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

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CHAPTER 6

Money, Morality, Mortality: The Migration of the Danse Macabre *from Murals to Misericords*

SOPHIE OOSTERWIJK

The *danse macabre*, or Dance of Death, has seen many transformations and migrations since the 'Bourgeois de Paris' recorded in his diary the first known mural with accompanying verses, painted onto the walls of the Franciscan cemetery of Les Saints Innocents in Paris between August 1424 and Easter 1425 while the city was under Anglo-Burgundian control.[1] The theme presents in its purest form a chain of alternating skeletons and living characters from all walks of life, originally all male, with a dialogue between each pair. It was the combination of text and image that resulted in some of the most famous examples, such as the (lost) mural schemes in Basel[2] and Lübeck.[3] The wall-painting in Paris was similarly destroyed centuries ago, but

1 Literature on the *danse macabre* is vast, but the last English monograph is still J. M. Clark, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Glasgow, 1950). For a recent overview of the subject, see S. 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.

2 There were two mural schemes in Basel, the oldest of which in the churchyard of the Dominican convent is likely to have been created around 1440, possibly in commemoration of the plague that struck the city in 1439. Only some fragments survive after its destruction in 1805, and the scheme is now best known through Matthäus Merian's engravings first published in 1621. Hans Holbein the Younger, who lived in Basel in the 1510s and '20s, was probably familiar with either or both schemes. See F. Egger, *Basler Totentanz* (Basel, 1990); R. Sörries, 'Katalog der monumentalen Totentänze in deutschsprachigen Raum', in *Tanz der Toten – Todestanz: Der monumentale Totentanz in deutschsprachigen Raum*, ed. W. Neumann (Dettelbach, 1998), pp. 93–96; R. Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes: die mittelalterlichen Totentänze und ihr Nachleben* (Bern and Munich, 1980), pp. 183–88; *Der tanzende Tod: Mittelalterliche Totentänze*, ed. G. Kaiser (Frankfurt am Main, 1983), pp. 194–275.

3 The *Totentanz* scheme in the Marienkirche in Lübeck, which is specifically referred to in the Redentiner Easter play of 1464, is believed to have been painted by Bernt Notke in 1463, with subsequent 'restorations'. A new version made in 1700/01 was destroyed in the air raids of March 1942. See *Der Totentanz der Marienkirche in Lübeck und der Nikolaikirche in Reval (Tallinn). Edition, Kommentar, Interpretation, Rezeption*, ed. H. Freytag, Niederdeutsche Studien, 39 (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna, 1993); also M. Claussnitzer, H. Freytag and S.

not before it had been reproduced as a series of woodcuts with verses by the Parisian printer Guyot Marchant in 1485 (Pl. 12).[4] However, this essay will focus not on such famous two-dimensional schemes, but on the appearance of the *danse macabre* on a number of English misericords: a move into a different medium and setting that may have been uniquely English, but actually proves quite fitting in terms of context.

Whether the *danse macabre* moved from text into image or *vice versa* remains a matter for debate. The verses accompanying the lost mural at Les Innocents remain the earliest *known* text version of the theme, but there may well have been an earlier Latin poem no longer extant.[5] A quite distinct German *Totentanz* tradition also developed, which emphasized music far more than the French *danse macabre*, and an illustrated blockbook edition of the earliest German text version was produced around 1465.[6] The theme rapidly travelled across Europe, with the move into print obviously helping to widen the spread of the theme even further. Folklore and (religious) processions or performances may have played a part in the genesis of the *danse*, which followed earlier themes related to death, from the popular tale of the Three Living and the Three Dead that first appeared in French poetry in the thirteenth century to the cadaver tomb that emerged in the late fourteenth.[7] The theme of the Three Living and the Three Dead survives in manuscript texts and illuminations, but also in numerous murals and even sculpture: a tympanum illustrating the story was added to the doorway to the cemetery of Les Innocents in Paris in 1408 under the patronage of Jean, Duc de Berry, while a broken incised tomb slab of the mid-fifteenth century in Senlis Cathedral also features the same theme.[8] Several surviving French mural

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Warda, 'Das Redentiner – Ein Lübecker Osterspiel. Über das Redentiner Osterspiel von 1464 und den Totentanz der Marienkirche in Lübeck von 1463, *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 132 (2003), pp. 189–238.

4 Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes*, pp. 167–70, 171–2. For Marchant's 1485 woodcut edition, see Kaiser, *Der tanzende Tod*, pp. 70–107.

5 Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes*, esp. pp. 29–39, 149; Kaiser, *Der tanzende Tod*, pp. 276–77; H. Rosenfeld, *Der mittelalterliche Totentanz. Entstehung, Entwicklung, Bedeutung* (1954, revised edn and trans. Cologne and Graz, 1968), pp. 44–117.

6 Kaiser, *Der tanzende Tod*, pp. 276–329.

7 For the theme of the Three Living and the Three Dead, see *Vifs nous sommes ... morts nous serons. La Rencontre des trois morts et des trois vifs dans la peinture murale en France*, ed. Groupe de Recherches sur les Peintures Murales (Vendôme, 2001). The standard work on cadaver tombs is still K. Cohen, *Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol: The Transi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, California Studies in the History of Art, 15 (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1973), but see also S. Oosterwijk, 'Food for Worms – Food for Thought: The Appearance and Interpretation of the "Verminous" Cadaver in Britain and Europe', *Church Monuments*, 20 (2005), pp. 40–80, 133–40.

8 The tympanum was recorded by the Parisian antiquarian Jacques Dubreul in

schemes actually feature a combination of this story and the *danse macabre*, as at Meslay-le-Grenet (Eure-et-Loire) and La Ferté-Loupière (Yonne).

Although the *danse macabre* later acquired a more decorative character, it was originally to be found in churches, especially in a funerary context, such as in cemeteries at Paris, London, Basel, and Metnitz (Carinthia). The cemetery of Les Innocents in Paris was a popular meeting place and medieval preachers are known to have incorporated the wall-painting into their sermons as a visual reminder to their audiences of the inevitable end. The sculpted, but now badly worn *danse macabre* pairs in the Aître Saint-Maclou in Rouen, which date from the early-sixteenth century, were also clearly meant to add to the character of the churchyard, placed beneath a sculpted wooden frieze showing a range of objects related to the last rites and burial.[9] Less obvious may seem the location of the late-fifteenth-century mural on the north wall of the monks' choir in the abbey church of St Robert at La Chaise-Dieu (Haute-Loire), until one remembers that this part of the church was used for funeral rites; a stone table on which the monks prepared their dead for burial still stands beneath the mural.[10] This location can be compared to that of the still extant wall-painting on the north wall of the Guild Chapel in Stratford-upon-Avon, which was similarly used for funeral services for guild members.[11] The *danse macabre* with its moral message about the inevitability of death for all clearly lent itself well to such settings.

The series of *danse macabre* pairs at Rouen form one example of the migration of the theme into sculpture: earlier examples can be found on the spandrels of five blind arches on the south wall of the nave of the church of Notre-Dame du Sablon in Brussels and on the roughly contemporary vault ribs of the Lady Chapel at Rosslyn, Scotland.[12] The carvings in both settings

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1612; see H. Couzy, 'L'Église des Saints-Innocents à Paris', *Bulletin Monumental*, 130, IV (1972), p. 281. For the tomb slab, see *Vifs nous sommes ... morts nous serons*, pp. 11–12.

9 P. Levasseur, 'Observations sur l'iconographie de l'Aître Saint-Maclou: une synthèse de l'art macabre et des apports de la renaissance', *Actes du 11e Congrès International d'études sur les Danses macabres et l'art macabre en général* (Meslay-le-Grenet, 2003), pp. 39–56; S. Oosterwijk, '*Danse Macabre* Imagery in Late-Medieval Sculpture', in A. von Hülsen-Esch, H. Westermann-Angerhausen and S. Knöll (eds), *'Zum Sterben schön!' Alter, Totentanz und Sterbekunst von 1500 bis heute*, exhibition catalogue, vol. 1 (Regensburg, 2006), p. 168.

10 Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes*, pp. 162–4; C. and P. Boisse, *La danse macabre de La Chaise-Dieu* (Brioude, n. d.), p. 11.

11 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; C. Davidson, *The Guild Chapel Wall Paintings at Stratford-upon-Avon* (New York, 1988); M. C. Gill, 'Late Medieval Wall Painting in England: Content and Context (c.1330–c.1530)', unpublished PhD thesis (Courtauld Institute, 2002), pp. 403–4 and fig. 6.9.

12 I. Hans-Collas, 'Les écoinçons sculptés du XVe siècle de l'église Saint-Martin de

are rather inaccessible and hard to distinguish, making them perhaps more decorative than clearly moralizing in purpose. Nonetheless, these early carvings at Rosslyn Chapel are an important example of the theme in the British Isles where only a handful of *danse macabre* examples survives in relative obscurity: for example, the extant mural scheme at Stratford has remained hidden behind oak panelling since the 1950s. The march of the theme into Britain started with a poem: *The Dance of Death* by the Benedictine monk and poet John Lydgate (c.1371–1449) from Bury St Edmunds, written during or shortly after a sojourn in Paris in 1426.[13] Lydgate claimed that his Middle English version was based on the French verses at Les Innocents, although not a literal translation, and subsequently wrote a revised and expanded version. He also added a small number of female characters such as the empress and the abbess that were not part of the all-male Parisian scheme. The revised poem accompanied a Dance of Death scheme commissioned in 1430 for the medieval cloisters of Pardon Churchyard at St Paul's Cathedral in London by the wealthy London town clerk John Carpenter (1371/2–1442).[14] It was this scheme that became so famous that the *danse macabre* came to be known in England as the 'dance of [St] Paul's', as we shall see. Thereafter the theme appears to have made its way across Britain while moving into a variety of media: from mural schemes at Stratford and elsewhere to the carvings in Rosslyn, a stained-glass window at St Andrew's Church in Norwich, and painted pulpitum panels at Hexham Abbey.[15] Particularly interesting are the lost but recorded, painted or stained cloths depicting the *danse* at Holy Trinity Church, Long Melford, All Saints' Church in Bristol, and St Edmund's Church in Salisbury: these were not necessarily on permanent show but rather displayed on special occasions, and stored away during the rest of the year.[16]

Hal et de Notre-Dame du Sablon à Bruxelles: les trois morts et les trois vifs et la Danse macabre', *Actes du 11e Congrès* (2003), pp. 325–37; 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; also Oosterwijk, '*Danse Macabre* Imagery', p. 171.

13 F. Warren, *The Dance of Death*, EETS, o. s., 181 (London, 1931, repr. 2000).

14 F. Kloppenborg, 'Danse macabre de Londres: le commanditaire et son cercle d'amis / The London Dance of Death: The Patron and his Circle of Friends', *Actes du 11e Congrès*, pp. 9–24.

15 The *danse macabre* also influenced tomb iconography; an initial paper on the subject is S. Oosterwijk, '"The sodeyne vyolence of cruel dethe": Death and *danse macabre* iconography on tomb monuments', *Actes du 11e Congrès*, pp. 209–22.

16 The Long Melford cloths may have been in use during Lent, whereas the Bristol cloths are recorded as being displayed twice a year 'at All Hallow's tide and at Saint James'; as the latter feast coincides with that of St Christopher, the medieval protector against sudden death, it may have been a special display for his feast day instead. The Salisbury cloths may have been on more permanent display. See F. Kloppenborg, 'Totentänze in der religiösen Gebrauchskunst Englands', in *L'art*

However, medieval churches afforded an opportunity for artists to depict popular themes in yet another location and medium. Choir-stalls and misericords across Britain and the Continent offer a wealth of medieval imagery to the viewer, including moralizing scenes that appealed either to the clergy or to the artists carving them. Of course, these carvings occupied a relatively hidden position, especially misericords on the undersides of hinged seats in the choir, and they would not be seen by the population at large. Nevertheless, they give a good idea of themes popular at the time. Devils and hell scenes make a regular appearance on misericords throughout Europe, as in the scene with the devil Tutivillus positioned between two gossiping women at Ely or the misericord of the dishonest alewife being carried off to hell at Ludlow.[17] Monks were not safe, either, as illustrated by a misericord at St George's Chapel, Windsor, and two more in King Henry VII's Chapel at Westminster Abbey: the former depicts three monks in a wheelbarrow being carted off to hell by a devil, while the latter two show a monk being attacked by a winged demon and another monk being carried to hell.[18] The Westminster Abbey misericords are interesting in that they hint at two distinct Deadly Sins: the first monk has a bag full of coins by his side that may betoken Avarice, while the second misericord scene is flanked by a supporter showing a woman waving her arms about, suggesting Lust as the cause of that monk's downfall.

Curiously, Death appears far less frequently on medieval misericords and choir-stalls than the Devil. One early exception is an enigmatic misericord of 1339–41 at Ely Cathedral, in which a seated man and a kneeling woman are flanked by an almost voyeuristic skull lurking in the foliage on the left-hand supporter (Pl. 13): whether the scene represents a couple of lovers or a woman confessing is unclear, but the skull lends a very sinister character to the ensemble.[19] The theme of sudden death was prevalent throughout the Middle

macabre 1, ed. U. Wunderlich, Jahrbuch der Europäischen Totentanz-Vereinigung (Düsseldorf, 2000), pp. 53–67.

17 C. Grössinger, *The World Upside-Down: English Misericords* (London, 1997), pp. 78–81 and figs 116–17, and Grössinger, this volume. For Tutivillus on misericords, see C. Grössinger, 'Tutivillus', in *The Profane Arts of the Middle Ages*, ed. E. C. Block, J. Fellos and M. Jones (forthcoming); also S. Bethmont-Gallerand and C. Leduc, 'Le diable, des bavardes et les clercs. Un motif iconographique et ses variations dans la peinture murale, la sculpture et la gravure médiévales et leurs sources textuelles', *Le décor mural des églises*, *Ars Sacré*, 18 (Châteauroux, 2001), pp. 215–34. Various examples of devils and vices on continental misericords can be found in D. and H. Kraus, *The Hidden World of Misericords* (London, 1996); D. and H. Kraus, *Gothic Choirstalls of Spain* (London, 1986); E. C. Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords in France: XIII–XVI Century* (Turnhout, 2003), the latter being the first in a series of monographs covering misericords throughout Europe.

18 Grössinger, *The World Upside-Down*, pp. 78–9 and figs 114–15.

19 G. L. Remnant, *A Catalogue of Misericords in Great Britain, with an essay on their iconography by M. D. Anderson* (Oxford, 1969), p. 16. I am very grateful to Dr

Ages, as illustrated by the words of the young servant boy in Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* when explaining the threat of Death to the three doomed revellers: 'Beth redy for to meete hym everemoore; / Thus taughte me my dame' (ll. 683–84). Of course, the Ely misericord pre-dates the *danse macabre* in Paris by almost a century, yet Death-related motifs are still rare on misericords even by the sixteenth century, as a number of recent authors have discovered. Most examples tend to carry a *vanitas* meaning, such as the figure of Death in a monk's habit studying his reflection in a hand-held mirror from the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Pierre in Orbais (Marne) or the recumbent figure of Death parodying the voluptuous pose of a naked woman on the adjacent misericord in the church of Saint-André at Besse-en-Chandesse (Puy-de-Dôme).[20] Admittedly, a handrest on one of the choir-stalls at Saint-Martin-aux-Bois (Oise) shows a figure of Death holding a now broken scythe, but this was a common attribute for Death also in other contexts.[21] A skeleton riding a cow while armed with a dart and a coffin on a misericord at Pocé-sur-Cisse (Indre-et-Loire) is not so much related to the *danse macabre* as to the theme of the Triumphs of Death.[22] The *vanitas* motif is also evident in some skulls decorating misericords and other parts of choir-stalls in France,[23] or in the macabre device of a maiden's face half-alive and half-dead that can now be found in the Spitalkirche in Baden-Baden, although it was originally carved in 1512 by Hans Kern for the Stiftskirche.[24] Similar contemplative devices are

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Christa Grössinger for alerting me to this example in Ely and kindly lending me a photograph of it.

20 E. C. Block, 'Les maladies et la mort sur les misericordes médiévales', *Actes du 10e Congrès International d'études sur les Danses macabres et l'art macabre en général* (Meslay-le-Grenet, 2000), pp. 430, 433, 436. Block failed to see the link between the skeleton and the naked temptress at Besse, misinterpreting the former as the 'sleep of death', although the set admittedly includes other reclining figures, including a near-naked child; see Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords in France*, 121 (NB–06) and 356, fig. A2, which mistakenly shows the child (SH–04) rather than the voluptuous woman (NB–07).

21 K. Lemé-Hébuterne, 'Images de la mort à travers les stalles de la fin du Moyen Age', *Actes du 11e Congrès*, p. 142 and fig. 5.

22 Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords*, pp. 77 (S–01) and 302, fig. C2; S. Bethmont-Gallerand, 'De l'illustration à la leçon, le motif de "la Mort à cheval sur un bœuf"', *Reinardus*, 16 (2003), pp. 47–61 and illustrations. Some early examples of this motif in the margins of a missal produced in Amiens in 1323 (The Hague, Royal Library MS 7840) can be found in Rosenfeld, *Der mittelalterliche Totentanz*, figs. 2, 3. According to Dr Miriam Gill, some late-medieval Danish wall-paintings of the Three Living and the Three Dead also feature skeletons on cows.

23 See Block, 'Les maladies et la mort', p. 430 and also 439; Lemé-Hébuterne, 'Images de la mort', figs. 3, 4.

24 I am grateful to Dr Christa Grössinger for lending me the original photographs by the late Jan Verspaandonk in her possession, and to Mr Achim Otte for identifying the location from the very summary note 'Baden' on the back of the photos; the location has since been confirmed by Professor Elaine Block during a

found in Spain.[25] Only a skull surmounting a dividing pillaret in the choir-stalls at Baden-Baden uses his skeletal hands to play the flute on this architectural feature in traditional *Totentanz* fashion (Pl. 14), but otherwise the *danse macabre* proper appears to be absent on medieval misericords across Europe.[26]

Yet medieval themes and motifs travel in often unpredictable ways, and what is true for the Continent is not always true for Britain. In at least two locations, English carvers chose to introduce the *danse* on misericords, albeit within quite distinct contexts. Three misericords at St Michael's Church in Coventry and one extant example at Windsor testify to the fact that surviving medieval examples of the *danse macabre* in Britain need to be sought outside the more usual media of wall-painting, manuscript illumination and print. Unfortunately the Coventry misericords no longer exist: they were destroyed in the German air raids on the city in 1940.[27] However, the Coventry choir-stalls had been discussed and illustrated in an article by Mary Dormer Harris published in 1927.[28] At that time the set consisted of twelve surviving medieval misericords, with a further two blocked out but left uncarved, as well as three modern stalls and three other old but uncarved stalls; they were situated in the Drapers' or Lady Chapel of St Michael's Church and had been subject to restorations both in 1582 and in Victorian times.[29] The misericords at St Michael's comprised a mixture of secular and religious scenes, amongst which were the Tree of Jesse, the Assumption and a possible decapitation of St John the Baptist. Of the secular themes, Harris suggested that two scenes of country life might have belonged to a series of either the Seasons or the Labours of the Months, which would make the original set potentially much larger.[30]

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visit to Baden-Baden. Compare also Lemé-Hébuterne, 'Images de la mort', p. 144 and fig. 8.

25 I. Mateo Gómez, *Temas Profanos en la Escultura Gótica Española: Las Sillerías de Coro* (Madrid, 1979) figs. 192 and 194. Amongst the many themes discussed by Gomez, separate sections are devoted to the *Psychomachia*, the vices and virtues, and the allegory of death (*vanitas*), but the *Danza de la Muerte* is only mentioned in passing on p. 190.

26 Compare Lemé-Hébuterne, 'Images de la mort', p. 142: 'Les Danses macabres, où la mort entraîne les vivants dans une farandole, sont absentes des stalles'.

27 These in turn were followed by the allied bombing of Lübeck in 1942 and of Ulm in 1944, causing the destruction of the Totentanz mural in the Marienkirche and of part of the 1440 mural in the cloisters of the Wengen convent in Ulm.

28 M. D. Harris, 'The Misericords of Coventry', *Birmingham Archaeological Society Transactions and Proceedings*, 52 (1927), pp. 246–66, but esp. 246, 248, 262–3 and fig. XXXI v–vii. See also Grössinger, *The World Upside-Down*, p. 133 and fig. 194.

29 Harris, 'The Misericords of Coventry', pp. 248, 260.

30 One of these featured a shepherd amidst his flock in the centre, while on the other misericord two supporters flanking an ivy bush full of birds showed a bat–fowler and a thresher with a flail. According to Grössinger, *The World Upside-Down*, pp.

Five other misericords were also grouped together by Harris as part of a series: the chaining of Satan, the Last Judgement, and three misericords combining central carvings of the Seven Corporal Acts of Mercy with *danse macabre* pairs in the supporters. The latter featured the Acts of clothing the naked (Pl. 15), visiting the sick (Pl. 16), and burying the dead (Pl. 17), with a token male benefactor wearing a big hat in the first two scenes. It seems more than likely that the set originally also contained the other four Acts, but that these had already been lost before 1927. Charity was increasingly taught as a prerequisite for one's salvation in the late-medieval period, and the theme of the Corporal Acts of Mercy became very important both in art and in literature and drama.[31] They appear in late-medieval stained-glass windows, perhaps most famously at All Saints North Street Church in York, but were also combined with the Vices on poppy-heads at Blythburg (Suffolk).[32] Originally six Acts, based on the words of Christ on the Last Judgement in Matthew 25.35–36, the Act of burying the dead was inspired by its importance in the Book of Tobit and added later. To combine these carvings with a Last Judgement showing a now headless Christ enthroned on the rainbow flanked by trumpeting angels with figures rising from their tombs in the supporters (Pl. 18) would have been very apt, as is the apocalyptic scene of Satan between two angels in the supporters holding his chain based on Rev. 20.1–3.[33] As we shall see, however, there were other important reasons for introducing these *danse macabre* carvings into this particular setting in combination with the Corporal Acts of Mercy.

Sadly, when they were photographed the Coventry misericords and their supporters had already suffered damage that may well have been deliberate, and perhaps iconoclastic: the heads had all been knocked off or were badly mutilated, and not much more than a hand remained of Death's victim to the right of the Act of visiting the sick (Pl. 16). Although this damage does not affect the interpretation of the different Acts of Corporal Mercy, it badly hampers the identification of the different *danse macabre* characters. Traditionally the *danse* starts with the highest ranks and usually (although not consistently) alternates religious and secular figures. Thus the first four figures tend to be the pope, emperor, cardinal and king, which are exactly the characters that can still be found on the Hexham panels. If the sculptors had followed the usual order of the Acts of Corporal Mercy and the *danse macabre* one would expect the pope and the emperor to flank the Act of

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160–67, but esp. p. 160, the Labours of the Months can be found specifically on Worcestershire misericords, with Ripple alone having a complete cycle devoted just to this theme. The Labours of the Months can also be found on Continental misericords.

31 E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven and London, 1992), pp. 357–68.

32 Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 64 and figs 21–25.

33 Harris, 'The Misericords of Coventry', pp. 264–5, numbers IX and XI.

feeding the hungry, but instead we can still recognize the pope's tiara on the supporter to the right of the Act of burying the dead (Pl. 17). The pope raises his right hand in blessing while Death grasps his left hand. Although this hand-in-hand stance is reminiscent of the original medieval chain of *danse macabre* characters, on the three Coventry misericords we find Death on the right side of his victims, whereas he traditionally approaches them from the left in *danse macabre* schemes elsewhere. On the left-hand supporter is an enigmatic figure with his right hand raised, who appears to have been wearing an oddly shaped hat with a large brim on the right, to judge by the remaining outline of his lost head in the photograph. The pope is usually paired with the emperor in the *danse*, but he normally wears a traditional imperial crown, whereas this figure may have worn a cap-like headdress with a large brim shading his face, if we can assume that it is turned towards Death.[34] He cannot be a cardinal as he wears a long robe covered diagonally by a cloak, which suggests a secular character, but perhaps also a historicized one, as this is not contemporary dress. Perhaps the carver here opted for a more unusual hat-shaped crown inspired by that worn by the Byzantine emperor as one occasionally finds in medieval and Renaissance art, but it remains puzzling.[35] Death's left hand is raised, as if mirroring his victim's gesture, while his right is firmly encircling the latter's left arm.

The figure on the right of the Act of clothing the naked (Pl. 15) is almost certainly a bishop, as the outline of a mitre is still visible; he wears a chasuble and amice, but no pallium that would make him an archbishop. He does not hold a staff and instead has his right hand across his chest. His secular counterpart on the left wears a long robe without a belt, and perhaps a cloak fastened below his neck. He carries a notched staff in his right hand, but his head is missing and it is not clear if he wore any head-dress. He may represent an official, or perhaps a pilgrim, but further attributes are missing and no firm identification can be offered.

[34] Grössinger, *The World Upside-Down*, fig. 194, claims that the man puts up his hand in resistance while looking away, but the raised hand may instead signal surprise, whereas the outline of the head suggests hair on the left, which would mean that the face is actually turned towards Death.

[35] For example, Pisanello portrayed John VIII Palaeologus on a 1438 medal (Florence, Bargello) with a head-dress featuring a very prominent upturned brim at the front, although with a higher and more pointed crown than that suggested by the instead rather dented outline on the Coventry misericord. Curiously, the head-dress on Pisanello's medal resembles that worn by 'Machomet der Turcken kayser' or Mehmet the conqueror of Byzantium in a woodcut in the *Schedelsche Weltchronik* or Nuremberg Chronicle published in 1493. Elsewhere in the same Chronicle, emperors such as Sigmund and Frederick are shown wearing the traditional imperial crown. The Early Netherlandish painter Dieric Bouts also opted for a more unusual brimmed form of imperial crown in his historicized diptych of the Justice of the Emperor Otto of c. 1470–75, now in Brussels.

Finally, there are the two supporters flanking the Act of visiting the sick, in which three people attend a sick person lying in a diagonally placed bed (Pl. 16). Unfortunately, only the left hand and a ghostly outline remained of Death's captive on the right-hand supporter; Harris described him as probably a layman wearing a chaperon,[36] and his silhouette suggests a long-waisted robe with rather voluminous sleeves, but it is hard to be sure what character he represents. A grim detail is Death's firm grip on the figure's left wrist. The headless figure in the left-hand supporter may also be a layman wearing a long robe without a belt covered by a cloak that is fastened below the neck. His right arm and hand are hidden beneath his cloak, but Death has managed to take hold of his left hand. His identity is unclear, and it is equally difficult to ascertain any deliberate order or pairing in these six *danse macabre* carvings, or to hazard a guess about which further eight characters the four lost misericords might have shown.

So how can the unusual appearance of the *danse* on these Coventry misericords be explained? Tempting though it is to link the dedication of St Michael's Church with such death imagery, it must be pointed out that Doom-related imagery was to be found in other medieval churches in Coventry, while the town itself had St Michael for its patron.[37] The church is first mentioned in 1153 but may well predate the Norman Conquest.[38] Although it was to become a cathedral only much later, it held an important position in the city and contained the chapels of various city guilds, including the Drapers, Mercers, Dyers, Smiths, Girdlers, and Cardmakers, the latter sharing their chapel with the Cappers from 1531.[39] In Harris's time the choir-stalls were situated in the chapel of the prestigious Drapers' guild, where at least some of them may also originally have been located.[40] Sharp included a

[36] Harris, 'The Misericords of Coventry', p. 263.

[37] As noted in *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. P. M. King and C. Davidson, Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series, 27 (Kalamazoo, 2000), p. 47, St Michael can be found on the reverse of the municipal seal from the fourteenth century on. M. Gill, 'Holy Trinity Church, Coventry: An Art Historical Study of the Doom and Other Wall Paintings', unpublished report (1997), discusses a Doom painting in Holy Trinity and stained-glass Last Judgement scenes from St Michael's Church, while fragments of an Apocalypse wall-painting are discussed in M. Gill and R. K. Morris, 'A Wall Painting of the Apocalypse in Coventry Rediscovered', *The Burlington Magazine*, 143 (2001), pp. 467–73. I am grateful to Dr Miriam Gill for also drawing my attention to a fragment of mural painting showing the head of a demon now in the Herbert Art Gallery, which may have been part of a Doom painting in the Priory.

[38] S. Bassett, 'Anglo-Saxon Coventry and its Churches', *Dugdale Society Occasional Papers*, 41 (2001), p. 3, with thanks to Dr Graham Jones for this information.

[39] T. Sharp, *Illustrative Papers on the History and Antiquities of the City of Coventry*, ed. W. G. Fretton (Birmingham, 1871), pp. 24–34. See also *Coventry's First Cathedral*, ed. G. Demidowicz (Stamford, 1994).

[40] Harris, 'The Misericords of Coventry', p. 248; King and Davidson, *The Coventry*

note to the effect that work in the Chapel in 1830 included the repair and rearrangement of 'the ancient oak stalls, or misereres, with their singular and grotesque carvings, and richly-panelled fronts and ends'.[41] The Drapers supported their own priest in the Lady Chapel and the iconography of at least nine of the St Michael's misericords would have lent itself well to a guild chapel where the funerals of deceased drapers were conducted and many of them were buried.

There is yet a further link with the famous Coventry Corpus Christi pageants, which were performed by its local guilds and which attracted many noble and royal visitors to the city. A Corpus Christi play is first mentioned in Coventry in 1392, but only two plays survive in copies dated around 1535: those of the Shearmen and Taylors, and of the Weavers.[42] It was the Drapers' guild that was responsible for staging the Doomsday play at Coventry, of which only later records remain.[43] This play at the end of the pageant saw all souls being summoned to Christ's Judgement to be forever damned or saved. Many surviving Doomsday plays present devils gloating over the damned and the latter themselves lamenting their earlier sins, especially an obvious fondness of earthly delights and consequently a fatal lack of charity towards their fellow man. Particularly relevant are the blessed and damned characters in the Chester cycle bemoaning the temptations of covetousness and lechery amongst the Deadly Sins, of which the triumphant devils in the N-Town play specifically accuse their seven damned victims.[44] In return, Christ in the Last

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Corpus Christi Plays, p. 44; Sharp, *The History and Antiquities of Coventry*, pp. 24–34. According to Sharp, the Lady Chapel was built around 1300 on the north side of the chancel and later also became known as the Drapers' Chapel; several wills survive of drapers expressing a wish to be buried in the chapel, which apparently included a charnel house and possibly also mortuary chapels in the crypt where the remains of burials and an altar were found in the nineteenth century. However, as noted by Harris, p. 261, there is also a reference in Sharp, p. 29, to 'a few more misereres' on the eastern side of the then recently constructed screen in the Mercers' Chapel in St Michael's Church.

41 Sharp, *The History and Antiquities of Coventry*, p. 27.

42 The latest edition with an extensive introduction is King and Davidson, *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*. These plays should not be confused with the East Anglian N-Town plays, which were often incorrectly referred to in earlier literature as the *Ludus Coventriae*.

43 See the Drapers' Accounts in *Coventry: Records of Early English Drama*, ed. R. W. Ingram (Manchester, 1981), esp. pp. 217–64, *passim* (for 1561–73), and pp. 455–81 (undated accounts), which include sums for devils, angels, 'wormes of Conscyence', as well as white and black souls.

44 *The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D.8*, ed. S. Spector, vol. 1, EETS, s. s., 11 (Oxford, 1991), Play 42, ll. 79–126. See also R. Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (1972, repr. Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980), pp. 294–8; S. Oosterwijk, 'Lessons in "Hopping": The Dance of Death and the Chester Mystery Cycle', *Comparative Drama*, 36 (2003), pp. 249–87, esp. 272–6; also G. R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in*

Judgement play by the York Mercers refers tellingly to the Corporal Acts of Mercy by echoing the words in Matthew 25.35–36 in a long speech to the blessed: 'Whenne I was hungery ye me fedde ...'.[45] The lost Coventry Doomsday play may also have contained references to the Corporal Acts of Mercy, and their combination with *danse macabre* supporters on the misericords at St Michael's Church must have seemed quite apt to the carvers or their patrons.[46] Despite the damage visible in the photographs, the misericords appear to have been well carved: the skeletal figures are carefully modelled, and the burial scene in particular shows wonderful funereal details, such as the priest with his book and aspergillum, the mortuary cross on the shrouded corpse, and the grave-diggers' implements in the foreground.

The *danse macabre* had reached not just any place in England. Coventry was a major medieval city known for its textile industry, although its wealth and importance had gone into decline by the early sixteenth century;[47] its many churches are known to have been richly decorated with wall-paintings, stained-glass windows and sculpture. The choir-stalls from the city's Whitefriars Church, which have recently been been the subject of detailed research, are both early in date and of high-quality craftsmanship.[48] The Coventry City Record Office still has sketches of especially the Whitefriars misericords but also other medieval sights in Coventry by the nineteenth-century antiquary Nathaniel Troughton,[49] but attempts to find similar or other antiquarian evidence of the choir-stalls from St Michael's Church have so far been unsuccessful. However, the second half of the fifteenth century is very much the time when one would expect to find examples of the *danse macabre* in medieval art, and a date in the mid 1460s is

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Medieval England: A Neglected Chapter in the History of English Letters & of the English People (Oxford, 1961), chapter VIII, 'Sermon and Drama', esp. pp. 511–26.

45 *The York Plays*, ed. R. Beadle, York Medieval Texts, second series (London, 1982), esp. ll. 285–94. See also Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays*, pp. 297–8; King and Davidson, *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, p. 18; C. Davidson, *From Creation to Doom: The York Cycle of Mystery Plays* (New York, 1984), pp. 178–81. Davidson, p. 184, also points to a Last Judgement wall-painting at Trotton, Sussex, which combines the Seven Deadly Sins with the Corporal Acts of Mercy.

46 King and Davidson, *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, pp. 46–47. It was a popular topos among late-medieval preachers that the Last Judgement would include an examination of people's contributions to the Corporal Works of Mercy during their lifetime.

47 C. Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1979).

48 C. Tracy, 'Choir-stalls from the 14th-Century Whitefriars Church in Coventry', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 150 (1997), pp. 76–95.

49 See Tracy, 'Choir-Stalls from the 14th-Century Whitefriars Church in Coventry', esp. p. 79 and n. 16. I am grateful to Dr Tracy for referring me to his article and the existence of these sketches.

very probable for these misericords.[50] An occurrence of the plague around 1465–66, when the Drapers are known to have founded a Jesus altar in St Michael's Church with mass to be celebrated every Friday, may also have played a role in the decision to introduce the *dance macabre* into the choir-stalls.[51]

For our final example, we have to travel to Windsor. The choir-stalls in St George's chapel are more precisely dated between 1477 and 1484; they were thus carved during the latter years of the reign of Edward IV, the king who had wanted to be commemorated with a double tomb containing a cadaver effigy.[52] The richly decorated stalls at Windsor contain only one misericord with *danse macabre* scenes,[53] although there is also the above-mentioned misericord of three monks being carted off to hell in a wheelbarrow, in addition to other carvings of St Michael trampling the Devil, the Last Judgement, and miscellaneous scenes featuring demons across the choir-stalls. Both the main scene and the supporters on the misericord in question contain *danse macabre* scenes, but with a difference. To start with the latter (Pl. 19), the left-hand supporter shows an open-mouthed Death on the left reaching out to a bald-headed labourer who is pushing down his now broken spade with his foot, oblivious of the imminent threat. The digger is simply dressed in a short tunic with a hose or boot crumpled below the right knee. Apart from the spade, there is virtually no damage to this carving. The right-hand supporter (Pl. 20) shows Death on the right grinning hideously as he lays his right hand on an older bearded man with a bald crown who is holding probably a flail in his right hand. The thresher wears a short-waisted tunic with a belt and a long dagger by his side; a hose is folded back over his right thigh and both feet are shod. This supporter has suffered more damage: not only the flail, but also the man's left arm and both Death's legs are broken. The supporters are well carved with beautifully observed details, such as the teeth in Death's jaws; both are linked to the central carving by a vine or ribbon encircling each pair. They were clearly intended to mirror each other,

50 A date of c. 1465 is given in King and Davidson, *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, p. 45 and fig. 5, and in C. Davidson and J. Alexander, *The Early Art of Coventry, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwick and Lesser Sites in Warwickshire*, Early Drama, Art, and Music Reference Series, 4 (Kalamazoo, 1985), pp. 16, 36–7, 40 and figs 12, 13–14. Compare also Harris, 'The Misericords of Coventry', p. 247 and n. 1; Remnant, *A Catalogue of Misericords*, p. 162.

51 King and Davidson, *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, p. 4.

52 M. R. James, *St. George's Chapel, Windsor: The Woodwork of the Choir* (Windsor, 1933, repr. 1985); Remnant, *A Catalogue of Misericords*, pp. 5–10; Grössinger, *The World Upside-Down*, p. 132 and fig. 192. For the mention of a 'figure of death' in Edward IV's will, see Cohen, *Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol*, pp. 42 n. 82, and 122 n. 4.

53 James, *St. George's Chapel, Windsor*; south side, lower row, west block, no. 7C; Remnant, *A Catalogue of Misericords*, p. 7; Grössinger, *The World Upside-Down*, p. 132 and fig. 192.

with Death on the outside in both cases, but otherwise do not deviate much from the traditional *danse macabre* in which Death confronts each victim within a minimal setting; the first scene only features a token bush and what appears to be a lumpy soil against a patterned background, while the second only has a single leaf next to the flail and a similar pattern. The labourer was a regular character in the *danse macabre* across the Continent and in Britain: for example, Lydgate included a 'Laborere' who prefers his hard work 'with spade & pikeys' to Death's summons; Marchant showed a 'laboureur' with a flail in his 1485 edition; and a peasant with a flail occurs in both the 1465 Heidelberg blockbook and the lost Basel *Totentanz* mural, if Matthäus Merian's engraving of the latter can be used as evidence.[54]

However, it is the central carving on this misericord that appears to offer a new direction amongst *danse macabre* scenes, both in its form and its interpretation (Pl. 21). A stout male figure in a long robe is seated in a carved chair as Death comes rushing towards him from the left, grabbing his right arm with both skeletal hands. The victim is beardless and richly dressed with a conical cap and a heavy chain across his upper chest; his robe is gaping across his belly. He has a dagger across his legs and the position of his hands on both thighs suggests pride and arrogance as he turns his head towards Death. This impression is reinforced by the remaining props: there are two buildings in the background on the left behind Death, two flagons between the two figures, and on the right a table laden with richly decorated chalices and flagons and two coffers underneath. The latter are clearly money-chests: both the larger chest and the table feature locks with visible keyholes.

Even if the central carving offered the sculptor more space for such additional details, the setting and pose are very unusual. Death's victims are usually shown standing with only a few props where absolutely vital. For example, Marchant's woodcuts show each pair against a background of plants and grasses with only the most characteristic props held by the victim or lying nearby, which may well reflect what was originally shown in the Paris mural. However, the so-called Knoblochtzer woodcut edition of c. 1488, which was probably published in Heidelberg by the printer Heinrich Knoblochtzer following the success of Marchant's venture in Paris, occasionally includes more extensive props: the usurer with a money-bag in his left hand looks back regretfully at the chest behind him, the host is seated on a chair beside a table or desk, and the gambler is standing behind a gaming table.[55] The Knoblochtzer examples may post-date the Windsor misericord, but the *Totentanz* mural of c. 1440 at the Dominican convent in Basel also included a usurer rising from his chair behind a desk laden with coins (Pl. 22); he holds out a handful of coins, perhaps in a futile attempt to bribe Death. Holbein

[54] Warren, *The Dance of Death*, stanza LXX; for Marchant and the German *Totentanz* examples, see Kaiser, *Der tanzende Tod*, pp. 98, 270, 322.

[55] *Der Heidelberger Totentanz von 1485*, ed. M. Lemmer (Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig, 1991), pp. 24, 29, 30; also Kaiser, *Der tanzende Tod*, pp. 150, 160, 162.

also designed a woodcut with a man surrounded by treasure chests who rises in alarm from behind his table as Death piles coins onto a large serving dish (Pl. 23).[56] One much earlier and relatively unknown example must be quoted for comparison, however, as it proves how the iconographic migration of the *danse macabre* is never straightforward. A richly illuminated, but relatively little-known book of hours produced in Paris for an unknown patron around 1430–35 features no fewer than 57 *danse macabre* scenes in circular and semi-circular vignettes in the outer margins (New York, MS Morgan Library M.359, ff. 123r–151r). Apart from their very early date and the exceptionally large number of different characters, these scenes are unusual in many other respects: Death is shown on the right or on the left; many victims are flanked by two skeletons, and several figures are shown seated, such as a merchant(?) (f. 141r), an apothecary in his shop with bottles and jars on the shelves behind him (f. 142r), a money-changer seated at a table full of weights, measures and coins (f. 144r), a goldsmith seated at a table with a forge on the left (f. 145r), and a jeweller (?) with coins and a gold chalice on the table before him (f. 150v).[57] The inspiration or model for this large scheme, which deviates so much from the Paris mural as reproduced decades later by Marchant, is yet to be discovered, just as the models for the Windsor and Coventry misericords remain to be identified.

So what else sets the Windsor misericord apart from other *danse macabre* scenes? The juxtaposition of the humble workers in the supporters and the rich scene in the middle seems significant, and the sculptor may well have intended this central carving to represent more than one sin: the man's pose suggests Pride, his indolent attitude (as opposed to those of the labourers on either side) could indicate Sloth, while his large belly and the flagons may hint at Gluttony.[58] Yet the overwhelming impression is one of wealth, and thus of

[56] *The Dance of Death by Hans Holbein the Younger*, ed. W. L. Gundersheimer (New York, 1971), p. 43; see also n. 2 above. Holbein departed from the original theme by showing Death in elaborate settings typical of each victim, although he adhered to the musical element of the German *Totentanz*. This figure represents a rich man and not specifically a miser or usurer, as is evident from the title of an early proof printed in 1524–6: see C. Müller, *Hans Holbein d. J. Die Druckgraphik im Kupferstichkabinett* (Basel, 1997), illustration on p. 148. I am grateful to Dr Uli Wunderlich for this information.

[57] The identification of the characters is based on the description of the manuscript included on the Corsair website of the Morgan Library and on a study of the microfilm of the manuscript. The vignette of the goldsmith on f. 145r is illustrated in M. Camille, *Master of Death: The Lifeless Art of Pierre Remiet, Illuminator* (New Haven and London, 1996), pp. 159–60 and fig. 114, where the patron is incorrectly given as John, Duke of Bedford. This scheme also includes a labourer with a spade over his shoulder on f. 147v.

[58] I now agree with Professor Elaine Block that this scene may indeed hint at more than one sin, as she suggested after my paper at the 2003 Misericordia Conference in Sheffield.

Avarice. Seven Deadly Sins have a long history both in art and in literature, but Avarice has always been a prominent one.[59] Prudentius's fourth-century poem *Psychomachia* may have given us the image of the Sins as allegorical female figures riding their own symbolic animals, but artists increasingly turned towards more recognizable personifications, or instead the sinners themselves. Sculpted scenes depicting the death of misers and their punishment in hell, or the feast and subsequent death of the biblical Dives, can be found in medieval churches across Britain and the Continent. Choir-stalls elsewhere in England also include specific images of Avarice amongst the Vices: a bearded figure on a carved bench-end in Wigginhall St Germans (Norfolk) is still clutching his money-bags as he is already caught between the jaws of hell.[60] A very interesting and contemporary drawing in a manuscript of c. 1470–80 of *The Mirroure of the Worlde* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 283, f. 59) shows Avarice as a bearded man seated on a bench behind a table, fingering a pile of coins from a chest nearby;[61] curiously the remaining sins instead all ride their traditional animals, such as Pride on a lion, Gluttony on a sow, and Lechery on a goat. The text below the drawing identifies the figure as 'covetice. the whiche regneth in the worlde. that nowe is. moore than any oother vice', but also points out that avarice is much more an old man's sin as opposed to 'jolynes and lecherye' that are the sins of youth. Various *Ars Moriendi* woodcuts of this period also show the dying man being reminded by devils of the possessions he is about to leave behind, including his house, his horse, and his well-stocked cellar. Avarice was a sin that violated both the seventh and the tenth commandments, and one that most medieval people knew themselves to be guilty of in one way or another: covetousness was as much a sin as usury. Famous were the words in I Timothy 6.10: 'Radix enim omnium malorum est cupiditas', and many a poor man must have found some grim satisfaction in the warning that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God (Matthew 19.24).

Comparisons have often been drawn between the *danse macabre* and the morality play, both so popular by the end of the Middle Ages.[62] Although it

[59] A detailed study is R. Newhauser, *The Early History of Greed: The Sin of Avarice in Early Medieval Thought and Literature* (Cambridge, 2000).

[60] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 64 and fig. 27.

[61] K. L. Scott, *The Mirroure of the Worlde. MS Bodley 283 (England c. 1470–1480): The Physical Composition, Decoration and Illustration* (Oxford, 1980), fig. XV and p. 30, with thanks to Dr Miriam Gill and Dr Martine Meuwese. This manuscript was produced in London with drawings probably by an Early Netherlandish artist in the workshop.

[62] See, for example, the discussions in P. M. King, 'Morality Plays', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. R. Beadle (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 240–64; M. Jones, 'Allegory into Drama: Souls in Jeopardy', in *The* Revels *History of Drama in English*, vol. 1, *Medieval Drama*, ed. A. C. Cawley *et*

is unclear what the relationship may have been between the two, it is likely that there was mutual influence.[63] Many morality plays show the main protagonist being made gradually aware of the dangers of wealth and sin when faced with the prospect of death. The early morality play *The Pride of Life*, written probably in the first half of the fifteenth century, has a Bishop warning the King of Life against sin and death with a typical reference to worldly wealth:

> Ricmen spart for no thing
> To do the por wrong;
> Thai thingit not on hir ending
> Ne on Det that is so strong.[64]

The vainglorious King, confidently trusting his knights Strength and Health, challenges Death but inevitably loses the fight. The morality play *The Castle of Perseverance*, which may have been written around the end of the fourteenth century, presents Humanum Genus or Mankind under attack from the Vices, amongst which is the male figure of Coveytyse.[65] In *Everyman*, which was probably translated from the Middle Dutch morality play *Elckerlijc* in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, the central character Everyman is deserted by fickle Goods only to find that he has almost fatally neglected his true friend Good Deeds.[66] Charity and Humility are also the friends who save Youth in the Tudor interlude *Youth*, albeit from Riot, Pride and Lady Lechery rather than from avarice.[67]

Avarice and cupidity were well-known sins amongst the clergy, as the misericord at Westminster Abbey of a monk with a bag of coins being attacked by a demon also seems to suggest. Many religious characters in the various *danse macabre* versions intimate that they were no exception; Lydgate has Death reminding the patriarch of his 'dowble cros / of golde & stones clere', whereupon the latter recognizes the uselessness of 'suche tresowr'.[68]

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al. (London and New York, 1983), chapter III.3, pp. 247–62; R. Potter, *The English Morality Play: Origins, History and Influence of a Dramatic Tradition* (London and Boston, 1975), esp. chapters I and II; P. Spinrad, *The Summons of Death on the Medieval and Renaissance English Stage* (Columbus, 1987), esp. chapters I–V; Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, esp. pp. 526–36.

63 Potter, *The English Morality Play*, pp. 20–21.

64 *The Pride of Life*, ll. 363–6, in *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, ed. N. Davis, EETS, s. s., 1 (London, New York and Toronto, 1970).

65 *The Castle of Perseverance*, in *The Macro Plays*, ed. M. Eccles, EETS, o.s., 262 (London, New York and Toronto, 1969). Only Lecherye is presented as a female figure amongst the Vices in this play.

66 *Everyman*, in *Three Late Medieval Morality Plays*, ed. G. A. Lester (London, 1981).

67 *The Interlude of Youth*, in *Two Tudor Interludes*, ed. I. Lancashire (Manchester, 1980).

68 Warren, *The Dance of Death*, Ellesmere MS, stanzas XVI, l. 123, and XVII, l. 132. For consistency's sake, the version in the Ellesmere MS is quoted throughout, unless otherwise indicated.

Similar warnings about vain riches are also issued in Lydgate's dialogues between Death and the archbishop, the bishop, and the canon; the abbot is instead plainly guilty of gluttony. Lydgate's hermit sums up the basic truth: 'No man is riche / that lacketh suffisaunce'.[69] The Windsor carving might even represent a usurer, who was an even more obvious hate figure. The usurer occurs in many *danse macabre* versions, including Marchant's 1485 woodcuts (Pl. 12), in which the usurer expresses his disbelief at Death's unexpected summons: 'Et ne me pourroit secourir. / Mon or: mon argent: ma cheuance'. He does attempt to make last-minute amends for his sins by giving money to a poor man – but still only as a loan, as the latter complains. Lydgate echoes the usurer's French versions in his poem: 'Socowre to fynde I see no maner weie / Of golde ne siluer be no cheuisshaunce'.[70]

Whether the Windsor misericord shows an actual usurer or not, Avarice was a popular theme in medieval sermons and other literature. The popular moralistic Middle English poem *Erthe upon Erthe*, which survives in two versions in different manuscripts from the early fourteenth century on, contrasts the transitoriness of life with man's attachment to worldly wealth. Besides a reference to 'glisteryng gold', the B-version of this poem contains lines that may help to explain the buildings behind Death on the Windsor misericord:

> Erth apon erth wynnys castellys and towrys;
> Then seth erth vnto erth: 'Thys ys all owrys'.
> When erth apon erth hath bylde hye bowrys,
> Then schall erth for erth suffur many hard schowrys.[71]

The poem was copied onto the west wall of the nave in the chapel of the Trinity at Stratford-upon-Avon, where it features on scrolls surrounding a four-winged angel (St Michael?) painted beneath a martyrdom of St Thomas Becket. This chapel also houses the *danse macabre* mural commissioned by the former London Lord Mayor Sir Hugh Clopton in the late fifteenth century. According to the antiquarian R. B. Wheler in his 1806 work *History and Antiquities of Stratford upon Avon*, beneath the angel were also painted two men 'holding another scroll over a body wrapt in a winding sheet, and covered with some emblems of mortality', with further verses on that scroll.[72]

[69] Warren, *The Dance of Death*, stanza LXXVIII, l. 624.

[70] Warren, *The Dance of Death*, stanza LI, ll. 403–4. Warren translates *cheuisshaunce* as 'borrowing or lending money'.

[71] *The Middle English Poem, Erthe upon Erthe, printed from Twenty-Four Manuscripts*, ed. H. M. R. Murray, EETS, o. s., 141 (1911, repr. London, New York and Toronto, 1964), stanza 3, ll. 9–12. Murray, p. x, points out that this B-version is common in fifteenth-century manuscripts. I am grateful to Dr Miriam Gill for drawing my attention to this poem.

[72] Murray, *Erthe upon Erthe*, p. xii. Davidson, *The Guild Chapel Wall Paintings at Stratford-upon-Avon*, p. 9, describes the corpse further as 'eaten by worms with three bones and two skulls'. The angel can still be observed behind a door in the

The macabre connection between money and mortality clearly moved across the country. Early in the sixteenth century, a painter filled two panels on the south side of the chantry chapel of Robert Markham in the church of St Mary Magdalene in Newark-on-Trent (Notts.) with a figure of Death on the left and on the right an elegant young man, who vainly dips his right hand into his purse (Pl. 24).[73] The flower held out by Death may be a parody of courtship, but it was also traditionally an emblem of transitoriness, and Death's left hand points tellingly at the earth below. However, it is the detailed will of 1513 by the wealthy Thomas Cooke, Esquire, of Ludlow that offers one of the most striking links between money, mortality and the *danse macabre*, while at the same time illustrating the spread of the theme from London. Cooke, who had already founded a chantry chapel in the local parish church of St Lawrence, desired a brass that was to show the figures of Cooke himself and his wife Isabel, as well as 'third after the mortal after the daunce of powles having a scripture in his hand in this manner

> "Man behold so as I am now, so shalt thou be
> Gold and silver shall make no plea
> This daunce to defende, but follow me" [...]'.[74]

In other words, Cooke and his wife were to be accompanied by a figure of Death similar to that in the *danse macabre*, or Dance of [St] Paul's, with Death holding a banderole with the warning that no gold or silver can help the living to avoid the dance of death. He may have been wealthy, but Thomas Cooke was keen to let the world know that he was fully aware of the uselessness of gold and silver in the face of death.

The theme of the *danse macabre* travelled widely: from the Continent to England and throughout most of Europe, from text into image and *vice versa*, and from painting into sculpture. It obviously appealed to artists and patrons alike, as it lent itself so well to moral warnings about the transitoriness of life and the vanity of earthly pleasures and wealth. As such, it was well suited to cemeteries as well as to choirs and chapels in which funeral services were held, and also to tomb monuments and chantry chapels. Not so much the occurrence of the *danse macabre* on the Coventry and Windsor misericords is surprising, as rather the apparent absence of the theme on choir-stalls elsewhere in Europe. The early sixteenth-century stone capitals in the Aître St Maclou at Rouen show that the theme made other excursions into sculpture, but those were the exception to the rule: the best known examples are in wall-painting, manuscripts, and print, usually with accompanying texts. It was British artists who chose to move the theme into a different setting and

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panelling; I am grateful to Dr Miriam Gill for this information.

73 Gill, 'Late Medieval Wall Painting in England', pp. 403, 405 and pl. 6.8.

74 H T. Weyman, 'Chantry Chapels in Ludlow Church', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 3rd series, 4 (1904), pp. 357–61 and esp. 359–60.

context. The *danse macabre* misericords at Coventry and Windsor were not decorative but instructive in purpose. They may ultimately have been unique in combining Death with both the Seven Deadly Sins and their remedy: the Seven Corporal Acts of Mercy. As such, they do not need accompanying verses to enlighten the viewer about the final message about the importance of good works and the futility of earthly goods: 'For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out' (I Tim. 6.7). When wealth and power are less than useless, good deeds will have to save each sinner when Judgement Day finally arrives.[75]

ADDENDUM

Since publication of this article it has been pointed out to me by Professor Pamela King that the Coventry 'Pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors' survives only in an early-nineteenth-century edition and not in a late-medieval manuscript, as erroneously stated on p. 47. While looking through the Drapers' Accounts in the REED volume for Coventry (n. 43), I was unaware of a character in the lost Cappers' pageant of the Harrowing of Hell who is described in the Cappers' Accounts as the 'mother of death'; she may represent Sin but is not really germane to my argument here. However, I am grateful to Professor Pamela King for bringing the above error and omission to my attention, and to Professor Meg Twycross for further information on the Cappers' pageant.

[75] I am grateful to Professor Elaine Block, Dr Miriam Gill, Dr Christa Grössinger, Mr Fred Kloppenborg, Dr Martine Meuwese, Dr Charles Tracy, and Dr Uli Wunderlich for their various suggestions and help with this paper, and for Miss Enid Davies for offering me an opportunity to scrutinize the Windsor misericord.

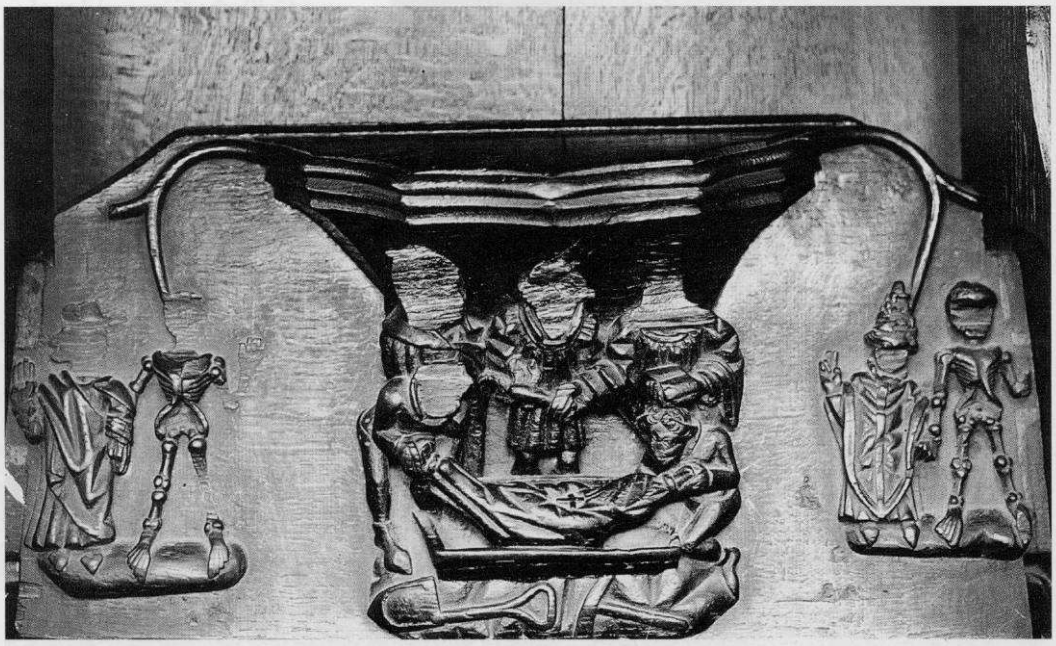
12 (Oosterwijk). Death with (left) the monk and (right) the usurer and the poor man, woodcut from Guyot Marchant's *Danse Macabre* first published in Paris in 1485.

13 (Oosterwijk). Man and woman seated or kneeling, with a skull in the foliate left-hand supporter, 1339–41, misericord, upper north side of the choir, Ely Cathedral (photo: Department of Art History and Archaeology, University of Manchester).

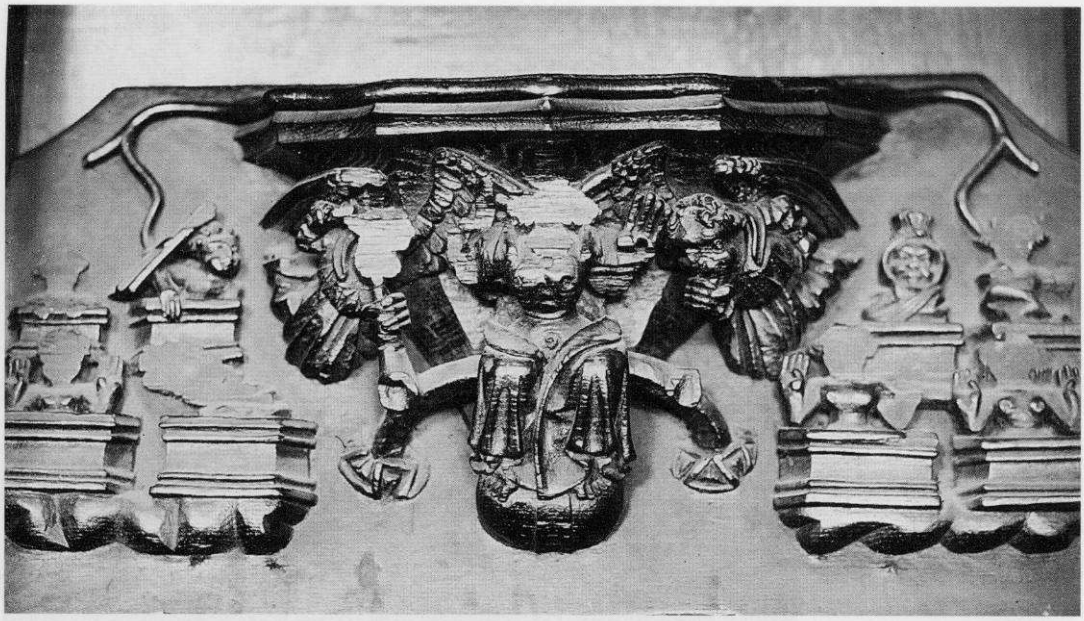
14 (Oosterwijk). Skull playing the flute on a bench-end in the choir-stalls in the Spitalkirche in Baden-Baden, originally carved in 1512 by Hans Kern for the Stiftskirche (photo: Jan Verspaandonk).

15 (Oosterwijk) (below). Misericord with the Corporal Act of Mercy of clothing the naked in the centre, flanked by two *danse macabre* supporters showing Death with a pilgrim(?) (left) and a bishop (right), originally at St Michael's Church, Coventry, until destroyed in 1940 (photo reproduced by kind permission of Coventry City Council).

16 (Oosterwijk). Misericord with the Corporal Act of Mercy of visiting the sick in the centre, flanked by two *danse macabre* supporters showing Death with two unidentified secular figures, originally at St Michael's Church, Coventry, until destroyed in 1940
(photo: RCHM. Reproduced by permission of English Heritage. NMR).



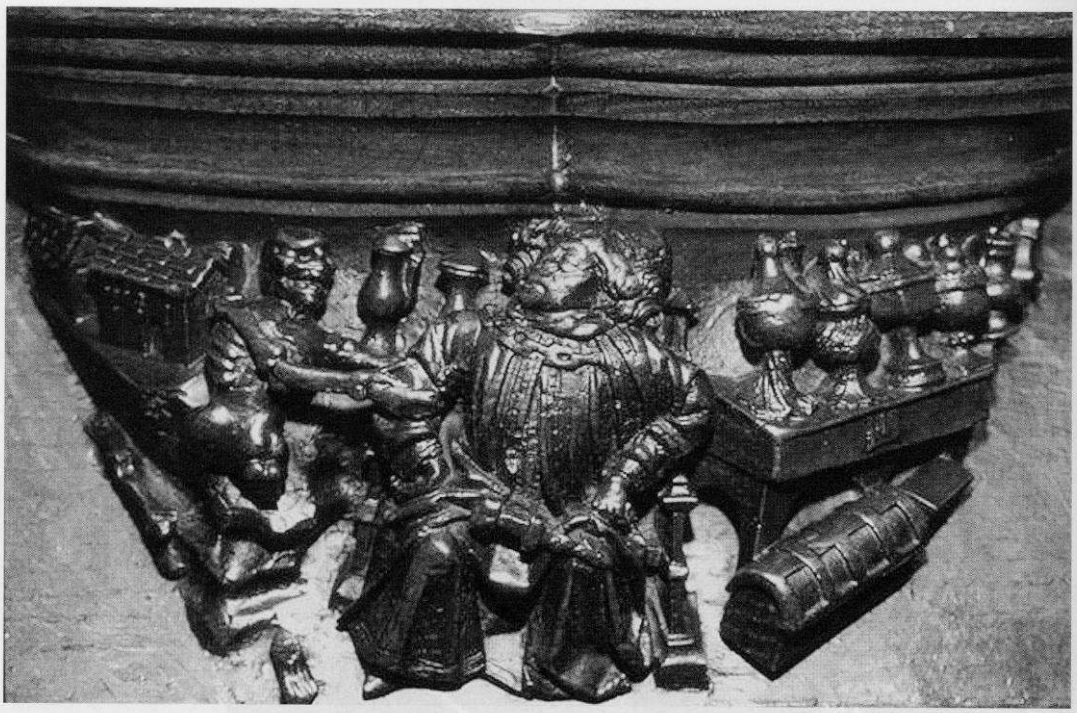
17 (Oosterwijk). Misericord with the Corporal Act of Mercy of burying the dead in the centre, flanked by two *danse macabre* supporters showing Death with the emperor(?) (left) and the pope (right), originally at St Michael's Church, Coventry, until destroyed in 1940
(photo: RCHM. Reproduced by permission of English Heritage. NMR).



18 (Oosterwijk). Misericord showing the Last Judgement in the centre flanked by the dead rising from their tombs, originally at St Michael's Church, Coventry, until destroyed in 1940 (photo: RCHM. Reproduced by permission of English Heritage. NMR).

19 (Oosterwijk). Death threatening a labourer, left-hand supporter on the single *danse macabre* misericord in the west block, lower row, on the south side in St George's Chapel, Windsor, dated 1477–84 (photo: Bert Ronhaar. Reproduced by permission of the Dean and Canons of Windsor).

20 (Oosterwijk). A thresher surprised by Death, right-hand supporter on the single *danse macabre* misericord in the west block, lower row, on the south side in St George's Chapel, Windsor, dated 1477–84
(photo: Bert Ronhaar. Reproduced by permission of the Dean and Canons of Windsor).



21 (Oosterwijk). Death summoning the rich sinner, central scene on the single *danse macabre* misericord in the west block, lower row, on the south side of the choir in St George's Chapel, Windsor, dated 1477–84
(photo: Bert Ronhaar. Reproduced by permission of the Dean and Canons of Windsor).

22 (Oosterwijk) (left). Death and the usurer, engraving by Matthäus Merian after the since destroyed mural of c. 1440 at the Dominican convent in Basel, first published in 1621.

23 (Oosterwijk). Death and the rich miser, woodcut from the famous *danse macabre* series designed by Hans Holbein the Younger in the 1520s, and first published as *Les simulachres & historiees faces de la mort* in Lyon in 1538.

24 (Oosterwijk) (below). Death and a young gallant, two painted panels on the south wall of the chantry chapel of Robert Markham in the choir of St Mary Magdalene's Church in Newark-upon-Trent (Notts.), early sixteenth century (photo reproduced by kind permission of St Mary Magdalene Church, Newark-upon-Trent).