1424 and Lent 1425 (see chapter 2), it must be remembered that many medieval texts have been lost. Le Fèvre may have been referring to some now unknown form of ‘macabre’ performance that he expected his readers to be familiar with, but he could equally have alluded to a no longer extant poem that he himself wrote. The brief mention by Abbé Miette (an antiquarian conducting research in Normandy before the French Revolution) of a lost record in the Caudebec church archive that supposedly described a *danse macabre* performance in the church in 1393 is unfortunately too vague to be accepted as firm evidence (see also chapter 8).²⁹ Even so, there are likely to have been earlier dramatic enactments on the theme of Death. Suggestive is the description in the fourteenth-century *Scottichronicon* of a dance performed at the wedding of Alexander III of Scotland and Yolande de Dreux at Jedburgh in October 1285 (see chapter 1), but this account by John of Fordun (d. c.1384) may have been retrospectively coloured by the king’s death soon after the wedding, or even by a later vogue for such death-inspired pageants.

Nonetheless, the idea of a performance underlying the subsequent literary and visual tradition should not be dismissed for lack of firm evidence: dramatic performances are by their very nature transient, and difficult to date when written versions do survive. The extant corpus of medieval drama texts – mostly preserved in late-medieval or early modern manuscript copies – can only represent a small proportion of what was once performed in the course of the Middle Ages and even for a period after the Reformation. The dialogue and musical character of the *danse* make a development from drama possible but it also would have lent itself well to real-life enactment once the theme had become known through poetry and art.³⁰ The *danse* could in its turn have influenced other plays. In the morality play *Everyman* – itself an import from the Continent, just like the *danse* – the protagonist is left with only Good Deeds to support him at the final reckoning when all his former friends and faculties have failed him.³¹ The *danse* likewise reminds the living that they must relinquish beauty, strength, wealth, and all other earthly goods and pleasures.

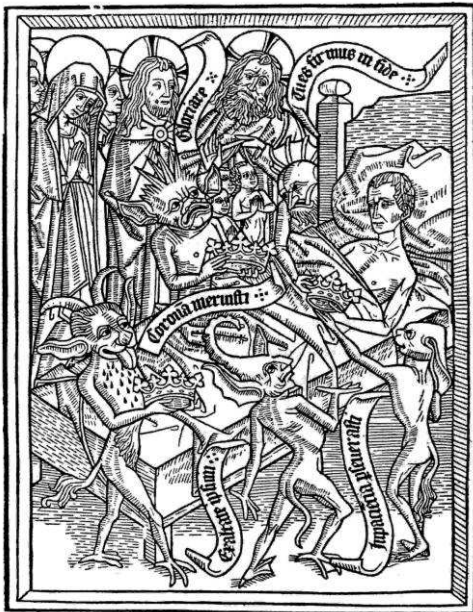


5. Procession of the damned towards hell, detail of the carved tympanum of the Judgement portal, north-transept, Rheims Cathedral, c.1225-30.

Scholars have long drawn comparisons between medieval art and drama, some of which also apply to the *danse macabre*. Iconographically interesting is the comparison with the Last Judgement in church art of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Carved

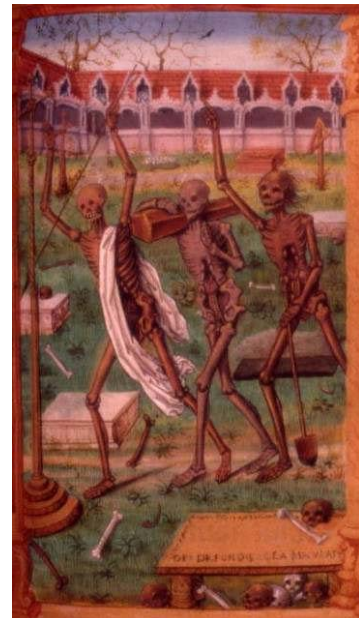
tympana above the doors of cathedrals such as Autun, Rouen, Rheims (**Fig. 5**) and Bamberg show rows of souls being escorted to heaven by angels and to hell by devils: reunited with their resurrected bodies, the souls exhibit all the trappings that denote their former status on earth, such as tiaras for popes, crowns for emperors and kings, mitres and tonsures for the clergy, and money-bags for the avaricious.³² Similar depictions may have played a role in the genesis of the *danse* on the Continent, even if such tympana do not occur much in English medieval church architecture. More relevant in England is the visualisation of the Last Judgement in medieval drama, which may have been influenced by the *danse macabre*. The Chester Last Judgement play presents two groups of saved and lost souls that include a pope, an emperor, a king, a queen, a merchant and a 'Justiciarius'; a hierarchical grouping of social types that bears a strong resemblance to what we find in the *danse* (see chapter 4).

Similar groupings of social types are found in another precursor of the *danse*: the *Vado Mori* poem, of which a number of different versions survive, the earliest dating to the thirteenth century.³³ All of these versions comprise solely male characters who in distich verse monologues lament the fact that they are about to die, each repeating like a refrain the phrase 'vado mori'. Thus the king sighs, 'Vado mori: rex sum. Quid honor, quid gloria mundi? / Est via mors hominis regia: vado mori' (I am going to die: I am the king. What use is honour, what use worldly glory? Death is the royal road of man: I am going to die.).³⁴ The *Vado Mori* poems share a number of characters with the *danse*, such as the aforementioned king, the pope, bishop, knight and physician, but the verses for each are rather stereotypical and there is no evidence of a pictorial *Vado Mori* tradition. Moreover, the *Vado Mori* poems also comprise figures that are either characterised by their age or by other traits and sins, such as the *juvenis*, *senior*, *sapiens*, *stultus*, *dives*, *pauper*, *voluptas* and *vino repletus*. This suggests an influence of other popular medieval themes such as the Ages of Man and the Seven Deadly Sins, which in turn influenced depictions of the *danse macabre*.



6. (Left) Woodcut illustrating the sin of Pride, from a Netherlandish *Ars Moriendi* edition of 1465.

7. (Right) The Three Dead pursuing the Three Living (not shown), miniature in a French book of hours, c.1500 (Manchester, John Rylands Library, MS 38, fol. 96r).



Dying in a state of sin was a great fear among medieval people, and the *danse macabre* presents many characters who are utterly unprepared for death. In the later fifteenth century, printed *Ars Moriendi* editions with woodcut illustrations (**Fig. 6**) impressed upon individual readers how they should learn to die a good death. In both

literature, drama and art, death was held up to medieval readers and viewers as a mirror, but with subtle differences. The Three Dead present themselves as a mirror to the Three Living in order to warn them of the ultimate fate that awaits all;³⁵ yet here the dead do not originally threaten the living, allowing them instead time to mend their ways. In the *danse* the living are granted no such reprieve and their inevitable death becomes a warning to the audience, especially as most of the living are woefully ill-prepared for death; they tend to look back at their lives with vain regrets, rather than forward at the judgement that awaits them. The *Ars Moriendi* offers a variation on the *danse* by showing through different examples how to die well or badly; the devils, angels and saints present at each deathbed serve to remind the dying – and thereby the reader – of the consequences of their choices. The cadaver effigy takes the beholder yet further forward, beyond the moment of death to the stark image of putrefaction. However, its underlying message is that while the body is corruptible the soul is immortal, and at the Last Judgement all souls will be reunited with their resurrected bodies. The dead dancers in the *danse macabre* are thus in a way still very much of this world where corruption reigns supreme.



8. (Left) Hieronymus Bosch, *Death of a Miser*, panel from a dismantled altarpiece, c.1480-90, Washington, National Gallery.



9. (Right) *Death of an avaricious king (King Sweyn?)*, incomplete palimpsest brass of c.1480, found at Frenze, Norfolk.

Inevitably, these different ‘macabre’ traditions came to influence each other. Cross-fertilisation of ideas and imagery meant that certain themes changed in character in the course of the Middle Ages. Whereas the Three Dead in the early-fourteenth-century miniature in the psalter of Robert de Lisle (see chapter 1, fig. 2) merely engage the Three Living in a polite if grim conversation, their successors in depictions of the theme in the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries aggressively

pursue the fleeing figures of the Three Living, armed with a spear, a coffin and a spade (**Fig. 7**). The dart, arrow, javelin or spear becomes an increasingly common attribute of Death; it is held by *le mort* in several of Marchant's woodcuts, albeit only as another attribute. Yet it can also be actively used as a weapon to strike down the living, as shown by various sketches in the so-called Carthusian miscellany of c.1435-40 (see chapter 4, fig. 8). A typical Continental example of this type of deathbed image is the so-called *Death of a Miser* panel from a dismantled altarpiece by Hieronymus Bosch (d. 1516) now in the National Gallery, Washington (**Fig. 8**).

Iconographic cross-fertilisation may lead to confusion as it is not just Death who can strike down the living with a spear, dart or javelin. Death's presence appears to be implied by his spear transfixing a king in a palimpsest brass fragment of c.1480 found at Frenze in Norfolk, which was traditionally believed to represent the death of the avaricious king from the *Ars Moriendi* (**Fig. 9**).³⁶ An alternative interpretation of this brass, however, is the story of St Edmund killing King Sweyn in his sleep as a just punishment for his oppression of the people of Bury; a devil hovering above the bed gleefully seizes the king's soul. With the king's assailant missing, we can no longer be sure what the complete brass was intended to show: there is the possibility of iconographic influences from both the *Ars Moriendi*, the death of Herod, and the Dance of Death, the latter being popular themes in this period and in this part of England (see also **Figs 10** and **16**). Therefore, not all 'macabre' art can be traced back to the same source: the Dance of Death, too, is just one of several themes or motifs, but an important one nonetheless.



10. (Above left) *Death and the bishop*, sole surviving panel of a larger stained-glass danse macabre scheme of c.1500, now situated in a window in the south wall of the nave of St Andrew's church, Norwich.



11. (Above right) *Death rising from a tomb to shoot an arrow at vicar Henry Williams* (d. 1500), stained-glass panel in the choir of St Nicholas church, Stanford-on-Avon, Northamptonshire.

Death was thus a major theme in late-medieval art, literature and drama, and there has consequently been a plethora of scholarly texts on death in the Middle Ages (and later periods). In this line of research the French historian Philippe Ariès was once again a prime mover, just as he had earlier been in childhood studies (see chapter 5), although the *danse macabre* is mentioned only very briefly in his work.³⁷ At least there are plenty of *danse macabre* and *Totentanz* aficionados on the Continent nowadays, unlike in Britain where the theme appears to be far less known or recognised and where lip service is paid at best to the *danse* in studies of medieval death. An example is Colin Platt's entertaining book *King Death*, which does make reference to the *danse* and includes an illustration of the stained-glass panel of Death and the Bishop in St Andrew's church in Norwich (**Fig. 10**);³⁸ yet while quoting John Stow's 1598 edition of the *Survey of London* on the *Dance of Death* scheme in Pardon Churchyard, Platt fails to mention Stow's later account of its destruction in 1549. However, Platt correctly identifies the Norwich panel as the sole survivor of a larger *Danse Macabre* window since lost, whereas it was not recognised as such by Richard Marks in his book *Stained Glass in England during the Middle Ages*, despite the fact that the author had earlier devoted an article to a contemporary memorial glass panel of Death shooting an arrow at vicar Henry Williams which had been installed in Stanford-on-Avon church in accordance with Williams' instructions in his will of 5 April 1500 (see **Fig. 11** and chapter 8).³⁹ Likewise, although Nigel Llewellyn devoted a chapter of his book *The Art of Death* to 'Dances of Death', he illustrated the earlier period with only Holbein's woodcuts published in 1538; apart from citing Sir Thomas More's mention of the scheme at Old St Paul's when it was still in existence during the earlier part of the period covered by his study (see below), Llewellyn chose to ignore the theme's pre-Holbein origins.⁴⁰

It has surprised continental authors how a theme that attracted the attention of an eighteenth-century English antiquarian – Francis Douce (1757-1834) – long before anyone else in Europe took a serious interest in it, could subsequently have become so little known in his native country.⁴¹ The iconographical variations may have blurred the picture that many have of the *danse*: for example, the stained-glass panel in Norwich contains no allusions to music nor evidence of accompanying verses, and it is now only a single scene that is almost lost high among the nave clerestory windows. It also does not help that the *danse* emerges rather awkwardly in the first part of the fifteenth century – too early for most early modernists but too late for those medievalists who prefer the High Gothic period – and that there are apparently so few examples left across Britain, of which none are on a par with Holbein's woodcuts. Douce himself mentioned having in his possession 'two panes of glass with a portion of a Dance of Death' that 'probably belonged to a Macaber Dance in the windows of some church': one without verses, 8½ by 7 in., was described as showing Death and the pope, while the other featured three dead figures and the lines 'ev'ry man to be contented wt his chaunce, / And when it shall please God to folowe my daunce'.⁴² Sadly, the current whereabouts of both panes are not known and their origins can no longer be ascertained.

The greatest losses occurred long before Douce's time, however, and the importance of the *danse macabre* in the medieval period is now difficult to judge after the havoc wreaked on church art during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Elizabeth I and, a century later, under Oliver Cromwell and his Puritan soldiers. These losses greatly affect our understanding of medieval culture to the extent that it is now hard to comprehend that such a seemingly marginal theme as the Dance of Death was

once quite well known across the country. Probably the most renowned example of the theme in England was the series of paintings in Pardon Churchyard at Old St Paul's Cathedral, London, which was commissioned by the London Town Clerk John Carpenter (see chapter 3). This scheme incorporated a revised version of Lydgate's original *Dance of Death* poem that the author had based on the French verses in the famous *Danse Macabre* mural in the cemetery of the parish church of Les Saints Innocents after a visit to Paris in or around 1426. The painted scheme in London was evidently intended to emulate the fame of its Parisian counterpart, which had been painted in 1424-25 during the English occupation of the French capital (see chapter 2). From its prestigious location in London's foremost church the Dance of Death derived the name by which it became popularly known in medieval England: references to the 'Dance of Paul's' can be found as far afield as Long Melford, Bristol and Ludlow (see chapter 1) as well as in at least two extant manuscript copies of Lydgate's poem. Even so, the wide-spread use of this name does not imply any degree of resemblance with the actual scheme on display at Old St Paul's.

Pardon Churchyard was demolished in 1549 together with its *Dance of Death* paintings, like so many other such schemes, including the painted and stained cloths of Long Melford and Bristol. One example that still survives, albeit hidden behind oak panelling, is the *Dance of Death* mural on the north wall of the nave of the Guild Chapel in Stratford-upon-Avon (see chapter 1, fig. 6, and chapter 3, fig. 11). In 1563-64 the wall-paintings in this chapel were covered with whitewash on the authority of John Shakespeare (the playwright's father) as Chamberlain of the Corporation of Stratford in obedience of the Royal Injunctions of 1559, which demanded the removal of all signs of superstition and idolatry from places of worship. It is just possible – but not very likely – that some wall-paintings which were not judged offensive (including the *Dance of Death*) may have had a temporary reprieve.⁴³ The 'Daunce of Powles' at Stratford was still mentioned in 1576 by the London antiquary John Stow (1525-1605) in a note added to his manuscript copy of John Leland's *Itinerary*.⁴⁴



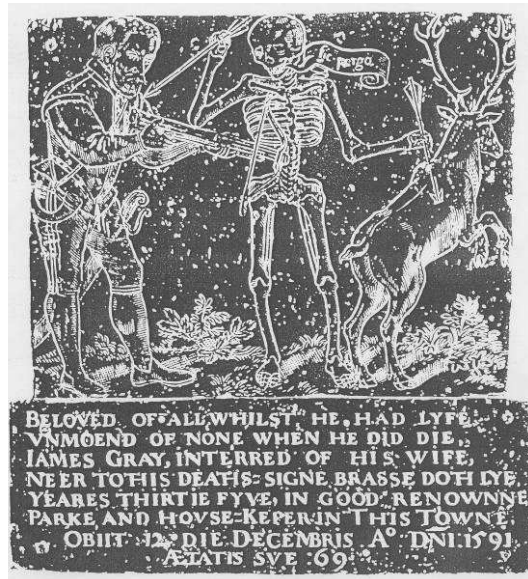
12. (Left) Woodcut illustration at the start of The daunce of Machabree, published by Richard Tottel in 1554 as an appendix to his edition of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*; the pope and the clergy are prominently present.

Even if the Stratford *Dance of Death* was indeed covered up while William Shakespeare was still a mere infant, he is likely to have heard about it later and to have come across earlier and more recent examples of the theme elsewhere, both in (monumental) art and in print.⁴⁵ In 1554 – sixteen years after the publication of

Holbein's *danse macabre* woodcuts in Lyons and only five years after the destruction of Pardon Churchyard – Richard Tottel printed Lydgate's *Dance of Death* poem with two woodcut illustrations as an appendix to *The Fall of Princes* (**Fig. 12** and chapter 7, fig. 19); this relatively late publication from the reign of Queen Mary may have been partly inspired by antiquarian motives, to preserve the memory of a once popular scheme (see chapter 3).⁴⁶ In 1569, John Day (1522-84), who was a prominent member of the London Stationers' Company, included an extensive *Dance of Death* cycle of sixty-two lay male and female characters with short English monologue verses in the margins of his *Christian Prayers and Meditations* (**Fig. 13**; see also chapter 8); the graphic work is good, even if the accompanying verses are rather uninspiring doggerel.⁴⁷ The satirical adaptation of the *danse* in the brass commemorating the park-keeper James Gray (d. 1591) at Hunsdon in Hertfordshire (see **Fig. 14** and chapter 8) provides further proof that the theme was far from forgotten, despite the destruction of the medieval 'Dance of Paul's' scheme in London; it is but one of many examples of tomb monuments on which personifications of Death, armed with darts or spears, make their lethal appearance (see chapter 8).⁴⁸



13. (Left) Death with the infant, detail from the marginal danse macabre cycle which initially appeared in the 1569 edition of John Day's *Christian Prayers and Meditations*, here reproduced from his 1578 *Booke of Christian Prayers*. (See also chapter 5.)



14. (Right) Brass of the park-keeper James Gray (d. 1591) at Hunsdon, Hertfordshire.

Evidence for the impact of the medieval *danse macabre* can thus still be found in Renaissance art and literature. In his unfinished treatise on the Four Last Things, which probably dates from c.1522, Sir Thomas More (1478-1535) made a tantalising reference to the *Dance of Death* scheme at Pardon Churchyard. The excerpt is usually quoted only in part yet deserves to be given in full for a better sense of the overall context of More's meditation on death:

But if we not only here this word death, but also let sink into our heartes, the very fantasye and depe imaginacion thereof, we shall perceiue therby, that we wer neuer so gretly moued by the beholding of the daunce of death pictured in Poules, as we shal fele our self stered and altered, by the feling of that imaginacion in our hertes. And no maruell. For those pictures expresse only, y^e lothely figure of our dead bony bodies biten away y^e flesh. Which though it be ougly to behold, yet neither the sight thereof, nor the sight of all y^e dead heades in y^e charnel house, nor the apparicion of a very ghost, is halfe so grisely as the depe conceiued fantasy of deathe in his

nature, by the liuely imaginacyon grauen in thyne owne heart. For there seest thou, not one plain grieuous sight of the bare bones hanging by the sinewes, but thou seest (yf thou fantasye thyne own death, for so art thou by this counsell aduised) thou seest I saye thy selfe yf thou dye no worse death, yet at the leastwise lying in thy bedde, thy hed shooting, thy backe aking, thy vaynes beating, thine heart panting, thy throte ratelyng, thy fleshe trembling, thy mouth gaping, thy nose sharpening, thy legges coling, thy fingers fimbiling, thy breath shorting, all thy strength fainting, thy lyfe vanishing, and thy death drawyng on.⁴⁹

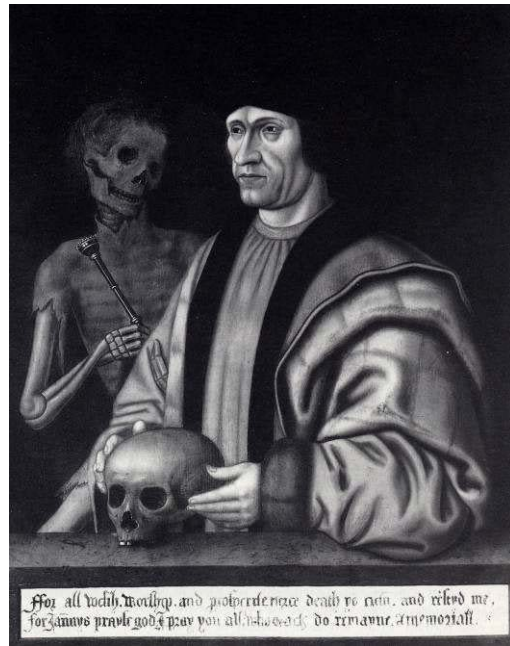
It is unfortunate that More does not actually describe the paintings. Instead, he dismisses these ‘lothely’ images of dead figures – combined with the very real skulls piled high in the nearby charnel houses – as less effective than meditations on one’s own death with all its attendant symptoms. His words convey the impact that the scheme must have had on visitors to the churchyard from the moment when the paintings were first revealed, probably in the early 1430s, but no detailed description survives to tell us what they looked like.

More’s words are further proof that a preoccupation with mortality was not a purely medieval phenomenon, but that death continued to be a source of inspiration, fascination and meditation, albeit in different ways. The *danse macabre* did not just paint a picture of various social stereotypes meeting Death; it was intended to serve viewers and readers as a mirror to remind them of their own inevitable end and to prepare them for the hereafter. More’s text expounds how beholders should take the images at St Paul’s one step further by relating them to the agonies of death that they themselves must expect to endure ‘at the leastwise’(!); a horrifying deathbed image conjured up by many authors and artists before More, as the examples of Hoccleve and the *Ars Moriendi* show. Many cadaver effigies also still seem to betray the final death throes and as such are very different from the cavorting corpses in the *danse* who almost appear to enjoy their condition. It is understandable, therefore, why Lydgate and others chose to interpret the figures of *le mort* as Death personified, for the dead dancers are much more like opponents of the living than a premonition of what each of us will become in the words of the Three Dead, ‘Sum quod eris; fuerisque quod es’.

The requirement to apply the message of the *danse* to oneself may also explain why the visualisation of the theme changed from a chain of dancers in a neutral setting, with the living characterised by their dress or a token attribute, to a set of separate scenes in which each victim of Death is placed in his own personal environment. This individualisation is what characterises Holbein’s woodcuts, but similar settings can be observed much earlier in French manuscript illuminations (**Fig. 2**); the same individualisation is evident in James Gray’s brass (**Fig. 14**). Commemoration is, of course, in many ways a form of vainglory as were portraits, which are intended to preserve one’s likeness even after death, and it is telling that many Renaissance portraits attempt to counteract the semblance of vainglory through an inclusion of death emblems or even a personified figure of Death (**Figs 15-16**). In their *vanitas* messages these portraits resemble the so-called doubledecker monuments with their combined images of earthly glory and man’s ultimate fate (see chapter 7), or the stained-glass glass panel that Henry Williams ordered in his own memory (**Fig. 11**), and thus serve both as a public warning and a focus for private meditation.⁵⁰



15. (Left) Hans Holbein the Younger (after), Portrait of Sir Brian Tuke with Death, [1532], panel, 49x38cm, Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlung.



16. (Right) Posthumous portrait of Norwich mayor Robert Jannys (c.1480-1530) with Death, by an anonymous British artist, probably seventeenth century (copy?), Norwich Guildhall, City of Norwich.

The more terrifying the image of death, the more effective the *contemptus mundi* message it is meant to convey: this applies to the presentation of death in art as well as in literature. Yet death imagery could be used to send out different warnings. In his section on Pride in the same text on the Four Last Things, More again drew upon the image of the corpse as ‘stinking carien [...] layd in the ground & there lefte alone, wher euery leud lad wilbe bolde to tread on his hed’ – the ultimate image of pride humbled.⁵¹ Pride was a deadly sin that also featured in the *Ars Moriendi* where devils distract the dying man’s attention away from holy thoughts with reminders of his former glory in the form of three crowns (Fig. 6). The emphasis in the *danse* on each character’s individual sins from pride and anger to lust and avarice – often expressed in his or her own lines – demonstrably relate to the Seven Deadly Sins as presented in both text and image; in the Guild Chapel at Stratford the Sins were actually incorporated in the latter part of the *Dance of Death* mural.⁵² Yet this same death imagery could conversely be used to convey a message of ‘carpe diem’ and even an instrument towards seduction, as Andrew Marvell (1621-78) was to do in his poem *To his Coy Mistress*.⁵³ In fact, the shift towards a more horrific presentation of death in both the *danse macabre*, the Three Living and the Three Dead, and funeral art suggests that the medieval moralists were already targetting what they considered to be insufficient preparation for death amongst their contemporaries.⁵⁴ It is worth remembering that it is the hypocritical Pardoner who offers the exemplum about the death of three young revellers in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*.

In her study of the Spanish *Dança* Florence Whyte summed up the *danse macabre* as ‘a synthesis of many motives’.⁵⁵ On such motif is the Seven Deadly Sins; the Ages of Man is another. Some sins were believed to pertain to particular stages of life, such as lust to youth – prime examples being the *amoureux* in the French *danse* and Lydgate’s amorous squire – and avarice to those of a more advanced age. Another adaptation of the *danse* is the French poem *Le Mors de la Pomme* of c.1468-70, the

title of which is a play on the French words *le mors* (bite) and *la mort*; it combines encounters between *la mort* and the living with biblical stories of the Fall, the death of Abel, the Flood, the Last Judgement and Christ's Passion.⁵⁶ These examples show that the *danse* lent itself well to a variety of moralising contexts in both art and literature, and the juxtaposition of *danse macabre* pairs with carvings of the Seven Corporal Acts of Mercy on the lost misericords of St Michael's church in Coventry (see chapter 6) underlines that point. The *danse macabre* was thus a successful and popular theme that fitted in well with the moralising culture of the medieval period as well as beyond.

The present thesis is unusual not just in tracing the *danse* in both literature and art but also in attempting to cross the linguistic barriers; a truly interdisciplinary and multilingual approach is still rare, and perhaps over-ambitious, yet badly needed for a greater understanding of the origins and development of the theme.⁵⁷ Admittedly, it leaves unanswered the burning question of whether the French *danse* was preceded by a hypothetical lost Latin prototype, by the German *Totentanz* tradition, or by the Spanish *dança de la muerte* (see chapter 2 and Appendices): no firm dates can be attached to either the *Totentanz* or the *dança*, so this truly European debate is unlikely to die down or be resolved soon.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, a new theory about the French *danse* presented in chapter 2 offers crucial new insights into the development of the theme.

Research into the *danse* is nowadays largely confined to specialists and to members of the various *danse macabre* and *Totentanz* societies across Europe, with the focus narrowed down to the *danse* in a particular period, region, medium or genre. The subject does occasionally make an appearance in literature for the more general reader, but such articles often present a very basic overview by non-experts or are, at their worst, poorly researched and riddled with errors – perhaps inevitably as the subject is complex and the literature vast.⁵⁹ In Germany in the 1980s there was a spell of interest in the occurrence of the *danse* in Britain, yet Hubertus Schulte Herbrüggen's interesting articles were published in German and are thus inaccessible to the majority of English-speaking scholars.⁶⁰ There is still a serious language barrier in *danse macabre* studies, even if recent work by a handful of American and Canadian researchers has helped re-open the subject within Anglo-American scholarship.

The steadily growing body of literature on the *danse* across Europe is almost too large for one person fully to take into account, but every contribution takes our understanding of this once popular theme another step forward. The revival of interest is a welcome development, notwithstanding a tendency to take basic questions too much for granted in favour of subjecting the *danse* to trendy new ideas. This thesis is based largely on articles that were written over a period of time for different types of readership; there is thus a degree of overlap while discussion of important aspects such as reception and satire may in places be brief. Furthermore, it does not aim to take any new theoretical position but instead addresses different aspects of the *danse* as well as related themes and motifs. The predominantly antiquarian research presented here is perhaps unfashionable, quite apart from the risks inherent in adopting a combined multilingual and interdisciplinary approach. Yet it is this approach that allows the present thesis – which is part of this author's ongoing research – not only to highlight the former importance of the Dance of Death in medieval England but also to shed new light on its origins and evolution on the Continent.

NOTES

¹ No attempt has been made to regularise the spelling and punctuation of edited texts cited in this thesis.

² R.D. Drexler, 'Dunbar's "Lament for the Makaris" and the Dance of Death Tradition', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 13 (1978), pp. 144-58. Dunbar's refrain 'Timor mortis conturbat me' had been used by earlier Middle-English poets, including John Audelay in his carol *Dread of Death* and Lydgate in his poem *Timor mortis conturbat me*. See S. Fein (ed.), *John the Blind Audelay: Poems and Carols* (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 302), Medieval Institute Publications (Kalamazoo, 2008), no. 24; H.N. MacCracken and M. Sherwood (eds), *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, part II, EETS, o.s. 192 (London, 1934), no. 73.

³ Wolgemut's woodcut is conveniently copyright-free, so that it is frequently used to illustrate articles on medieval death and the *danse macabre*, e.g. in E.R. Huber, "'Oh Death!'" Death, Dying, and the Culture of the Macabre in the Late Middle Ages', website of The Camelot Project at the University of Rochester, <www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/Deathbooklet>, with thanks to Professor Rolf Bremmer for drawing my attention to this site, or as the opening illustration in H. Kokott, 'Todeserleben und Totentänze im Mittelalter', *Der Deutschunterricht*, 1 (2002), pp. 9-15, fig. 1. A detail of Wolgemut's woodcut was also used on the cover of C. Platt, *King Death. The Black Death and its Aftermath in Late-Medieval England* (London, 1996). The same woodcut decorates the cover of the recent D. Vanclooster (ed.), *Dansen met de dood* (Brugge, 2008) and likewise serves as the sole illustration in the short chapter on the *Totentanz* in N. Ohler, *Sterben und Tod im Mittelalter* (1990, repr. Düsseldorf, 2004), pp. 263-68, which is in turn based mainly on G. Kaiser (ed.), *Der tanzende Tod. Mittelalterliche Totentänze* (Frankfurt am Main, 1983).

⁴ E. Gertsman, 'Visualizing Death. Medieval Plagues and the Macabre', in F. Mormando and T. Worcester (eds), *Piety and Plague. From Byzantium to the Baroque* (Kirksville, Missouri, 2007), pp. 64-89.

⁵ See the discussion in J. Tomaschek, 'Der Tod, die Welt(zeit)alter und die letzten Dinge. Bemerkungen zum "Tanz der Skelette" in Hartmann Schedels *Weltchronik* von 1493', in R. Hausner and W. Schwab (eds), *Den Tod tanzen? Tagungsband des Totentanzkongresses Stift Admont 2001* (Anif/Salzburg, 2002), pp. 229-49.

⁶ The author of the *Weltchronik* text, Hartmann Schedel, annotated this woodcut in his personal hand-coloured copy with his own verses, beginning with the rubric 'TENDIMUS · HVC · O[MN]JES : HAEC · DOMVS · VLTIMA' (transl.: We are all going there, this is our final abode [*i.e.* the grave]), with further ruminations on the necessity of death ('MORTIS NECESSITAS') in the blank space on the verso side: see A. Wilson, assisted by J.L. Wilson, *The Making of the Nuremberg Chronicle* (1976, repr. Amsterdam, 1978), pp. 155, 214.

⁷ For a facsimile of Marchant's 1485 edition, see Kaiser, *Tanzende Tod*, pp. 70-107; unless stated otherwise, all quotations from the French *danse macabre* in this thesis are based on this edition. For Marchant's 1486 edition (including the *Danse Macabre des Femmes*), see P. Champion, *La Danse Macabre. Reproduction en fac-similé de l'édition de Guy Marchant Paris 1486* (Paris, 1925).

⁸ 'Distorti' is translated in the matching German verses as 'ungeschaffen', *i.e.* misshapen creatures. In the Latin verses it is hard to decide whether to interpret *mors* as death or personified Death in each case.

⁹ The idea of performativity – with particular emphasis on movement, gesture and body language – is discussed by Elina Gertsman 'Pleyinge and Peyntyng: Performing the Dance of Death', *Studies in Iconography*, 27 (2006), pp. 1-43, based on chapter 3 of her unpublished 2004 DPhil. dissertation.

¹⁰ A. Schröer, 'The Grave', *Anglia*, 5 (1882), pp. 289-90, l. 16. R. Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 83, described the fragment as having 'a cleverness, which is neither typically Anglo-Saxon nor typically medieval: it plays with the conceit of the grave as a house'. Other Middle English poems also play upon the idea of the grave as one's last abode, such as the short poem *Wen the turuf is thi tuur* (Cambridge, Trinity College MS 323) published in C. Brown, *Religious Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century* (Oxford, 1932), no. 30.

¹¹ See also K. Jankofsky, 'A View into the Grave: "A Disputacion Betwyx þe Body and Wormes" in British Museum MS Add. 37049', *Taius*, 1 (1974), pp. 137-59, with thanks to Dr Julian Luxford for providing me with a copy of this paper.

¹² F.J. Furnivall (ed.), *Hoccleve's Works, I. The Minor Poems, in the Phillipps MS. 8151 (Cheltenham) and the Durham MS. III.9.*, EETS, e.s. 61 (London, 1892, repr. 1937), XXIII, *How to Learn to Die*, l. 295. Hoccleve discussed his intention to translate the Latin treatise *Scite mori* in his *Dialogue with a*

Friend, XXI, ll. 204-40. The idea of the *danse macabre* as a mirror is also discussed in J.H.M. Taylor, 'Un miroir salubre', in J.H.M. Taylor (ed.), *Dies Illa: Death in the Middle Ages*, Proceedings of the 1983 Manchester Colloquium, Vinaver Studies in French, 1 (Liverpool, 1984), pp. 29-43.

¹³ K.S. Guthke, *The Gender of Death: A Cultural History in Art and Literature* (1997, transl. Cambridge, 1997), esp. chapter 2 'The Middle Ages: The Unfortunate Fall', but also pp. 21-22, 118-22 and figs 12-13; see also L.P. Kurtz, *The Dance of Death and the Macabre Spirit in European Literature*, Publications of the Institute of French Studies, Inc. (New York, 1934), chapter 13.

¹⁴ I. Gollancz (ed.), *Death and Liffe. A Medieval Alliterative Debate Poem in a Seventeenth Century Version* (London, 1930), ll. 162, 159-60. The connection between woman and death was very strong in medieval culture: after all, Eve had brought death to mankind through the Fall in Paradise.

¹⁵ Guthke, *Gender of Death*, pp. 71-75 and fig. 8; also A. Tenenti, *La vie et la mort à travers l'art du XVe siècle* (Paris, 1952), pp. 20-23.

¹⁶ Illustrated in T.S.R. Boase, *Death in the Middle Ages: Mortality, Judgment and Remembrance* (London, 1972), fig. 91. See also the facsimile edition by C.M. García-Tejedor, *The Book of Hours of Joanna of Castile* (Barcelona, 2005), pp. 285-88. For the Berlin miniature, see C. Kralik, 'Änderungen in der Andachtspraxis und die Legende der drei Lebenden und der drei Toten in spätmittelalterlichen Handschriften', in U. Wunderlich (ed.), *L'art macabre*, 6, Jahrbuch der Europäischen Totentanz-Vereinigung (Düsseldorf, 2005), pp. 134-47, at pp. 141-43 and fig. 4; painted on a separate page, this miniature may have been a later insert.

¹⁷ F. Warren (ed.), with introduction and notes by B. White, *The Dance of Death, edited from MSS. Ellesmere 26/A.13 and B.M. Lansdowne 699, collated with the other extant MSS.*, EETS, o.s. 181 (London, 1931, repr. 2000). Quotations from this edition will be referenced in the text with *E* for the Ellesmere and *L* for the Lansdowne version.

¹⁸ D.A. Fein, 'Guyot Marchant's *Danse Macabre*. The Relationship between Image and Text', *Mirator* (August 2000), pp. 1-11, n. 8. Both instruments can be found in the *Totentanz* edition attributed to Heinrich Knoblochtzter, which was based on Marchant's edition: see the woodcuts of the *Dumherr*, *Pferner* and *bose Monch* in Kaiser, *Tanzende Tod*, pp. 124, 126 and 166. Knoblochtzter's edition features an unusually wide variety of musical instruments when compared to the earlier Heidelberg blockbook where many of the dead dancers play no music at all: see the facsimile of this 'Oberdeutsche vierzeilige Totentanz' in Kaiser, *Tanzende Tod*, pp. 276-329. This blockbook is usually dated 1465 but an earlier date of 1458-65 is proposed in P. Layet, 'Die bimediale Münchner Totentanzhandschrift Xyl. 39', in U. Wunderlich (ed.), *L'art macabre*, 1, Jahrbuch der Europäischen Totentanz-Vereinigung (Düsseldorf, 2000), pp. 80-96, at p. 95. A bagpipe is also often carried by one of the shepherds in medieval Adoration scenes.

¹⁹ B. Schulte, *Die deutschsprachigen spätmittelalterlichen Totentänze. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Inkunabel 'Des dodes dantz'. Lübeck 1489*, Niederdeutsche Studien, vol. 36 (Cologne, 1990), pp. 136-43.

²⁰ The story is discussed in J.M. Clark, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Glasgow, 1950), pp. 106-7; it is set in the time of Emperor Henry II (r. 1002-24). For Mannyng's Middle-English exemplum of the 'hoppynge' dancers of 'Colbek', which he based on a shorter version in William of Waddington's Anglo-Norman *Manuel des Pechiez*, see F.J. Furnivall (ed.), *Robert of Brunne's 'Handlyng Synne'*, EETS, o.s. 119, 123 (London, 1901, 1903), ll. 9015-9260.

²¹ K. Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres and the Dance of Death: Studies in Musical Iconology* (1970, repr. New York, 1984), p. 271.

²² See R. Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes: die mittelalterlichen Totentänze und ihr Nachleben* (Bern/Munich, 1980), esp. pp. 24-26, 39-42, and also chapter 14 on the Dance of Death in Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres*, esp. pp. 298-305. In medieval culture music often served as a link between Satan and the Deadly Sin of Luxuria.

²³ An apt visual comparison is made with the skeleton playing the flute at the start of the Lübeck *Totentanz* scheme in Vanclooster, *Dansen met de dood*, p. 41.

²⁴ Furnivall (ed.), *Handlyng Synne*, ll. 4885-88.

²⁵ See also Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik*, p. 40 and figs 23-24.

²⁶ *The Castle of Perseverance*, ll. 3424-25, in M. Eccles (ed.), *The Macro Plays: The Castle of Perseverance, Wisdom, Mankind*, EETS, o.s. 262 (London/New York/Toronto, 1969), as quoted amongst several references to the theme in Middle English literature in A. Breeze, 'The Dance of Death', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 13 (Summer 1987), pp. 87-96, at p. 89. If the play indeed originated in Norfolk or Lincolnshire one might suspect the influence of Lydgate's poem.

²⁷ Kurtz, *Dance of Death*, pp. 215-16, mentions a reference to a 'danse douloureuse' in a chronicle entry for 1421 and another to 'la dance' in relation to the plague in a poem by Eustache Deschamps (d. c.1406).

²⁸ G. Hasenohr-Esnos (ed.), *Le Respit de la Mort par Jean le Fevre*, Société des Anciens Textes Français, (Paris 1969), p. 113, l. 3078.

²⁹ Clark, *Dance of Death*, p. 93.

³⁰ J.H.M. Taylor, 'The Dialogues of the Dance of Death and the Limits of Late-Medieval Theatre', *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, 16 (1990), pp. 215-32; E. Gertsman, 'Pleyinge and Peyntyng: Performing the Dance of Death', *Studies in Iconography*, 27 (2006), pp. 1-43.

³¹ See, for example, the discussion in P.S. Spinrad, *The Summons of Death on the Medieval and Renaissance English Stage* (Columbus, 1987), chapter 4, pp. 68-85. Although the Dance of Death is frequently mentioned in this study, what is lacking is the comprehensive understanding of the theme that could have done justice to the impact it clearly had on English drama of the period. The same applies to P. Tristram's *Figures of Life and Death in Medieval English Literature* (London, 1976), where the discussion of the theme is largely confined to pp. 167-73 with much attention being given to Holbein's woodcuts, even though they postdate Lydgate's poem by a century.

³² Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik*, figs 4-7; also H.M. Bloem, 'Doodsvoorstellingen in de late middeleeuwen', in L. van Beeck *et al.* (eds), 'Met het oog op de dood', studium generale-bundel Katholieke Universiteit Brabant (Tilburg, 1988), pp. 74-92, at p. 83 and fig. 5. A different kind of connection with death occurs on the tympanum on the west front of Strasbourg Cathedral where a skeleton representing Adam in his grave rests beneath Christ on the cross, with thanks to Robert Didier for drawing my attention to this example.

³³ See E.P. Hammond, 'Latin Texts of the Dance of Death', *Modern Philology*, 8 (1911), pp. 399-410; H. Rosenfeld, *Der mittelalterliche Totentanz: Entstehung - Entwicklung - Bedeutung* (1954, revised edn Cologne/Graz, 1968), esp. pp. 38-43, 323-26, and by the same author 'Vadomori', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 124 (1995), pp. 257-64.

³⁴ Quoted from the so-called Paris version in Rosenfeld, *Mittelalterliche Totentanz*, p. 324, ll. 17-18.

³⁵ S.G. Fein, 'Life and Death, Reader and Page: Mirrors of Mortality in English Manuscripts', *Mosaic*, 35:1 (2002), pp. 69-94.

³⁶ J.A. Goodall, 'Death and the Impenitent Avaricious King. A Unique Brass Discovered at Frenze, Norfolk', *Apollo*, 126 (October 1987), pp. 264-66; the brass was shown in the 1987 V&A exhibition *Witness in Brass*, cat. 205. The scene was discovered on the back of an epitaph to George Duke, Esq. (d. 1551), which was re-engraved in a workshop in Bury St Edmunds, although the reverse may have been the product of an earlier Norwich workshop.

³⁷ P. Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death* (1977, transl. London, 1981, repr. 1983), and *Images of Man and Death* (1983, transl. Cambridge/London, 1985).

³⁸ Platt, *King Death*, fig. 69 and p. 178-79, using the Stow quotation in Florence Warren's *Dance of Death* edition with the remark that the scheme was 'long thought to have been a casualty of the Great Fire of London in 1666, but probably lost much earlier'. Platt's bibliography does not even include Clark's *Dance of Death*.

³⁹ R. Marks, *Stained Glass in England during the Middle Ages* (London 1993), p. 84 and pl. 67. The window was recorded in 1712 by the antiquarian John Kilpatrick as still showing the emperor, pope, cardinal and other professions, albeit with most of the figures defaced (Church Notes for St Andrew's church dated September 1712, Norwich Record Office, MC 5000/14, with thanks to Fred Kloppenborg). For the Stanford panel, see R. Marks, 'Henry Williams and his "Ymage of Deth" Roundel at Stanford on Avon, Northamptonshire', *Antiquaries Journal*, 54 (1974), pp. 272-74.

⁴⁰ N. Llewellyn, *The Art of Death. Visual Culture in the English Death Ritual c.1500-c.1800* (London, 1991, repr. 1997), chapter 4, pp. 19-27, but esp. p. 19, and figs 4-5 and 11-12. Although the time-frame of Llewellyn's book might have been the excuse for excluding earlier medieval examples of the theme, it does not stop him from including prints by Thomas Rowlandson (1817) and Richard Dagley (1827) that technically fall outside his chosen period.

⁴¹ This sense of surprise was shared by Clark (p. v), whose 1950 *Dance of Death* is still the last survey of the theme in English. Although Douce's study (see below) was not published until 1833, it was based on material researched and written up forty years earlier.

⁴² F. Douce, *Holbein's Dance of Death, Exhibited in Elegant Engravings on Wood, with a Dissertation on the Several Representations of the Subject* (1833, repr. London, 1858), p. 201.

⁴³ The Stratford Dance of Death had probably been painted in the early sixteenth century as part of the provisions in the will of Sir Hugh Clopton (d. 1496) for the rebuilding of the nave of the chapel. The

account of John Shakespeare (father of the playwright) includes the entry 'Iten payd for defasyng ymages in y^e chappell ij^s'; see C. Davidson, *The Guild Chapel Wall Paintings at Stratford-upon-Avon*, AMS Studies in the Renaissance, 22 (New York, 1988), p. 10 and 11. Davidson cites no evidence for his claim that the Dance of Death was not whitewashed over in 1563-64 and one may wonder whether a mural that included an image of the pope would have received Protestant approval in this period.

⁴⁴ 'About the body of this chapele was curiously paynted the Daunce of Deathe, commonly called the Daunce of Powles, because the same was sometyme there paynted abowte the cloysters on the north-west syd[e] of Powles churche, pulled downe by the Duke of Somarset, *tempore* E. 6', as quoted in W. Puddephat, 'The Mural Paintings of the Dance of Death in the Guild Chapel of Stratford-upon-Avon', *Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society*, 76 (1958), pp. 29-35, at p. 30.

⁴⁵ Explicit references to the Dance are hard to find in Shakespeare's work according to H. Morris, 'The Dance-of-Death Motif in Shakespeare', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 20 (1984), pp. 15-28, which draws mainly upon Holbein's woodcuts as a likely visual source of inspiration. However, see S. Oosterwijk, "'Alas, poor Yorick': Death, the fool, the mirror and the *danse macabre*", in S. Knöll (ed.), *Narren – Masken – Karneval. Meisterwerke von Dürer bis Kubin aus der Düsseldorfer Graphiksammlung 'Mensch und Tod'*, exhibition catalogue (Regensburg, 2009), pp. 20-32, esp. n. 47. Jaques' line 'I am for other than for dancing measures' in *As You Like It*, V, iv, 192, could be a hitherto unrecognised allusion to the *danse*. Shakespeare must have been aware of the fact that the property he bought in Stratford in 1597, known as New Place, had been built by the town's former benefactor Sir Hugh Clopton.

⁴⁶ I am grateful to Professor Anthony Edwards for this suggestion.

⁴⁷ The only extant complete copy of Day's 1569 edition (Lambeth Palace Library, 1569.6, known as 'the Queen's own copy' because it is believed to have belonged to Elizabeth I) comprises a *danse macabre* cycle of hand-coloured woodcuts illustrating thirty-six male and twenty-six female characters (fols 148r-156v and 166r-172r, respectively). The impact is somewhat lessened by the wholesale repetition of the male cycle on fols 157r-165v. See also H.S. Herbrüggen, 'Ein anglikanischer Beitrag zur Geschichte des englischen Totentanzes: John Days *Christian Prayers and Meditations*, 1569', in H.-J. Müllenbrock and A. Klein (eds), *Motive und Themen in englischsprachiger Literatur als Indikatoren literaturgeschichtlicher Prozesse: Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Theodor Wolpers* (Tübingen, 1990), pp. 73-93.

⁴⁸ For *danse macabre* influences on tomb iconography, see S. Oosterwijk, "'The sodeyne vyolence of cruel dethe': Death and *Danse Macabre* Iconography on Tomb Monuments', *Actes du 11e Congrès de l'association 'Danses macabres d'Europe'* (Meslay-le-Grenet, 2003), pp. 209-22.

⁴⁹ Sir Thomas More, unfinished treatise on 'The Last Things', in A.S.G. Edwards, K.G. Rodgers and C.H. Miller (eds), *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 1 (New Haven/London, 1997), pp. 128-82, at pp. 139-40. There is earlier evidence for More's fascination with death; he is also said to have designed in his youth an allegorical painted cloth for his father's house, which included amongst nine 'pageaunts' an image of Death described in the accompanying verses as 'foule vgly lene and mysshape'; see More, 'Pageant Verses', in Edwards *et al.*, *Complete Works*, pp. 3-7.

⁵⁰ Just as cadaver effigies (see chapter 7), such portraits might be commissioned by the sitters themselves as reminders of their own mortality. An interesting counterpart to the window in Stanford is the almost contemporary pair of stained-glass trefoils dated 1502, which show in one trefoil Death on an emaciated horse aiming his arrow at the figure of the Nuremberg provost Dr Sixtus Tucher (1459-1507) standing at his open grave in the matching trefoil; the panels may have originated from a window in Tucher's house in the Grasersgasse where he spent most of his time amongst his books after resigning his post in 1504. The panels are preserved in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg; the original design drawings by an artist active in Albrecht Dürer's circle also survive. The drawings only show the Latin inscription for Death and the year 1502. The complete inscriptions on the panels themselves read 'CAVE MISER . NE MEO TE CONFIXVM . TELO . IN HOC TETR[IC]O COLLOCEM FERETRI LECTO' (Take care, unfortunate one, that I do not lay you, pierced by my arrow, on this hard bed of the funeral bier) for Death and 'QVID . MI[NARIS QV]OD . HOC MONENTE . SEPVLCHRO : ECIAM . SI . VELIS . CAVERE . NEQVEO : ' (Why threaten me with this waiting grave, against which, even if you wished it, I cannot defend myself) for Tucher. See *Gothic and Renaissance Art in Nuremberg 1300-1550*, exhibition catalogue (New York/Munich, 1986), pp. 286-289, cat. nos 116-117.

⁵¹ More, 'The Last Things', p. 156.

⁵² Davidson, *Guild Chapel Wall Paintings*, p. 7 and n. 35; also K.T. Parker (comp.), *The Guild Chapel and other Guild Buildings of Stratford-Upon-Avon, Based on the Research of Wilfrid Puddephat* (Stratford-upon-Avon, 1987), p. 8. The scheme appears to have juxtaposed the sins with the following

characters: physician, Pride, merchant, Envy, artificer, Wrath, labourer, Avarice, sergeant of Office, Sloth, juror, Gluttony, minstrel and Lust.

⁵³ See Jankofsky, 'A View into the Grave', esp. pp. 137-38.

⁵⁴ Comparisons between a medieval 'memento mori' outlook v. the more cheerful 'carpe diem' motto, which is popularly associated with the Renaissance, create a false impression of an abrupt change in thinking. The exhortation 'memento mori' could in any case be construed differently: Clark, *Dance of Death*, p. 2, pointed out that whereas the words were a call to repentance for medieval people, to the ancients they meant 'Eat, drink and be merry'.

⁵⁵ F. Whyte, *The Dance of Death in Spain and Catalonia* (Baltimore, 1931), p. 85.

⁵⁶ L.P. Kurtz (ed.), *Le Mors de la Pomme*, Publications of the Institute of French Studies Inc. (New York, 1937). The poem survives in a single illustrated manuscript copy (BnF, ms fr. 17001).

⁵⁷ An edited volume in English on the *danse macabre* and related themes by a range of international scholars in the field, provisionally entitled *Mixed Metaphors*, is currently being prepared in collaboration with Dr Stefanie Knöll.

⁵⁸ There are persistent but incorrect claims about the earliest *Totentanz* examples, such as an impossibly early date of 1312 for the Klingenthal mural in Basel (based on a misreading of the date 1512) or 1383 for a scheme in Münden, Westphalia, that was not a *Totentanz* at all; see Warren, *Dance of Death*, p. 97. Even more persistent, because his monograph is still regarded outside Germany as the standard text on the subject, is Hellmut Rosenfeld's purely hypothetical 'Würzburg *Totentanz*' of c.1350, which has long been dismissed by German scholars (see, for example, Kaiser, *Tanzende Tod*, pp. 276-77 and n. 1, or the critical review by T.F. Mustanoja in *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 57 (1956), pp. 162-63) but is still perpetuated in recent studies such as E.E. DuBruck and B.I. Gusick (eds), *Death and Dying in the Middle Ages*, Studies in the Humanities, 45 (New York/Canterbury, 1999), p. 300.

⁵⁹ For example, A.-J. Donzet, 'Les danses macabres', *Monuments Historiques*, 124 (Dec. 1982-Jan. 1983), theme issue on 'L'architecture et la mort', pp. 49-52, or J. Cohen, 'Death and the Danse macabre', *History Today*, 32 (August 1982), pp. 35-40. The latter is an example of the worst variety, containing a mixture of unreferenced claims, misinterpreted illustration material, and a very inadequate brief bibliography that does not even list Clark's monograph. Similarly, A. Kinch, 'The *Danse Macabre* and the Medieval Community of Death', *Mediaevalia*, 23.1 (2002), pp. 159-202, offers a wide-ranging but ultimately superficial discussion of the *danse macabre* marred by sloppy research and factual errors, such as the suggestion that the 'fresco' on the 'outer wall of the Cemetery of the Innocents' showed the dead 'playing musical instruments, dancing, making conversation' (pp. 171-72), or the mistaken assumption that the two *Totentanz* murals in Basel were situated 'in the local cathedral' (p. 193).

⁶⁰ See the Bibliography for articles by Herbrüggen.