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

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Citation

Oosterwijk, S. (2009, June 25). *'Fro Paris to Ingland'? The danse macabre in text and image in late-medieval England*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/13873>

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

CHAPTER 5

‘Muoz ich tanzen und kan nit gân?’: death and the infant in the medieval *danse macabre*

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The medieval *danse macabre*

In his famous book on Netherlandish and French art and culture in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which was first published in 1919 and translated into English in 1924, the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga described the *danse macabre* as a vivid example of the late-medieval vision of death.¹ It is inevitably a very grim vision, as Huizinga admitted: ‘In all these sombre lamentations about death the accents of true tenderness are extremely rare. They could, however, hardly be wanting in relation to the death of children.’² One particular example that Huizinga clearly felt worth quoting is that of the little girl in Martial d’Auvergne’s *Danse macabre des femmes* who, even while she is being led away by Death, begs her mother to look after her most cherished possessions: ‘Pour dieu quon garde ma poupee/mes cinq pierres ma belle cotte’ (For God’s sake, take care of my doll, my five stones [=knucklebones], my pretty dress).³ Even though there may be a suggestion by the poet that the little girl already shows herself a typical female by hankering after frivolous earthly possessions, just like many of her adult counterparts in the poem, the words are undeniably reminiscent of a child’s voice. Yet Huizinga felt constrained to add a sobering thought to this example: ‘But this touching note is only heard exceptionally. The literature of the epoch knew childhood so little!’⁴ As we shall see, the little girl was not the only child in the *danse macabre*; she had an even younger, male counterpart.

Martial d’Auvergne’s all-female version of the *danse macabre* marks a new development, for most earlier versions of this late-medieval theme focus on male members of society who are characterized by their social rank or profession, ranging from pope, king and emperor to merchant, usurer and labourer; some women do appear earlier in especially the German and English tradition, but only in small numbers. The first recorded example of a medieval *danse macabre* is the famous but no longer extant French mural with accompanying verses that was painted on the walls of the Franciscan cemetery of Les Saints-Innocents in Paris between August 1424 and Easter 1425 at the time of the English occupation of the city.⁵ Its text with accompanying woodcut illustrations was published in 1485 by the Parisian printer Guyot Marchant, who produced an illustrated *Danse macabre des femmes* the following year and a new enlarged edition in 1491.⁶ However, the English poet John Lydgate had already composed a Middle-English version of the

original poem at Les Innocents before 1430, after a visit to Paris in 1426; a subsequent expanded version of his poem was included in the similarly famous but lost scheme in Pardon Churchyard of Old St Paul’s Cathedral in London.⁷

Despite its popularity in the medieval and later periods, the origins of the *danse macabre* are still obscure. There is probably a link with the popular medieval tale of the Three Living and the Three Dead, which first appeared in French poetry in the thirteenth century and was soon to be found in medieval art across Europe, but whether the *danse macabre* actually developed out of this earlier theme is debatable; even the origins and meaning of the word ‘macabre’ are uncertain.⁸ It is equally unclear whether the *danse macabre* started life as a text, a performance or procession, or a pictorial scheme, and also whether the theme originated in Germany or France; however, an early Latin version seems distinctly possible. The mural at Les Innocents is unlikely to have been the first appearance of the theme, but there is no indisputable evidence of an earlier scheme. What is certain is that the *danse macabre* follows the moralizing tradition of the Three Living and the Three Dead and the emergence in the fourteenth century of so-called cadaver effigies, all of which illustrate the late-medieval preoccupation with death.⁹

For the *danse macabre des femmes*, the relative paucity of female professions to make up an all-female version was resolved by the inclusion of the different marital stages of womanhood, from the little girl and the young virgin to the widow and the old spinster.¹⁰ In contrast, the participants of the largely male *danse macabre* are almost all distinguished professionally; the most striking exception is the infant, who appears in many versions of the *danse* from the earliest known examples onwards. This might seem odd because infants held little social status in their own right in the Middle Ages.¹¹ In fact, relatively little is known about medieval infancy; as a phase of life it has largely been ignored by historians, and one could argue that such a lack of modern interest in the medieval infant may well reflect a similar absence of interest on the part of medieval authors, be they literary or more scientifically inclined. Yet whereas Huizinga admitted that real-life sentiments are not usually preserved in the ‘higher literature’ of the period, it is still a common assumption that medieval adults were incapable of understanding the nature of children, and thus must have regarded — and treated — them as ‘miniature

adults'. A notorious example of this school of thought was the French historian Philippe Ariès, whose book *La vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* was first published in 1960; this work elicited a debate on the history of childhood that still has not died down. In particular the high rates of infant mortality led Ariès and his followers to believe that infancy was the phase of human development least regarded by medieval parents and carers, who could not allow themselves to become too emotionally attached to such transitory creatures. As Ariès concluded, 'childhood was simply an unimportant phase of which there was no need to keep any record'.¹²

Closer inspection shows, however, that childhood was anything but 'an unimportant phase' in the Middle Ages. Early infancy was undeniably regarded as a vital first stage of human life, as one would expect in a period characterized by the omnipresence in art of the Christ child alone or in his mother's arms. A range of *danse macabre* examples will demonstrate not only that there was a keen interest in children and child development, but that infant mortality may have impressed contemporaries to such an extent that the inclusion of the infant amongst the adult members of society seemed no more than obvious, and just.

Infantia and the Ages of Man

The late fifteenth-century *danse macabre* murals at La Chaise-Dieu and Meslay-le-Grenet typify the infant in accordance with earlier medieval iconography: as a swaddled infant (figure 1) or, more commonly, lying naked in a rocking cradle (figure 2). This is how one tends to find the infant depicted in the (all-male) Ages of Man, a popular medieval theme dating back to Antiquity.¹³ In the more extensive schemes of six or seven Ages, the first Age of *infantia* traditionally covered the first seven years of human life although many artists actually chose the earliest, pre-weaning phase of the infant in his cradle as the stereotypical representative of this Age. Various medieval authors, such as Bartholomaeus Anglicus in his encyclopaedic work *De proprietatibus rerum* of c.1230 (figure 3) or the thirteenth-century Tuscan physician Aldobrandinus of Siena, indicated a separate baby phase within this seven-year Age span. Bartholomaeus's description in John Trevisa's Middle-English translation is as follows:

Isidir seip, and Constantyn also, þat þere ben mony diuers ages. The firste hatte *infancia* 'þe firste childehode', wipouten teþ and neuliche igete and bore, and dureþ seuen monthis, and is sit ful tendre and neische, quabby and gleymy. Þerfore



Figure 1. Death and the swaddled infant, wall-painting of the late-fifteenth century at La Chaise-Dieu (Haute-Loire), France. Photo: Europäische Totentanz-Vereinigung.



Figure 2. Death and the infant in the cradle, late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century wall-painting in the nave of the parish church of Meslay-le-Grenet (Eure-et-Loire), near Chartres. Photo: author.



Figure 3. Seven Ages of Man, woodcut from the French translation *Le propriétaire des choses* of Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De proprietatibus rerum*, printed 1482 (London, British Library IB.41688); note the infant in the cradle, the toddler behind a baby-walker, and the slightly older boy with his hobby-horse and whirlingig. By permission of the British Library.

in þat age a child nedip alwey tendre and softe kepinge,
fedinge, and norischinge. And childheod þat bredip teep
strecchip and durith seven ȝere.¹⁴

It would seem that Bartholomaeus did regard *infantia* as an initial separate phase, albeit one of seven months. Officially, the overall *infantia* phase was thought to last seven years up to the stage when a child starts to lose its milk teeth. Based on Isidore of Seville's etymological interpretation of the word *infans*, Bartholomaeus explained:

And suche a child hatte *infans* in latyn, þat is to mene 'nouȝt spekyng', for he may nouȝt speke noȝir sowne his wordes profitabliche, for here teep be nouȝt ȝet parfitliche igrowe and isette in ordere. So seip Isidre.¹⁵

Obviously, by the age of seven a child should have mastered the ability of speech, yet the clue here is the word 'profitabliche'; it is the more mature art of reasoning that Bartholomaeus feels is still lacking. It was well understood that children need to be encouraged to speak and learn 'proper' words, and Bartholomaeus himself praised the benefit of lullabies sung by nurses to their infant charges: 'Also þey vsen to singe lullinge[s] and opir cradil songis to plesse þe wittis of þe childe'.¹⁶ Possibly the earliest surviving Middle-English lullaby, dated pre-1350, has as its opening line 'Lollai, lollai', lilil child, whi wepistou so sore?', and this is quite typical of the genre.¹⁷

The babyhood phase proper was often defined as the period when infants were most like animals: as yet incapable of any form of reason whatsoever, and spending their time just eating, sleeping, crying and soiling their swaddling clothes. Infants were generally described as lacking those proper human characteristics that distinguish humans from animals: the

ability to speak and to walk on two legs. Again and again, medieval authors define young children by these two characteristics, as does the anonymous author of the thirteenth-century romance *Havelok the Dane* when he introduces the eponymous hero's future bride Goldborough as a maiden 'þat was so yung þat sho ne couȝe/Gon on fote, ne speke wit mouȝe'.¹⁸ In the early fifteenth-century Scottish poem *Ratis Raving* the first of the seven Ages is summed up thus:

The formest of thire eildis sere
I Set within the fyrst thre yere.
Than buskis child to speke ore ga
and to wyt quhat is na & ya.
Sa lang can nocht ellis cheld think
but one the met and one the drink,
On norryss and one slep, thai thre;
Syk is the formest propyrtie.¹⁹

The anonymous author's apparently poor opinion of the infant's basic characteristics is further confirmed in this subsequent comparison with mere beasts, which likewise have feelings but little else, although he admits that infants are at least capable of laughing and crying:

Rycht as a best, child can no mare
bot lauch ore gret for Joy & care.
Na best has thai twa properteis
bot seid of mankind, as þow seis.
This eild has kind of growin thing,
and as best it havis feilinge.²⁰

While in this helpless state, infants are at their most vulnerable. Havelok's father Birkabeyn quite rightly worries about who might be trusted to look after his soon to be orphaned children 'Til þat he koupen speken wit tunge;/speken and gangen' (ll. 369–70). Typically, when faced with their treacherous protector Godard, only Havelok speaks out and is spared, whereas his speechless little sisters are slaughtered.

The nature and development of the young infant were thus clearly a matter of interest to medieval authors, even when they did not necessarily all agree on the length of this first phase of *infantia*.²¹ As mentioned earlier, medieval artists often depicted the first Age of *infantia* as an actual infant. The well-known, elaborate Wheel of Fortune of c.1240 by the English illuminator William de Brailes (Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 330 iv), into which he incorporated 12 Ages of Man, includes one half-medallion at the bottom containing a swaddled infant held between two women, perhaps the mother with Fortuna herself in view of the accompanying text scroll 'Incipit rota fortune' (here begins the Wheel of Fortune).²² The next scene shows a toddler in a short tunic taking his early steps behind a massive-looking baby-walker, who clearly represents the second of two stages of *infantia*; the *puer* in the next semi-circle has a bow and quiver of arrows as his attributes. Another Wheel of Life of the early fourteenth century can be found in the Psalter of Robert de Lisle, where the first of the 10 Ages is represented by an infant in the lap of a woman heating a pot in the fire; the

accompanying text reads 'Mitis sum et humilis, lacte vivo puro' (Meek am I and humble, I live on pure milk).²³ An infant in a rocking cradle represents the first of the seven Ages of Man in a fourteenth-century wall-painting above and around a window recess in the north wall of Longthorpe Tower, near Peterborough (figure 4a–b); the artist has cleverly used the architectural setting to emphasize the growth and decline in man's life.²⁴

Out of the Wheel of Fortune developed the Wheel of Life, which frequently features an even clearer symmetry. A German woodcut of c.1480 from the Middle-Rhine area shows the infant in his cradle mirroring the decaying corpse in his grave, just as the older toddler with his windmill mirrors the old man tottering on his walking-stick (figure 5).²⁵ It is the angel below the Wheel who links the infant and the corpse with the text scrolls 'Generacio' and 'Corruptio', thus bringing the Wheel to a full circle. A medieval viewer could not have failed to grasp the circular representation of growth and development, followed by decline, but also the fact that many people in real life failed to complete the circle, with children frequently



Figure 4. (a) The Seven Ages in an early fourteenth-century wall-painting on the north wall of Longthorpe Tower, near Peterborough, with a Nativity scene below. (b) The infant in a cradle, detail of the Seven Ages at Longthorpe Tower. Photos: author.

proceeding straight from the cradle into the grave. It was a theme that continued into the next century; later German prints actually juxtapose the Ages of Man with the Triumph of Death, in which mankind is vanquished by Death.²⁶ Thus, a woodcut of around 1518 illustrates the Ages surrounding a roundel in which various skeletal figures are shown shooting at the living; early infancy is represented by a baby in a rocking cradle alongside a seated naked infant at the bottom, with three older toddlers (one of them naked) in the bottom left-hand corner representing the next phase. Jörg Breu the Younger's 1540 woodcut presents the Ages of Life on nine rising and descending steps, the infant in the cradle and a naked toddler with a hobby-horse sharing the first step on the bottom left, while Death is shown at the top and the Last Judgement below; the old man at the bottom right-hand step is accompanied by another naked toddler, a coffin on a bier ominously awaiting them under an arch below.

As we have seen, the author of *Rats Raving* considered the age of three as the crucial moment when children begin to speak and walk. The infant's first steps were highly significant, as crawling children were clearly too reminiscent of animals

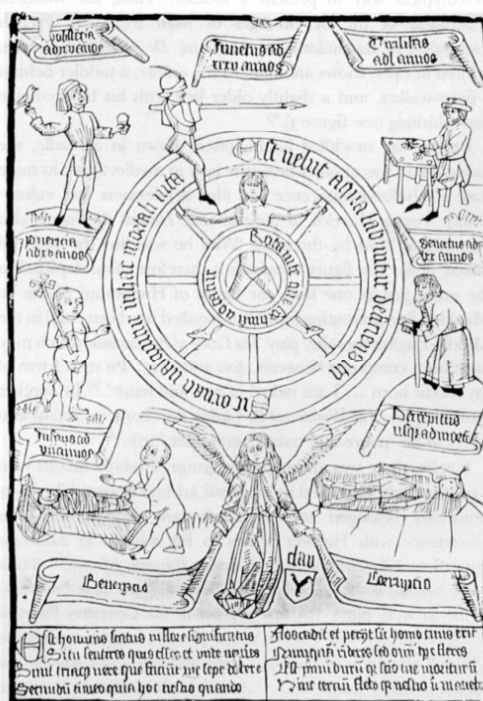


Figure 5. Wheel of Life, or *Rota vitae alias fortunae*, with seven Ages, woodcut of c.1480, Middle-Rhine area (London, British Library IC.35). By permission of the British Library.

and thus rarely depicted. An unusual exception is the naked crawling figure of *infantia* in a single mid-fourteenth-century German manuscript leaf illustrating the Five Ages of Man, its text largely based on Bartholomaeus Anglicus;²⁷ the Latin text accompanying the first roundel also draws on Aristotle in its description of how mankind crawls on hands and feet as an infant, walks erect as an adolescent and in his decrepitude is bent again towards the earth to which he will shortly return. Of course, this idea echoes the ancient riddle of the sphinx, which Oedipus managed to solve. A child's first steps are always hesitant as well as hazardous, and help is often required; many medieval writers issued advice on this issue, such as Aldobrandinus of Siena's recommendation that one should allow the infant to practise walking 'en liu mol et souef' where he cannot hurt himself.²⁸ The child might also achieve some stability if he has something or someone to support him; the toddler in William de Brailes' Wheel of Life appears to be marching along quite confidently behind his baby-walker, but he is still not *quite* on two legs. Such baby-walkers are frequently depicted in medieval art, suggesting that they were a reasonably familiar feature in medieval life and for artists a stereotypical way to present a toddler. Thus, the woodcut illustration of the Seven Ages of Man from the French translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De proprietatibus rerum*, printed in 1482, shows an infant in the cradle, a toddler behind a baby-walker, and a slightly older boy with his hobby-horse and whirligig (see figure 3).²⁹

Besides the swaddled infant, often shown in a cradle, the naked infant was another favourite icon in medieval art; its nude state symbolized innocence but also helplessness and vulnerability. Young Havelok in the romance *Havelok the Dane* is also summed up thus by the poet: 'Whil he was litel, he yede ful naked' (l. 6). The figure of *infantia* is therefore often depicted in the nude, just as one finds the figure of Humanum Genus or Mankind first presenting himself as a naked newborn child in the Middle-English morality play *The Castle of Perseverance*, which may have been composed between 1400 and 1425: 'Pis nyth I was of my modir born ... I am nakyd of lym and lende'.³⁰ In another morality play, *The Worlde and the Chylde*, the character Infans also refers to his 'poore and naked' state after birth.³¹

Finally, there was an important group of saintly infants who were regularly presented in medieval art and drama. The Holy Innocents belonged to the same early *infantia* stage, in accordance with Herod's orders to his soldiers in Matthew 2:16–18 to kill all male infants under the age of two.³² Their helplessness is frequently emphasized by their mothers in the mystery plays: the first mother in the Coventry Pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors warns Herod's knights against the 'sympull slaghtur' of slaying a child 'Pat can noder speyke nor goo/Nor neuer harme did'.³³ Artists traditionally depicted the Innocents naked, which symbolizes their innocence while at the same time illustrating their vulnerability and the horror of infanticide by fully armed soldiers (figure 6). The popularity of the Massacre as a theme in both art and drama, and the



Figure 6. Massacre scene, with Maria and the Christ child in an *Infantia Christi* pose, from a Flemish psalter produced in Liège, c.1290–1305 (London, British Library MS Additional 28784B, fol. 4v). By permission of the British Library.

late-medieval cult of the Holy Innocents, may have provided a further link between infants and death that could have led to the inclusion of the infant in the *danse macabre*.

The infant in the *danse macabre*

Both the French *danse macabre* and the German *Totentanz* traditions contain several features familiar from other presentations of the infant, such as its nudity or swaddled state, the cradle, and the whirligig for toddlers. These visual attributes confirm the infant status of this particular victim of Death. At least as important, however, is the different textual emphasis within these two traditions on two distinct aspects of infant nature: the inability to talk and to walk.

Although the famous mural of 1424–25 on the walls of the cemetery of the Franciscan convent Les Saints-Innocents in Paris was destroyed long ago, its appearance and texts were reproduced in Guyot Marchant's printed version first published in 1485 (figure 7). In this edition, the infant appears in combination with the 'cordelier' (friar) towards the end of the poem; he is depicted in his cradle while the text focuses on the



Figure 7. Death and the infant (on the right), from Guyot Marchant's *Danse macabre*, first edition printed in 1485. Photo: Europäische Totentanz-Vereinigung.

fact that he cannot talk. As Death and the infant gaze upon each other, the accompanying verses contain their dialogue:

<i>Le mort</i>	<i>Lenfant</i>
Petit enfant na gueres ne:	A. a. a. ie ne scay parler
Au monde auras peu de plaisance	Enfant suis: iay la langue mue.
A la danse seras mene	Hier nasquis huy men fault aler
Comme autres, car mort a	le ne fais quentree et yssue
puissance	
Seur tous: du iour de la naissance	Rien nay meffait. mais de peur sue
Conuient chascun a mort offrir:	Prendre en gre me fault cest le mieulx
Fol est qui nen a congnoissance.	Lordonnance dieu ne se mue.
Qui plus vit plus a a souffrir	Aussi tost meurt ieusne que vieux ³⁴

The 'baby prattle' at the start of the child's verses was not a poetic invention but based on Jeremiah 6:1, which in the Vulgate reads: 'et dixi a a a Domine Deus ecce nescio loqui quia puer ego sum'.³⁵ The text confirms the newborn state of the child, as well as the usual infant characteristics. Marchant's first publication was a huge success and it was soon followed by other editions; his woodcuts may subsequently have served as models for other *danse macabre* murals elsewhere in France, such as those at Meslay-le-Grenet (see figure 2) and especially La Ferté-Loupière (Yonne).

The poet John Lydgate, who is known to have stayed in Paris in 1426, saw the Parisian mural shortly after its completion. He in turn wrote his own free Middle-English translation soon afterwards, followed by a revised and expanded version that was incorporated in a *danse macabre* scheme commissioned in 1430 for Pardon Churchyard in London.³⁶ Although he clearly deviated from his French model in a number of ways, e.g. by introducing a number of women in his version, Lydgate also included the child in his poem:

<i>Dethe to the Chylde</i>	<i>The Chylde answereth</i>
Litel Enfaunt/that were but late borne	A a a/a worde I can not speke
Shape yn this worlde/to haue no plesaunce	I am so yonge/I was bore yisterdai
Thow moste with other/that gon here to forne	Dethe is so hasti/on me to be wreke
Be lad yn haste/be fatal ordynaunce	And liste no lenger/to make no delai
Lerne of newe/to go on my daunce	I cam but now/and now I go my wai
Ther mai non age/a-scape yn sothe ther fro	Of me no more/no tale shal be tolde
Late eueri wight/haue this yn remembraunce	The wille of god/no man with-stonde mai
Who longest leueth/most shal suffre wo.	As some dyeth/a yonge man as an olde. ³⁷

Both the French and English versions contain the conventional consolation — here offered by Death to the child — that an early demise will spare the infant the sufferings of a longer life. Such (cold) comfort was traditionally offered by medieval preachers to bereaved parents, who were exhorted not to mourn the deaths of innocent children as they must surely have gone to Heaven, provided they had been baptised. Both texts also include the infant's resigned acceptance that a youngster will as easily fall victim to Death as an old man. Lydgate likewise adopted the infant's tentative first utterings from the French version. However, there is a new element in Lydgate's version, compared with its French counterpart: Death's command that the child should 'lerne' to dance. This cruel joke presenting Death as a dance teacher of infants is not further exploited by Lydgate, but it is quite striking and perhaps even an indication of a wider Continental influence on his Middle-English version; female characters also occur in the earliest German *Totentanz* versions but not in the traditional French *danse macabre*.

The Dance of Death scheme at Old St Paul's Cathedral in London, which featured Lydgate's poem with accompanying images, in its turn inspired depictions of the theme in wall-paintings and other media elsewhere in Britain (now mostly lost), such as the textile hangings in Long Melford and Bristol or the scheme in the church of St Edmund, Salisbury.³⁸ The infant is likely to have featured in many of these lost examples, including the now covered mural in the Guild Chapel at Stratford-upon-Avon where the meagre fragments of the child's text were recorded by William Puddephat in the 1950s.³⁹ The child has also been said to feature amongst the mid- to later fifteenth-century *danse macabre* pairs on the sculpted vault ribs of the Lady Chapel at Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland, although these carvings require further investigation.⁴⁰

The popularity of the *danse macabre* can be gauged from its use as a more decorative motif, just as at Rosslyn where the carvings have no accompanying texts but simply constitute a visual moralistic message. The theme appears frequently as part of the decoration programme in late-medieval books of hours with the infant as one of the staple characters; examples

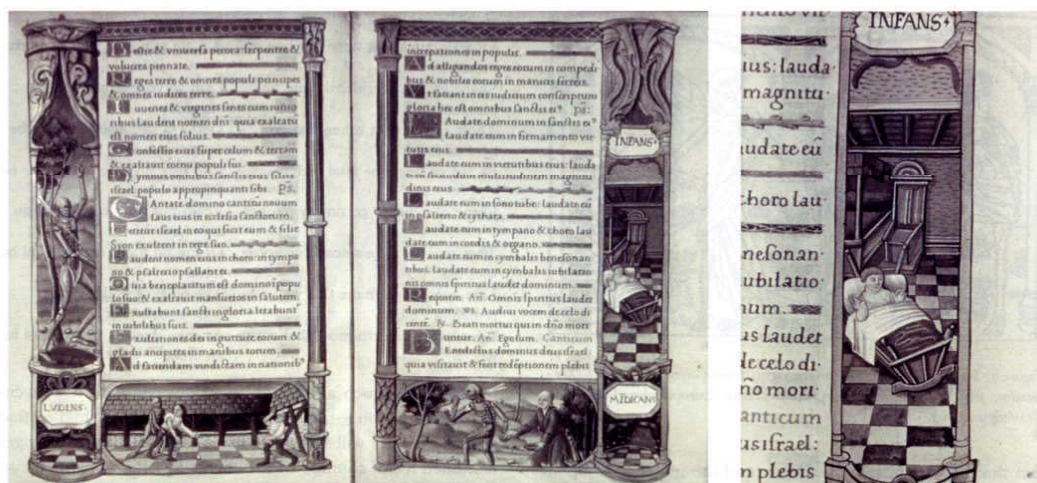


Figure 8. (a) *Danse macabre* scenes in the borders of a French book of hours, second quarter of the sixteenth century (University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 135, fol. 87v-88r). (b) Idem, fol. 88r: detail of the decorated border, showing the infant in his rocking cradle.

can be found in both illuminated manuscripts and printed editions, often as part of the Office of the Dead. A late fifteenth-century French book of hours in the British Library (BL MS Additional 25695, fol. 165r) features underneath a miniature of a burial scene a historiated initial D with Death bending over an infant in a cradle, his dart poised.⁴¹ The decorated border surrounding another burial miniature at the start of the Office of the Dead in the so-called Deloche Hours, illuminated in Savoye around 1460–65, contains amongst nine *danse macabre* vignettes one of Death carrying off a cradled infant.⁴² Spread across two pages, a richly illuminated French manuscript of the second quarter of the sixteenth century in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, shows Death on fol. 87v aiming his dart across the page at an infant in a cradle on fol. 88r (figure 8a–b). Slightly earlier is the small woodblock scene of Death attacking an infant in a rocking cradle while two siblings are looking on, which forms part of a vertical *danse macabre* border in a French book of hours printed by Simon Vostre in 1512 (figure 9). The theme of the Dance of Death also influenced tomb iconography: the incised tomb slab in Nieuwkapelle (Belgium), commemorating a baby girl who died in 1557, depicts Death mercilessly transfixing the swaddled infant with his dart (figure 10).⁴³ These are but a few examples of Death and the infant in which the latter is presented as a helpless baby, either swaddled or lying in a cradle. However, there was yet another tradition with a very different iconography.

The infant in the German *Totentanz* tradition

The infant is also a recurring figure in the German *Totentanz* tradition, but he is usually presented rather differently here.

The earliest surviving German text was written in Augsburg in 1443–47 and survives in a compilation manuscript in the University Library at Heidelberg (Cpg. 314). In this *Totentanz* text, which alternates two Latin with four German lines, the mother is the final character to appear, but she is preceded by the 'puer in cunabulo', i.e. the child in his cradle. This description would seem to match the iconography of the Parisian scheme, but there is a crucial textual difference. The child's text, in both Latin and in German, already contains the grim 'joke' that was to feature in later German versions and of which one may recognize an echo in Lydgate's poem:

Puer in cunabulo

O cara mater, me vir a te trahit
ater.
Debeo saltare, qui nunquam
scivi meare.
Daz Kint
O wê, liebiu muoter mîn,
ein swarzer man ziuht mich
dahin.
Wie wiltu mich alsô verlân?
Muoz ich tanzen und kan nit
gân?⁴⁴

(Translation:) The child in the cradle:

O dear mother, a black man pulls me away.

I must now dance, who have never learnt to walk.

The child:

Alas, my dear mother, a black man pulls me away.

How wilt you abandon me thus?
Must I dance when I cannot yet walk?

The words of the helpless infant are extremely poignant. Although he cannot yet even walk — the stereotypical condition of early infancy — he is still expected to participate in Death's dance. His final plea to his mother sums up the fate of all too many medieval infants who succumbed to a similarly early death without their parents being able to prevent it. In

fact, in the succeeding verses, the mother herself expresses her inability to come to her son's aid as she, too, is being taken by Death:

<i>Mater</i> O fili care, quae te volui liberare, Morte praeventa saliendo sumque retenta. <i>Diu Muoter</i> Ô kint, ich wolt dich haben erlöst. Sô ist entvallen mir der trôst. Der tôt hât daz für komen und hât mich mit dir genomen. ⁴⁵	The mother: <i>O dear son, I who had wanted to deliver you am now myself outreached by Death and held back by force for the dance.</i> The mother: <i>Oh child, I would have ransomed you. Now I have lost all consolation. Death has beaten us to it and has taken me along with you.</i>
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An expanded version of this theme of the infant being forced to dance can be found in an early illustrated blockbook edition, printed in 1465 and known as the Heidelberg Blockbook (figure 11). The German text now presents a proper dialogue between Death and his victim, although the text is otherwise based on the earlier Latin-German manuscript text:

<i>[Tod]</i> Kreuch her an du must hy tanzen lern Weyne adir lache ich hore dich gern Hettistu den totten yn dem munde Is hilft dich nicht an desir stunde <i>[Kind]</i> Awe liebe muter meyn Eyn swarzer man zeut mich do hyn Wy wiltu mich nw vorlan Nw mus ich tanzen vnd kan noch nicht gân ⁴⁶	Death: <i>Crawl hither, you must learn to dance here. Weep or laugh, I enjoy hearing you. Even if you had the teat in your mouth it would not avail you in this hour.</i> The child: <i>Alas, my dear mother, a black man pulls me away. How will you abandon me thus? Must I dance when I cannot yet walk?</i>
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The cruel joke of the earlier Latin-German text about the infant having to dance when it cannot yet walk has here been retained. However, Death adds to the grim picture with his insistence that the child must dance, regardless of his immature age and condition as an infant who is still being suckled; even if the child cannot yet walk, he must still crawl ('*kreuch*') his way to the dance. The special character of the infant amongst the adult members of society is emphasized by his physical appearance in the accompanying woodcut; whereas other participants in the *Totentanz* are characterized by their dress and attributes pertaining to their social status, the infant is shown vulnerably naked and with a tiny penis. Death's grip around the infant's chubby lower arm, his toothy grin and the inviting gesture of his right hand make a chilling picture; the



Figure 9. Death and the infant, detail from a marginal decoration in a French book of hours printed by Simon Vostre around 1512. Photo: Europäische Totentanz-Vereinigung.

child's feeble body movement towards the left is obviously destined to be futile.

As we have seen, the cradle was an often used attribute to denote an infant; we find it in depictions of the Ages of Man, but also in French *danse macabre* scenes at La Ferté-Loupière or Meslay-le-Grenet and in Marchant's printed edition (see figures 2, 7). However, many German *Totentanz* schemes appear to follow the same distinctly different visual tradition that can



Figure 10. Incised tomb slab in Nieuwkapelle (Belgium) commemorating 'Ghisiaenike vande Keroue', a baby girl who died in 1557. Photo: F.A. Greenhill.

be observed in the Heidelberg Blockbook by showing Death instead with a naked standing toddler. Examples are the extant mural of c.1500–10 originally situated on the exterior walls of the charnel-house at Metnitz in Carinthia (figure 12)⁴⁷ and the lost mural in the cloister of the 'Frauenkloster' in Klingenthal, Basel, painted in the second half of the fifteenth century.⁴⁸ Admittedly, the infant in the destroyed mural at Lübeck was shown lying in a cradle, just as he is described in the Augsburg text, but in actual fact the original 1463 Lübecker *Totentanz* by Bernt Notke may have been based on a French version; it has recently been compared to the extant mural at Meslay-le-Grenet.⁴⁹ The illustrated *Totentanz* edition printed in Lübeck in 1520 contains the nurse kneeling by an infant in a cradle, and it is she who answers for both, rather like the wet nurse in the French *Danse macabre des femmes*.⁵⁰



Figure 11. Death and the infant, from a German blockbook *Totentanz* edition printed at Heidelberg in 1465 (Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cpg. 438, fol. 41r).

The naked standing infant may also be found in later *Totentanz* schemes, such as the sculpted frieze of c.1534–37 originally made for the Georgenschloß in Dresden.⁵¹ The manuscript of c.1520 by Graf Wilhelm Wernher von Zimmern also contains *Totentanz* miniatures, amongst which on fol. 127v a scene of Death carrying a baby in a cradle under his right arm while leading a naked toddler with a whirligig by the hand on his left.⁵² Albrecht Kauw's gouache copy of the lost mural by Niklaus Manuel in 1516–19 on the churchyard wall of the Dominikanerkloster in Bern shows Death leading a naked toddler by the hand as the mother watches in horror.⁵³ This visual tradition of the standing or walking toddler was clearly persistent, as yet later examples show: Jakob von Wyl's painting of c.1610–15 for the Jesuitenkolleg in Luzern illustrates a young boy in a child's gown with a hobbyhorse and whirligig desperately turning to his mother, while the anonymous painted *Totentanz* of 1723 in the charnel-house at Bleibach (Black Forest) also depicts Death taking a standing young child by the hand.⁵⁴ The painted *Totentanz* scheme of c.1600–02 by Jakob Hiebeler in the Annakapelle at the Benedictine

church of St Mang in Füssen includes a panel of Death carrying a baby in a cradle on the right shoulder while leading along a small boy on a hobby-horse, as a diminutive mother looks on in the background. The accompanying verses run as follows:

[der Tod]

Der Jugett thue ich nit verschonen,
Die kündein nem ich wie die
bluomen.
Kom hehr mein liebeß kündein,
Vergiß der muetter ietz bist mein.

daß kündein

Schaw schaw mein liebeß
muetterlein
Do geht ein langer man herein.
Der zuicht mich fort vnd wil
mich hon,
Mueß tantzen schon, vnd kan
kaum gon.⁵⁵

Death:

*I do not spare the young;
I take the children like the flowers.*

*Come hither, my sweet little child;
forget your mother, you are now
mine.*

The child:

*Look, look, my dear sweet mother,
there enters a tall man.
He pulls me away and wants to
take me hence;
Now must I dance already, and I
can hardly walk.*



Figure 12. Death and the infant, detail of the *Totentanz* mural originally situated on the walls of the charnel-house in Metnitz, Carinthia, c.1500–10. Photo: Europäische Totentanz-Vereinigung.

The child's futile appeal to his mother is familiar and the comparison between children and flowers is also conventional, both being traditionally short-lived, but it is the final line that reiterates the same complaint so typical of German *Totentanz* schemes.

The above list is by no means complete, but although the infant in the cradle does occur in the German *Totentanz* it is the standing or walking toddler who is clearly the more popular variant. An interesting case is the printed and illustrated edition of c.1486–88, attributed to the German printer Heinrich Knoblochtzter and clearly inspired by Marchant's printed French edition of 1485. It shows a naked standing infant with Death wielding a whirligig — the late-medieval toddler's toy *par excellence*, as also often shown in depictions of *infantia* (figure 13; cf. figures 3, 5).⁵⁶ Knoblochtzter's text, however, reiterates the theme of the Parisian mural with the same opening lines for the child:

Der doitt.

IVnck nū geborns kyndelyn.
Eyn ende hait nū daz leben dyn.
Dye werlt mocht dich betriegēn

Beßer ist yß du sterbest in der
wiegen
Dan hye ist keyn blibende stat
Dū haist auch der werlt luste nyt
gehabt
Wie woill dyr ist gesatzet eyn
langes tzijll
Das enbadt dych nu nyt viell.
das iunge kindt.
A. A. a. ich enkan noch nit
sprechen
Hüde geborn hüde müß ich
auffbrechen.
Wand keyne stünde mag ich
sicher syn
Wie woll ich byn eyn kleines
kyndelyn
Dyß merckent alle gar eben
Ich han noch nyt leren leben
Vnd müß doch sterben also bald
Als woill stirbet das iunge als das
alde.⁵⁷

Death:

*Young newly born little child,
Your life has now come to an end.
The world would only have
deceived you,*

*so it is better for you to die in the
cradle
for here is no abiding city.
You have also not yet enjoyed
worldly delights.
Although you could have had a
longer life span,
that will not help you much now.*

The young child:

A, a, a, I cannot yet speak.

*Born today, I must also depart
today:
for at no hour may I be safe,*

even though I am but a little child.

*This everyone will realise easily.
I have not yet learnt to live
and must already die so soon.
The young are as likely to die as
the old.*

Despite the child's standing pose, the grim joke about his inability to walk or dance is lacking in this poem. Instead, the text focuses on the same tentative childish utterings that we find in Marchant's and Lydgate's versions, while also offering the consolation that an early death in the cradle will spare the child a great deal of earthly suffering.

The *Infantia Christi*

So why do we find these two different traditions for the infant in the French and German versions, each with its own emphasis on the infant's inability to talk or to walk? And why, despite the fact that the earliest German text specifically



Figure 13. Death and the infant, from the edition of *Der doten dantz; mit figuren clage und antwort schon von allen staten der werlt*, first printed probably by Heinrich Knobloch in Heidelberg in c.1486–88. Photo: Europäische Totentanz-Vereinigung.

describes the infant as 'puer in cunabulo', do many German depictions instead show a naked standing toddler whom Death is holding by the hand? Perhaps the image of the cradle was too closely associated with the *jésueau* or Christmas cradle to be used in the more worldly context of the *Totentanz*; certainly, the cult of the '*Christuswiege*' was very popular in the German regions,⁵⁸ although this did not stop the Lübeck *Totentanz* painter from deploying the infant in a cradle as the epitome of early childhood. There must be yet another explanation for this typically German variant of Death holding the hand of a standing toddler who cannot yet walk, let alone dance. Of course, children have always been led by the hand by parents or carers, especially while they are young and unstable on their feet, but also for adults to guide them and prevent them from straying; several smaller children are thus led by adults in the imperial procession depicted on the Ara Pacis Augustae in Rome.⁵⁹ One may also observe this same motif in a stained-glass window of c.1170–80 in the north choir aisle at Canterbury Cathedral depicting the Exodus of the Israelites, where a woman in the crowd is shown holding a child's right hand in her left while marching away from the Pharaoh,⁶⁰ and there are many more such examples to be found in medieval art.

Admittedly, it is usual for Death in the *Totentanz* to grab his adult victims by the arm or hand to make them join him in his dance. Yet in medieval German art, the toddler being thus guided by an adult appears to have been a special iconographic motif. For example, it occurs on a fourteenth-century tomb monument in the Evangelische Kirche at Unterreichenbach (Kreis Gelsenkirchen) commemorating two Gräfinnen von Weilnau: on the left Countess Greta or Margarete von Salza (d. 1362), wife of Reinhard von Weilnau, and on the right Countess Margarethe von Weilnau (d. 1364).⁶¹ In a quite



Figure 14. Tomb slab probably commemorating Agnes von Dienheim (d. 1518) and her infant son, situated in the churchyard of the Kirche Unserer Lieben Frau at Oberwesel am Rhein (Germany). Photo: LAD, Hein Straeter, 1996.

touching arrangement, the unknown medieval sculptor depicted Greta von Salza as holding by the hand her little daughter Gretchelein, whose name (a diminutive version of her mother's) is given on a separate scroll above her head. It is an unusual composition in a period when joint monuments to parents and children are comparatively rare. A much later example is the double effigy on a rather worn sandstone tomb slab now situated in the churchyard of the Kirche Unserer Lieben Frau at Oberwesel am Rhein, which probably commemorates Agnes von Dienheim (d. 1518) and her infant son (figure 14).⁶² The pose of the naked child reaching out his right hand towards his mother's right is very reminiscent of the child in Knobloch's woodcut, and it may be no coincidence



Figure 15. Mary and Joseph taking the young Christ child to school, woodcut from *Die neue Ehe*, printed by Anton Sorg in Augsburg, 7 October 1476 (Freiburg/Breisgau Universitätsbibliothek, Ink 4° K 3352).

that a new edition of his *Totentanz* had earlier been published by Jakob Meydenbach in nearby Mainz in 1492. Yet whereas the Oberwesel tomb slab may have been modelled on a *Totentanz* pairing of Death and the infant, this comparison cannot apply to the Unterreichenbach monument, for which we have to seek an earlier model.

The motif already occurs as Mary leading the Christ child by the hand alongside the Massacre scene in a Flemish psalter produced in Liège around 1290–1305 (see figure 6).⁶³ A related, but later variant can be found in a woodcut of c.1410–25 by an unknown Bavarian artist (Munich, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, inv. no. 171506), which depicts the crowned figure of St Dorothy holding by the hand a small haloed boy in a long robe carrying a basket of fruit.⁶⁴ This early woodcut is actually a variation on a different devotional image that appears to have been popular in the wider German-influence sphere. The German motif of an adult leading an infant by the hand, and more specifically of Death with the standing toddler, may ultimately be derived from the canonical theme of the *Infantia Christi*. The motif was identified as such by Hans Wentzel, who discussed it extensively in a series of papers in the 1960s.⁶⁵ He



Figure 17. Death and the infant, woodcut by Hans Holbein the Younger, c.1526, first published as *Les simulachres & histories faces de la mort* in 1538. Photo: Europäische Totentanz-Vereinigung.

found numerous depictions of the Virgin leading the small Christ child by the hand in monastic seals from the later thirteenth century on, such as the seal of Burkard von Winon of 1277, and recognized the image as a canonical theme similar to that of the double dedication of the Benedictine nunnery Pustimer near Wirschau in Mahren (founded in 1340) to the Nativity and the Infancy of Christ.⁶⁶ This convent came to be known as 'Ad infantiam Christi' or in German 'Czu der Kintheit unsirs Herren'; a fragmentary seal of the Abbess Hilaria on a document of 1371 apparently shows Mary holding the Christ child



Figure 16. Silver dagger sheath with six *Totentanz* pairs on either side designed by Hans Holbein the Younger in the 1520s, copy from the third quarter of the sixteenth century after the lost original, Basel, Kunstmuseum. Photo: Europäische Totentanz-Vereinigung.

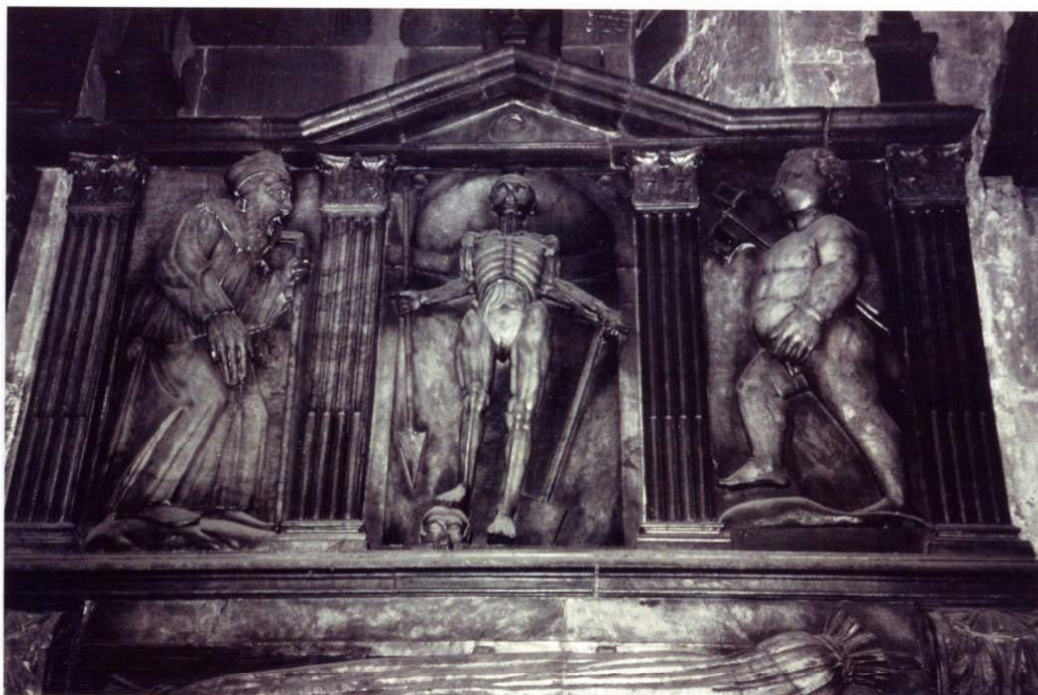


Figure 18. Tomb monument to a member of the Foljambe family, late sixteenth century, church of St Mary and All Saints at Chesterfield, probably carved by the Dutch-born artist Garrett Hollemans the Elder, showing Death flanked by the figures of Old Age and Infancy. Photo: author.

by the hand in a rose garden.⁶⁷ The theme was popular mostly in the German-speaking region but it may also be found further afield, including obviously the diocese of Liège. Further depictions of the Virgin leading the Christ child by the hand on the Journey into Egypt can be found in another Liège psalter of c.1265–75 and in a psalter of the late 1270s produced in Hainault,⁶⁸ as well as in the stained-glass Marienfenster of c.1330 on the north side of the choir at the Frauenkirche at Esslingen.⁶⁹ It also developed as a variant into the theme of the (reluctant) Christ child being led to school by his mother, which one may find in many illuminated miniatures depicting Christ's childhood, such as a woodcut in *Die neue Ehe* printed by Anton Sorg in Augsburg in 1476 (figure 15).⁷⁰ Wentzel believed that the actual understanding of the original *Infantia Christi* theme was lost in the later fifteenth century,⁷¹ although it clearly survived as an iconographical motif in different contexts.

Could these analogies help to explain the German preference in some *Totentanz* versions for Death holding a naked standing toddler by the hand, when one tends to find a swaddled or cradled infant elsewhere? Supporting the importance of this motif are two more examples in the work of Hans Holbein the Younger, who spent part of his early

career in Basel; here he may well have seen either or both of the famous *Totentanz* murals that both feature the infant. Some time in the 1520s, Holbein designed a silver dagger sheath with six *Totentanz* pairs on either side, including on one side a struggling naked child being pulled along by Death near the tip of the sheath (figure 16).⁷² More famous, however, is his series of *Totentanz* scenes that he designed around 1525–26, although the woodcuts were not published until 1538 under the title *Les simulachres & histories faces de la mort* (figure 17). Whilst the toddler in this woodcut is not naked but dressed in a child's robe, the grip of Death's skeletal claw on his chubby hand and his mute appeal to his horrified family will by now be familiar from other German examples.

Whether it is ultimately based on the *Infantia Christi* theme or not, the standing toddler is a typically German *Totentanz* motif that may help distinguish whether visual *danse macabre* schemes elsewhere were influenced by the French or the German tradition, especially when accompanied by verses that stress the child's inability either to walk or to talk. In their turn, both ways of presenting the helpless infant have their roots in the overall image of the developmental stages of infancy in medieval culture, echoes of which can be found in such



Figure 19. 'The Daunce and Song of Death', English broadsheet printed by John Audeley in 1569, showing the naked toddler together with the old man being led along by Death (London, British Library Huth 50(32)). By permission of the British Library.

themes as the Ages of Man and the Massacre of the Holy Innocents.

Cruel Death or gentle Death?

It was a well-known fact in the Middle Ages that young and old alike may be summoned by Death. In Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, a young servant boy in a tavern confirms his mother's lessons about 'a privee theef men clepeth Deeth' who strikes both men, women and children dead with his spear: 'Beeth redy for to meete hym everemoore;/Thus taughte me my dame'.⁷³ It was a well-known and acknowledged fact that many are not allowed to complete the full circle of the Wheel of Life from *infantia* right down to *decrepitas*. The link between Death and the Ages of Man is apparent in a late sixteenth-century tomb monument to a member of the Foljambe family in the church of St Mary and All Saints at Chesterfield, probably carved by the Dutch-born artist Garrett Hollemans the Elder, which shows Death flanked by the figures of Infancy and Old Age (figure 18).⁷⁴ Just as in the Wheel of Life in the German woodcut of c.1480 (see figure 5), the figure of Old Age

is shown as an old man leaning on a walking stick; the infant on the other side is conventionally naked and chubby, albeit huge, and holds his usual attribute of the whillogig. The design by the Dutch sculptor may be German in inspiration, but it has an English counterpart in a broadsheet printed by John Audeley in 1569, which shows Death leading both an old man and a naked toddler along in a circular dance (figure 19) — a relatively rare early English example of the *danse macabre* in print, and one that appears to have borrowed the image of the naked infant, or rather the personification of *infantia*, from the German tradition.

However, the high rates of infant mortality were not just a medieval phenomenon. As late as 1815, the English artist Thomas Rowlandson illustrated two examples of child death in his series of prints entitled *The English Dance of Death*.⁷⁵ In the second one of these, published on 1 July, Death is shown eagerly approaching a large family of children with the words: 'Twere well to spare me two or three/Out of your num'rous Family.' It is interesting to note that this is not a poor peasant family living in a hovel, who might almost be expected to

welcome the prospect of fewer mouths to feed, but a well-to-do bourgeois family in fairly elegant surroundings, except for the numerous toys strewn around the floor; while the father tries to concentrate on his reading, surrounded by his numerous offspring, his wife can be viewed through the door into a bedroom nursing yet another child. The claim made by Ariès for the medieval period would thus still seem apt in this period, at least to judge by this satirical print: 'The general feeling was, and for a long time remained, that one had several children in order to keep just a few.'⁷⁶

Infants have always been known to be particularly vulnerable and apt to fall victim to disease or infection, yet child death now seems unacceptable in the modern Western world where children are normally expected to thrive and outlive their parents. A prevailing sentimental attitude persuades us that Death should take the old but spare the young. Perhaps that is the reason why many modern scholars have tried to detect some kind of comfort — a more merciful attitude towards infants on the part of Death. Thus, in his edition of the famous Holbein woodcuts, James Clark reassured his readers that whereas the peasant woman in Holbein's woodcut (see figure 17) shows 'speechless grief', 'the infant turns back to wave a tiny hand to its mother'.⁷⁷ Even more surprising is the interpretation of this same scene by Philippa Tristram, who claimed that Death showed remarkable humanity towards his child victim: 'the toddler turns back from the door to wave a cheerful and affectionate farewell, whilst his other hand is grasped protectively by the skeleton who leads him over the threshold'.⁷⁸ It seems amazing that anyone could so misread the body language of the frantic child, or interpret Death's chilling grasp as 'protective', unless one accepts it as a mistaken example of wishful thinking.

In a similar vein, it has been suggested that Death shows evident kindness to the swaddled infant in the wall-painting at La Chaise-Dieu by bending over to him while hiding his face behind his arm (see figure 1). As early as 1908, the French art-historian Émile Mâle described the genius of the artist responsible for this *danse macabre* mural: 'sa plus belle trouvaille est le geste du cadavre qui dissimule sa hideuse figure derrière son bras maigre pour ne pas effrayer le petit enfant; on dirait qu'il a honte. L'homme qui a trouvé cela est un vrai, un grand artiste'.⁷⁹ Death's posture in this scene is indeed unusual, yet can one really interpret it as kindness shown by Death towards the helpless swaddled child, or is it just another grim joke at the child's expense: Death playing a macabre game of peek-a-boo with his infant victim?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the MAA 2001 Annual Meeting in one of the sessions on medieval childhood organized by Professor Joel Rosenthal; it is also an expanded and updated version of the paper given at the 2001 annual conference of the Europäische Totentanz-Vereinigung in Wolfenbüttel and published in its third Jahrbuch (2002). The

author would like to thank Miriam Gill, Martine Meuwese, Peter Kerssemakers, Fred Kloppenborg, Phillip Lindley and Uli Wunderlich for their invaluable suggestions, and Reinhard Lamp and Maria Theising-Otte for their help with the translations.

NOTES

1 – Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought, and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (1919, abridged version trans. 1924, repr. Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1982), ch. 11, pp. 139–46.

2 – Huizinga, *Waning of the Middle Ages*, p. 145.

3 – Huizinga, *Waning of the Middle Ages*, p. 145; Ann Tukey Harrison (ed.) with a chapter by Sandra L. Hindman, *The Danse Macabre of Women: Ms. fr. 995 of the Bibliothèque Nationale* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1994), p. 107. The latter edition presents the facsimile pages of the manuscript relating to the female *danse* with their accompanying miniatures, although the actual transcriptions on the opposite pages are far from accurate. Its authorship is not quite certain, but the poem is generally attributed to Martial d'Auvergne.

4 – Huizinga, *Waning of the Middle Ages*, p. 145.

5 – The execution of the Parisian mural was recorded by the Bourgeois de Paris in his diary. The standard English monograph is still James M. Clark, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Glasgow: Jackson, Son & Company, 1950), but this has been largely superseded by later studies published on the Continent. For a recent overview, see Sophie Oosterwijk, 'Of corpses, constables and kings: the *danse macabre* in late medieval and renaissance culture', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 157 (2004), pp. 61–90.

6 – For a complete facsimile version of Marchant's 1485 edition with commentary, see Gert Kaiser, ed., *Der tanzende Tod: Mittelalterliche Totentänze* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1983), pp. 70–107. For the female *danse*, see Harrison, *The Danse Macabre of Women*; Suzanne F. Wemple and Denise A. Kaiser, 'Death's dance of women', *Journal of Medieval History*, 12 (1986), pp. 333–43. For Marchant's 1491 edition, see also Florence Paul, 'La Danse Macabre des Femmes: re-evaluation and contextualisation', unpublished MA dissertation, University of York, 2001.

7 – For Lydgate's text, see Florence Warren, ed., *The Dance of Death, edited from Mss. Ellesmere 26/A.13 and B.M. Landsdowne 699, collated with the other extant Mss.*, EETS, o.s. 181 (London: Oxford University Press, 1931). For Lydgate and the *danse macabre* scheme at Old St Paul's, see also Fred Kloppenborg, 'The London Dance of Death: the patron and his circle of friends', *Actes du 11e Congrès International d'études sur les Danses macabres et l'art macabre en général* (Meslay-le-Grenet, 2003), pp. 9–24; Caroline M. Barron and Marie-Hélène Rousseau, 'Cathedral, City and State, 1300–1540', in *St Paul's: the cathedral church of London 604–2004*, eds Derek Keene, Arthur Burns and Andrew Saint (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 33–44, esp. 35–6.

8 – See the discussion with sources in Oosterwijk, 'Of corpses, constables and kings', esp. pp. 64–6 and n. 17–19; also Robert Eisler, 'Danse macabre', *Traditio*, 6 (1948), pp. 187–225. For the Three Living and the Three Dead, see the monograph by the Groupe de Recherches sur les Peintures Murales, *Vifs nous sommes ... morts nous serons. La Rencontre des trois morts et des trois vifs dans la peinture murale en France* (Vendôme: Éditions du Cherche-Lune, 2001).

9 – The standard work on cadaver effigies is Kathleen Cohen, *Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol: The Transi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, California Studies in the History of Art, vol. XV (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1973).

10 – Curiously, although this range also includes the unmarried woman (la demoiselle), the bride, the newly wedded wife, the pampered wife, and the pregnant woman, there are no separate verses dedicated to the mother, who does appear frequently in the German *Totentanz* tradition. Apart from

the wet nurse who succumbs to Death together with her charge, apparently to the plague, only the widow in the poem expresses concern for the children she is forced to leave behind.

11 – For an overall study of the medieval infant, see Sophie Oostervijk, *'Litel enfaunt that were bot late borne': The Image of the Infant in Medieval Culture in North-Western Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, forthcoming).

12 – Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (1960, trans. 1962, repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 36. The subsequent literature on the history of childhood is vast and still growing.

13 – See Elizabeth Sears, *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); J.A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (1986, repr. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

14 – M.C. Seymour, general ed., et al., *On the Properties of Things*, John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975 and 1988), vol. 1, book 6.1, p. 291. 'Constantyn' was Constantinus Africanus (d. 1087), who proposed a scheme of the four Ages, *pueritia, iuventus, senectus* and *senium*; see Sears, *The Ages of Man*, pp. 29, 128, and Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 22.

15 – Seymour, *On the Properties of Things*, vol. 1, book 6.1, p. 291.

16 – Seymour, *On the Properties of Things*, vol. 1, book 6.4, p. 299.

17 – See Carleton Brown, ed., *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century* (1924, 2nd edn revised by G.V. Smithers, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), no. 28; compare also nos 56, 59, 65. See also Douglas Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 109ff.

18 – *Havelok the Dane*, ll. 112–13, in *Middle English Metrical Romances*, eds Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale (New York: Russell & Russell, 1930, repr. 1963). A more recent edition with slightly modernized spelling is Ronald B. Herzman, Dave Graham and Eve Salisbury, eds, *Four Romances of England: King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Athelston*, Medieval Institute Publications for TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1999).

19 – R. Girvan, ed., *Ratis Raving and Other Early Scots Poems on Morals*. Edited, with an appendix of the other pieces from Cambridge University Library MS. Kk.1. 5, no. 6, STS, 3rd ser. g (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1939), ll. 1112–19.

20 – Girvan, *Ratis Raving*, ll. 1120–25.

21 – It is worth noting that a child's weaning was traditionally expected to have been completed by the age of three; according to the *Golden Legend*, the Virgin Mary was presented to the Temple by her parents once she had reached the age of three and been weaned. However, Aldobrandinus of Siena favoured an earlier weaning age: 'Et li nature de l'alaitier si est juesques à .ij. ans; et après remouvoir l'enfant ordeneement, especialement || quant li dent devant li vienent, et les doit on garder de dures choses maschié, ançois li doit donner li norrice pain qu'ele ait en se bouce maschié et faire papin de mies de pain, et de miel, et de lait, et .i. pau de vin douner'. See Louis Landouzy and Roger Pépin, *Le régime du corps de Maître Aldebrandin de Sienn: texte français du XIIIe siècle publié pour la première fois d'après les manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale et de la Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1911), p. 78.

22 – Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 45 n.103, 90 and figure 10. This identification of the two women was made by Sears, *The Ages of Man*, pp. 145–6; alternatively, it might be a childbirth scene with the mother lying on the left and a nurse with her hair loose receiving the baby on the right. This Wheel of Life was originally painted as an illumination in a psalter.

23 – Translation in Sears, *The Ages of Man*, pp. 146–7 and figure 87. The words of the puer in the next medallion would seem to refer to his achieved ability to walk: 'Numquam ero labilis, etatem mensuro' (Sears' translation: 'Never shall I stumble, I measure my age'). See also Lucy Freeman Sandler, *The Psalter of Robert de Lisle in the British Library* (London/Oxford: Harvey Miller/Oxford University Press, 1983), colour plate 4.

24 – E. Clive Rouse, *Longthorpe Tower, Cambridgeshire* (1987, repr. London: English Heritage, 1998), pp. 4–6.

25 – This woodcut is discussed and illustrated in John Winter Jones, 'Observations on the Origin of the Division of Man's Life into Stages', *Archaeologia*, 35 (1853), pp. 167–89; Sophie Oostervijk, "'Muss ich tanzen und kann nit gân?'" Das Kind im mittelalterlichen Totentanz', in *L'art macabre 3*, ed. Uli Wunderlich, Jahrbuch der Europäischen Totentanz-Vereinigung (Düsseldorf, 2002), figure 4. Compare also Sears, *The Ages of Man*, figures 91–92, the latter of which shows and illuminated wheel in a mid fifteenth-century German fortune-telling manuscript (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm. 312, fol. 98r).

26 – Christian Kiening, *Das andere Selbst: Figuren des Todes an der Schwelle zur Neuzeit* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2003), figures 21 and 37; Angelika Lorenz, ed., *Die Maler vom Ring*, exh. cat. (Münster: Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, 1996), vol. 2, cat. 52.

27 – Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 19414, fol. 180r, illustrated in Sears, *The Ages of Man*, figure 65.

28 – Landouzy and Pépin (1911), p. 78.

29 – J. de Kleijn, 'Leerde Liesje lopen in de lange lindelaan?', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen van het Rijksmuseum voor Volkskunde "Het Nederlands Openluchtmuseum"*, 30/2 (1967), pp. 48–55; Cornelia Löhmer, *Die Welt der Kinder im fünfzehnten Jahrhundert* (Weinheim: Deutscher Studien Verlag, 1989), pp. 144–5 and figure 38.

30 – Mark Eccles, ed., *The Macro Plays: The Castle of Perseverance, Wisdom, Mankind*, EETS, o.s. 262, (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), ll. 276, 279.

31 – Clifford Davidson and Peter Happé, eds, *The World and the Chylde*, Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series, 45, Medieval Institute Publications (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University), l. 45.

32 – See Sophie Oostervijk, "'Long lullynge haue I Iorn!': The Massacre of the Innocents in Word and Image", *Medieval English Theatre*, 25 (2003), pp. 3–52.

33 – *The Pageant of the Company of Shearmen and Taylors in Coventry*, ll. 797, 799–800, in *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, eds Pamela M. King and Clifford Davidson, Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series 27, Medieval Institute Publications (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 2000).

34 – Based on the facsimile in Kaiser, *Der tanzende Tod*, pp. 102–3.

35 – Holger Eckhardt, "'et dixi a a a ...': Vom Tod der Kinder und von der Umgestaltung eines biblischen Topos in Totentänzen', *Wirkendes Wort*, 4 (1994), pp. 33–40.

36 – Kloppenborg, 'The London Dance of Death'; also Warren, *The Dance of Death*, pp. xxi–xxiv.

37 – Warren, *The Dance of Death*, pp. 68–70; the version quoted here is that of the Ellesmere manuscript, belonging to group A. As in Marchant's edition, and presumably the Paris mural, the child is preceded by the friar and followed only by the clerk, the hermit, and the concluding words from 'Machabre the Doctoure' and the author himself.

38 – Clark, *The Dance of Death*, esp. pp. 7–21; Miriam Clare Gill, *Late Medieval Wall Painting in England: Content and Context (c.1330–c.1530)*, unpublished PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 2001, ch. 4; Fred Kloppenborg, 'Totentänze in der religiösen Gebrauchskunst Englands', in *L'art macabre 1*, ed. Uli Wunderlich, Jahrbuch der Europäischen Totentanz-Vereinigung (Düsseldorf: 2000), pp. 53–67. See also Oostervijk, 'Of Corpses, Constables and Kings', esp. pp. 70–1, and Sophie Oostervijk, 'Money, morality, mortality: the migration of the *dance macabre* from murals to misericords', in *Freedom of Movement in the Middle Ages: People, Ideas, Goods*, ed. Peregrine Horden, Harlaxton Symposium Proceedings 2003, accepted for publication.

39 – Wilfrid 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; Clifford Davidson, *The Guild Chapel Wall Paintings at Stratford-upon-Avon* (New York: AMS Press, 1988), esp. pp. 8–9, 54.

40 – H. Schulte Herbrüggen, 'Der Totentanz von Rosslyn (Schottland). Ein Beitrag zu einem neuen Forschungsvorhaben', *Jahrbuch der Universität*

Düsseldorf 1981–83 (Düsseldorf, 1986), pp. 165–75, but esp. p. 169; also Clark, *The Dance of Death*, p. 20.

41 – I am grateful to Dr Uli Wunderlich for drawing my attention to this manuscript.

42 – Illustrated and discussed in *Totentanz Aktuell*, Neue Folge, Heft 29 (September 2001), p. 11, after Sandra Hindman, *Books of Hours — Livres d'Heures* (Paris/Chicago: Les Enluminures & Bruce Ferrini, 2000). The image of Death and the infant is found in the top left-hand border, with another of Death and a lady flanking the initial; the manuscript appears to have been produced for a female patron.

43 – See F.A. Greenhill, *Incised Effigial Slabs: A Study of Engraved Stone Memorials in Latin Christendom, c.1100 to c.1700* (London: Faber & Faber, 1976), vol. 2, figure 153a.

44 – Hellmut Rosenfeld, *Der mittelalterliche Totentanz. Entstehung – Entwicklung – Bedeutung*, Beihefte zum Archiv für Kulturgeschichte, vol. 3 (1954; 2nd edn Cologne/Graz: Böhlau Verlag, 1968), pp. 317, 323; Reinhold Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes: Die mittelalterlichen Totentänze und ihr Nachleben* (Bern/München: Francke Verlag, 1980), pp. 37–38. Rosenfeld refers to this text as the 'Würzburger Totentanz'.

45 – Rosenfeld, *Der mittelalterliche Totentanz*, p. 317; Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes*, p. 38. This pairing of two victims in the *Totentanz* is exceptional; characters are usually dealt with individually.

46 – Kaiser, *Der tanzende Tod*, pp. 328–9. The child's words follow the text of the Heidelberg manuscript version.

47 – Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes*, pp. 191–2 and figures 2, 99; Wolfgang Neumann, ed., *Tanz der Toten — Todestanz: der monumentale Totentanz im deutschsprachigen Raum* (Dettelbach: Verlag J.H. Röll, 1998), pp. 105–8 and figure 55. Fragments of the original paintings have been preserved and replaced *in situ* by a copy; the accompanying text has apparently been lost.

48 – Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes*, pp. 188–9 and figure 93. This version was known as the 'Kleinbasel' dance, as opposed to the earlier and more famous but equally lost 'Großbasel' dance on the churchyard wall of the Dominican 'Predigerkloster' in the southern part of Basel; the latter, which may have been painted shortly after the disastrous 1439 plague that broke out during the council of Basel (1431–38), featured a mother carrying a cradle with a small boy walking by her side and hanging on to her skirt. The Klingenthal mural has often been incorrectly dated as 1312, based on a misreading of a date given in the mural itself; it is now thought to date from c.1460–80 and to have been derived from the Großbasel version.

49 – Hartmut Freytag, Brigitte Schulte und Hildegard Vogeler, 'Der Totentanz der Marienkirche in Lübeck von 1463 und seine Weiterwirkung bis in die Gegenwart', in: *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 Schaefer Schweinfurt*, Ausstellungskatalogue der Herzog August Bibliothek, vol. 77 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000), p. 88. The iconographic variation of the cradle in the Lübecker Totentanz, as opposed to the standing child in other German versions, had already been noted but not explained by Leonard P. Kurtz, *The Dance of Death and the Macabre Spirit in European Literature*, Publications of the Institute of French Studies (New York: Columbia University, 1934), p. 100. The Lübeck Totentanz mural that was destroyed in the 1942 allied bombardment was not the original medieval version, but a 'restored' version painted by Anton Wortmann in 1701; part of Notke's original Totentanz painting in tempera on canvas was preserved in the St Nikolai church in Reval and is now housed in the Revaler Museum in Tallinn.

50 – Timothy Sodmann, ed., *Dodentanz: Lübeck 1520. Faksimileausgabe mit Textabdruck, Glossar und einem Nachwort* (Vreden: Franz Gescher oHG, 2001).

51 – Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes*, pp. 182–3 and figure 93; p. 152 and figure 22; for the Dresden frieze, see also Neumann, *Tanz der Toten — Todestanz*, pp. 148–53 and figures 92, 103.

52 – Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes*, pp. 208–12 and figure 330; see also Wilhelm Werner von Zimmern, *Totentanz*, ed. Christian Kiening, Bibliotheca suevica 9 (Eggingen: Isle, 2004), p. 128 with the accompanying

text on fol. 128r (a variant of Knoblochtzer's poem) on p. 47. The artist also included a drawing based on Holbein's woodcut on fol. 123v. A facsimile of the Zimmern manuscript can also be viewed on <http://www.ds.unizh.ch/kiening/vergaenglichkeitsbuch>.

53 – Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes*, pp. 215–18 and figure 193. Some other German Totentanz schemes combine the child with the mother, e.g. the late fifteenth-century mural in the St Marien church in Berlin, where only some of the words of this last group are recorded; see Peter Walther, *Der Berliner Totentanz zu St. Marien* (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 1997), p. 84. The famous but lost 'Großbasel' mural of c.1440 combined the mother (in later copies actually labelled 'Malerin', i.e. the wife of the painter also featuring in this scheme) with an infant in a cradle and a (dressed) toddler, as mentioned in n. 48 above; see Kaiser, *Der tanzende Tod*, p. 272; Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes*, pp. 283–8 and figure 133; and Neumann, *Tanz der Toten — Todestanz*, figure 6.

54 – Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes*, pp. 220–2 and figure 221; for Bleibach, see Neumann, *Tanz der Toten — Todestanz*, pp. 229–31 and figure 163.

55 – Reinhold Böhm, *Der Füssener Totentanz und das Fortwirken der Totentanzidee im Ostallgäuer und Außerferner Raum: Oberdorf, Füssen (St. Sebastian), Breitenwang, Elbigenalp, Elmen, Schattwald, Pfongen (Lithographien)* (Füssen: Historischer Verein Alt Füssen e.V., 1990), p. 38; see also Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes*, p. 220 and figure 226, and Neumann, *Tanz der Toten — Totentanz*, pp. 169–70.

56 – Kaiser, *Der tanzende Tod*, p. 158; a whirligig is also held by the naked toddler in the Zimmern watercolour and by the dressed little boy in Jakob von Wyl's painting.

57 – Manfred Lemmer, ed., *Der Heidelberger Totentanz von 1485* (Frankfurt am Main/Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1991), pp. 28, 78. As kindly pointed out to me by Mr Reinhard Lamp, Death's line 'Dan hie ist keyn blibende stat' refers to Hebrews 13:14, which in the Latin Vulgate reads: 'Non enim habemus hic manentem civitatem, sed futuram inquirimus'.

58 – Peter Keller, *Die Wiege des Christuskindes: Ein Haushaltsgerät in Kunst und Kult*, Manuskripte zur Kunstwissenschaft in der Wernerschen Verlagsgesellschaft, vol. 54 (Worms: Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1998). The cradle of Christ also features quite prominently in several German 'Weihnachtsspiele', e.g. in the Nativity plays from Erlau and Hessen.

59 – See, for example, Emanuela Bianchi, *Ara Pacis Augustae* (trans., Rome: Fratelli Palombi Editori, 1994).

60 – Madeline Harrison Caviness, *The Early Stained Glass of Canterbury Cathedral, ca. 1175–1220* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 92 and colour plate VII.

61 – Sophie Oosterwijk, 'Madonnas, mothers, mites, and the macabre: three examples of medieval mother-and-child tomb iconography', *Church Monuments*, 18 (2003) pp. 10–22, esp. 13 and figure 6. See also Kurt Bauch, *Das mittelalterliche Grabbild: figurliche Grabmäler des 11. bis 15. Jahrhunderts in Europa* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1976), p. 240 and figure 360; Rainer Kahsnitz, *Die Gründer von Laach und Sayn. Fürstenbildnisse des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Nuremberg: Verlag des Germanischen Nationalmuseums, 1992), p. 64 and figure 46.

62 – Oosterwijk, 'Madonnas, mothers, mites', pp. 16–17 and figure 11.

63 – Judith H. Oliver, *Gothic Manuscript Illumination in the Diocese of Liège (c. 1250–c. 1330)* (Louvain: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1988), figure 76. There are slight, but potentially significant, differences in the actual pose; leading a child by the hand indicates guidance and protection, whereas an adult's grip on the child's wrist or lower arm suggests a certain degree of coercion. The Liège illumination shows Mary bending her body to reach the arm of her much shorter child, which is also a recurring element in this motif.

64 – Henk van Os, *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe 1300–1500*, exhibition catalogue Rijksmuseum (trans., Amsterdam/London: Rijksmuseum/Merrell Holberton, 1994), figure 11; also illustrated in Oosterwijk, 'Madonnas, mothers, mites', figure 8. The boy's feet are bare, and his cruciform nimbus identifies him as the Christ child.

- 65 – See, for example, Hans Wentzel, 'Ad Infantiam Christi: Zu der Kindheit unseres Herren', in *Das Werk des Künstlers: Studien zur Ikonographie und Formgeschichte, Hubert Schrade zum 60. Geburtstag dargebracht von Kollegen und Schülern*, Hans Fegers, ed. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960), pp. 134–60; by the same author 'Das Jesuskind an der Hand Mariae auf dem Siegel des Burkard von Winon 1277', in *Festschrift Hans R Hahnloser zum 60. Geburtstag 1959*, Ellen J Beer, Paul Hofer and Luc Mojon, eds (Basel/Stuttgart, Birkhäuser Verlag, 1961), pp. 251–70.
- 66 – Wentzel, 'Ad Infantiam Christi', pp. 146–8.
- 67 – Wentzel, 'Ad Infantiam Christi', pp. 146–8.
- 68 – Paris BNF Ms. lat. 1077, fol. 11v, and Brussels KB MS IV–10, fol. 82v; I am very grateful to Dr Martine Meuwese for drawing my attention to these manuscripts.
- 69 – Rüdiger Beckmann, *Deutsche Glasmalerei des Mittelalters*, vol. 1, *Voraussetzungen, Entwicklungen, Zusammenhänge* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1995), cat. no. 33, colour plate p. 135.
- 70 – Gerard Jaspers, *Een Amsterdams Marialeven in 25 legenden uit handschrift 846 van Museum Amstelkring* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2003), figure 34 (Freiburg/Breisgau Universitätsbibliothek, Ink. 4° K 3352). Compare also a German manuscript illumination of c.1450 in the Kupferstichkabinett, Germanische Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg (BP IIz 372), illustrated in Pierre Riché and Danièle Alexandre-Bidon, *L'enfance au Moyen-Age* (Paris: Seuil/Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1994), p. 124, and the various examples in Wentzel, 'Ad Infantiam Christi' and 'Das Jesuskind an der Hand Mariae'.
- 71 – Wentzel, 'Ad Infantiam Christi', p. 154.
- 72 – Holbein's original drawing is lost, but a large number of copies and variants survive; compare Hugo Schneider, *Der Schweizerdolch: Waffen- und kulturgeschichtliche Entwicklung mit vollständiger Dokumentation der bekannten Originale und Kopien* (Zurich: Orell Füssli, 1977), esp. nos 119–32. Admittedly, Holbein's printed *Totentanz* alphabet shows instead an infant in a cradle illustrating the letter Y for 'ynfans'. See also Kiening, *Das andere Selbst*, pp. 136–7 and figures 76–7.
- 73 – 'The Pardoner's Tale', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (1957, repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), ll. 675, 683–4.
- 74 – See Jon Bayliss, 'A Dutch Carver: Garrett Hollemans I in England', *Church Monuments*, 8 (1993), pp. 45–56.
- 75 – See Robert R. Wark, *Rocelandson's Drawings for The English Dance of Death* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1966), nos 39 and 47. The first of these shows Death approaching an infant in a cradle with the nurse asleep by its side.
- 76 – Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, p. 36.
- 77 – James M. Clark, *The Dance of Death by Hans Holbein* (London: Phaidon, 1947), p. 118.
- 78 – Philippa Tristram, *Figures of Life and Death in Medieval English Literature* (London: Elek, 1976), p. 170.
- 79 – Emile Mâle, *L'Art religieux de la fin du Moyen Age: Etude sur l'iconographie du Moyen Age et sur ses sources d'inspiration* (1908, repr. Paris: Librairie A. Colin, 1949), p. 374; cf. the English translation *Religious Art in France: The Late Middle Ages. A Study of Medieval Iconography and its Sources*, Bollingen Series XC.3 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 341: 'his best [pose] is the gesture of the corpse concealing his hideous face behind a bony arm so as not to frighten the infant; he even seems to be ashamed. Whoever thought of this was a true and great artist.'

