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Fear and Joy in the Dance of Death: Re-Interpreting the 14th Century Plague's Artistic Genre

Mary Cianflone

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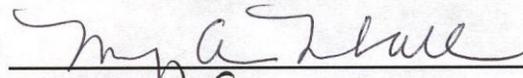
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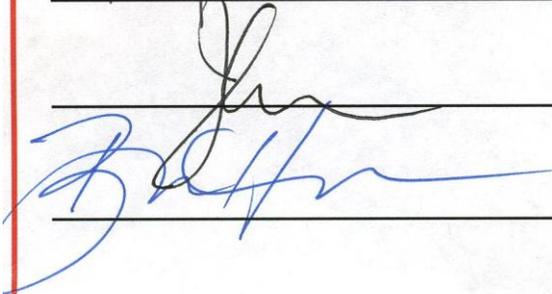
FEAR AND JOY IN THE DANCE OF DEATH:
RE-INTERPRETING THE 14TH CENTURY PLAGUE'S
ARTISTIC GENRE

BY

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BACHELOR OF ARTS, ENGLISH
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DECEMBER 2006

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts
Theatre and Dance

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

December, 2009

DEDICATION

Always for Julio.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores dancing bodies in the Dance of Death genre after the 14th century plague, known today as the Black Death. At that time, Western Europe withstood great losses in body count, with one third of the total European population dying, and in the faith and well-being of its civilization (McNeill 168). Even today, the Black Death continues to be a fascinating area of study because of its political, social, religious, and artistic impact. By considering dance, its images, and mythology, scholars can learn more about medieval perceptions of art, bodies, and faith. Taking as my research objective medieval Dance of Death works that specifically depict dancing characters bringing death, including skeletons and the deathly performer in the Pied Piper, I use the study of dance to look at the meaning of the form and garner insight about the emotional tone of the audience.

With both images of the Dance and one prominent dancing story, "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," I explore other possible meanings for this misread art. Previous interpretations of the Dance of Death have been negative or, at best, dismissive. For a more sensitive and thoughtful analysis, it is critical to factor in issues of the body, the spirit, and the faith surrounding the time of the Black Death. Such images and stories have the potential to reveal more than they have in past scholarship. Under this new scrutiny, dance becomes an expression of joy, instead of the ridicule and gloom that many analysts have attributed to it. This latter interpretation is unfair to the history and

place of dance amid other arts, as well as the medieval people who struggled to hold onto their faith in a dark time. In the Dance of Death, as shown through visual images and the Pied Piper tale, dance was not another betrayal of God or a morbid mockery of pain, but a way to alleviate the hopelessness of existence and the sorrow of loss.

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<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

Introduction to the Dance of Death

The term "Dance of Death" encompasses several artistic ideas from Western Europe at the time during and following the Black Death. More specifically, three distinct forms existed under this title both pre- and post-plague. First, actual dances, movement, and motion-accompanied song contained death as their subject matter (Daniels 37-45, Aberth 160). These forms, which include graveyard ceremonies and performances intended to prevent disease, planted the seeds for the Dance of Death examples I discuss here. Other later versions, like the children's dance, Ring around the Rosey, became an allegory for the plague symptoms. Though a valuable area of research for dance history, my concern in this work is to analyze the post-plague use of dancers as characters that bring death. The second type of Dance of Death works include images and stories that show a death figure as dancing partner. These works, though similar in nature to the ones I am concerned with here, do not contain actual dancing, but use dance as a metaphor for a procession through life. In this way, the skeletons or other death-bringers exist without depicted music and movement. Hans Holbein's Dance of Death woodcuts display several of these versions and, though I do discuss some of his works in this paper, I address those images that illustrate actual dancing. Again, this extension of dance as metaphor is a valuable addition to the dance history field, but due its own complexity, one that has its place in later writing.

The third category, and the one I approach for this work, comprises art and literary pieces that show dancing characters as agents of death. Like the second type, these works depict death as a partner, but, like the first, also contain actual movement and music. For my purpose here, the third category of the Dance of Death fits best with my goals to address dance as a philosophical idea, rather than specific analyses of actual dances. Though the areas of the first and second category may be necessary to understand a broad range of Dance of Death works, my goal is to explore some ideas of what dance as represented by a liminal mover meant to the people. Therefore, my work narrows to the images of moving skeletons and the story of the musical Pied Piper, instances in which dancing brings death and vice versa. This narrowing has much to

offer medieval study of both the physical and the spiritual. These representations of the Dance of Death reveal insights about the connections dance has with fear of the body, relief or even joy in death, the nature of faith amid pain, and overall effects of the plague on those who suffered by it.

Survey of Literature

Ascertaining every possible meaning of the Dance of Death artistic works would fill decades of study and, because of this, my intent in this thesis is only to enter the current conversation with a handful of questions and thoughts. What I desire to achieve with this work in particular, is to try new ways of looking at the same historical events to garner novel insights about then and now. More than that, though, I want to see dance history as an active participant in these broader historical conversations. My research sources encompass often-cited authors in their respective fields, which include European history, medieval medicine, and Catholicism. This paper and its accompanying resources are only a glimpse into one part of a fruitful and challenging study into medieval dance history.

The general downside to these varied resources is that, despite the in-depth analysis of plague effects on location, daily life, spirituality, mental well-being, and art, there is little collaboration across disciplines. Slight variations in prose style and focus of each work produce tidbits of well-worded or perceptive ideas, but often, these come out to little more than a sound byte. This work, to me, feels like a complex Venn diagram, in which some circles overlap beautifully, but other necessary ones never touching at all. Specifically for my work here, I use fragments and pieces to build a foundation for my argument, taking what I need usually from specific chapters of larger works. The research bonus of these texts, though, is that they often touch on various issues beyond the disease, including the Church's failings in the wake of illness, the artistic ramifications of the plague, and the emotional tone of the victims. For dance history, where there are few sources about my exact topic, this type of broad scope is the only way to work.

In locating and evaluating resources, I focused on three main topics from which to pull information: general information about the 14th century plague, which comprised the vast majority of my research; medieval Christian practices and philosophy, which established the spiritual mentality of the time; and dance history from surrounding decades, which analyzed the movements and interpretations within the Dance of Death.

First, the secondary research on the 14th century plague as an influence on Western Europe provides a foundation for my argument. The works from historians' research combine to create an explanation of origin, manifestation, reaction, and problem with the Black Death. For the plague and its effects, several sources proved useful. Norman Cantor's <u>In the Wake of the Plague: The Black Death and the World it Made</u> (2001) focuses on England and, as the title signifies, documents and reflects upon the effects of the plague. Cantor establishes context, though, and because of his readable and thoughtful research, remains one of the most quoted plague authors today. William McNeill's <u>Plagues and Peoples</u> (1976) lists the Black Death as only one chapter of an expansive analysis of various diseases and their effect across the world. It is a by-the-numbers work, describing the plague in terms of pre- and post-population, agricultural variants, and economics. Finally, Roy Porter's <u>The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity</u> (1997), a popular text in medical history classes, narrows down the exact symptoms of different plague variations. Though medieval descriptions of the disease are important as primary sources, Porter's text helps contemporary readers visualize the exact symptoms and their physical ramifications. Understanding and situating the symptoms and ramifications of the plague within the historical community of Western Europe creates a stronger foundation for my later analysis.

With their narrative style and sensitive writing, Faye Marie Getz's article, "Black Death and the Silver Lining: Meaning, Continuity, and Revolutionary Change in Histories of the Medieval Plague" (1991), John Kelly's <u>The Great Mortality: An Intimate History of the Black Death, the Most Devastating Plague of All Time</u> (2005), and Philip Ziegler's <u>The Black Death</u> (2000) treat the Black Death as a story to be told, weaving primary sources, historical facts, and writerly suppositions. Getz's piece addresses the plague as it fits in the world of history, including previous misconceptions of the disease and other interpretative arguments around it. Kelly's work informs but also elaborates on psychological perspectives of the various plague players, an approach that lends a human element to much of the data. Zeigler's research goals are to tell the story of the plague from an almost biographical standpoint, clearly breaking it down into origin and countries affected. Works like these contributed to my medieval world data set by

lending a softer and almost tender voice to some of the facts and events detailed by other authors.

In terms of relevant primary sources about the Black Death, I read Giovanni Bocaccio's narrative, The Decameron (first published between 1348 and 1351, according to Aberth) extensively, though only briefly cited, to evoke the mentality of the time for myself. The details of his stories may or may not be fictional, but scholars today consider their context and origin accurate. His accounts of the Black Death and the fear it brought make him an often-cited medieval author, one impossible to ignore. The Medieval Health Handbook of the late 14th century is vital in seeing life, including its sustenance, illness, cures, treatments, and various exercises, as the medieval people saw it. Collected with extensive illustrations, it also lends an interesting artistic perspective to the time. John Aberth's The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348-1350 (2005) and Anna Montgomery Campbell's The Black Death and Men of Learning (1931) are not primary sources themselves, but they base their works around extensive examples, cited and displayed in their text, of various documents, people, and events. Aberth provides primary sources for each topical chapter. Along with short synopses and extensive bibliographic information, he highlights the most important aspects of the Black Death. Aberth's book was one of the first I read and it gave me perspective and context that later helped me filter through other research works. Campbell details both the biographies of prominent medieval men who wrote on the plague, as well as the writings themselves. This approach provides a human look at these men who essentially failed in facing this disease, describing their own bafflement and fear.

Second, after getting a physical view of the plague, I focused on research about Christian medieval practices to gain a spiritual one. Theologian William T. Cavanaugh's article, "Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Social Imagination in Early Modern Europe" (2001), conveys the medieval perception of bodies, both literal and metaphorical, and how each fits in with society. Eucharistic sacrifice permeates every aspect of medieval life. For more detailed perspectives, Hans Küng's The Catholic Church: A Short History (2001) and André Lagarde's The Latin Church in the Middle Ages (1915) stand out. It is difficult to find accurate and concise research on the Catholic Church, since the insider's perspective is not always objective and the outsider's is not always accurate, but Küng

offers the best of both scholarly worlds—a historically candid clergyman—and Lagarde's is one of the few works I could find with actual details about the history of the Sacraments, which otherwise appear to have sprung up from the pages of the Bible without context. On that note, I always use The New Oxford Annotated Bible (2001) for any academic research citations. The translations are appropriate and the footnotes are without equal. The Bible and other spiritual resources provide framework for everyday life within such an overwhelmingly Christian community as medieval Western Europe.

Moving from the Church to actual moving bodies in the congregation became a challenging research shift. Especially with my analysis of the Dance of Death as it appeared to the medieval people, I needed to know much more than I thought I did about dead bodies and the rituals around them. Frederick S. Paxton's Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe (1990) and Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall's anthology The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe (2000) proved invaluable tools for such gory research. They humanized the dead body, reminding me and other modern readers that these elements of life were not distant to the medieval people. The deceased were not ushered away in sterile opaque bags, only to reappear as embalmed effigies of their former selves. A corpse was a real and present issue, one with which family members had to interact.

From a research perspective, living bodies proved almost as slippery as dead ones, and tracking the role of dance in the 14th century was especially difficult. Marilyn Daniels's The Dance in Christianity (1981), J.G. Davies's Liturgical Dance (1984), and Carl Engel's article, "Why Do We Dance?" (1920) all factor aspects of information necessary to analyze the Dance of Death. Daniels's historically relevant work tracks dance movement in Christianity since the beginning of the religion. Davies discusses the role of dance within Christianity and how it mattered then and now, with historical examples of specific dances representing only a small portion of her work. Engel's piece originates from a music journal with the intent for musicians to stay attuned to the role of dance in their field. He discusses dance history a great deal, often using poetic language to reiterate the artistic relationship between dance and music. In addition, Philip Freund's Dramatis Personae (2006) connects dance and the Christian religion, but only

because theater during the medieval time usually used dance and faith as methodology and subject matter. Combined, these four works illustrated both the purpose and the precise qualities of dance in the Church, providing both context and concrete examples.

Third, research on medieval dance represents the last section of necessary information for my analysis of the Dance of Death. Within dance history, the prominent and thoughtful scholar Alessandro Arcangeli, cites primary sources and dance pieces whenever possible. His "Dance and Health: The Renaissance Physician's View" (2000) and "Dance Under Trial: The Moral Debate 1200-1600" (1994) deal with the idea of dance as a genre, providing detailed articles for dance scholars that want to understand the art in context. Other works, such as Melusine Wood's <u>Historical Dances: 12th to 19th Century</u> (1982), take the different approach and track specific dances throughout time. In addition, E.L. Backman's <u>Religious Dances in the Christian Church and in Popular Medicine</u> (1952) provided context for many topics in this paper, including the folklore behind dance manias and the Pied Piper. Finally, Thoinot Arbeau's 16th century dance manual, <u>Orchesography</u>, offers valuable details on the actual movement of the dances. Both types of research, theoretical and performance-based, are useful, but I noticed that readers often do not know which type is the work in their hands until they begin reading it. Since many resources often focus on one distinct side— the idea of the dance versus the actual dance— this difference is important for scholars using the works. The term "dance" is not always helpful in establishing a topic's relevance in performance, history, or some combination thereof. For both the author and the reader, I would like to see dance research authors become more attentive to these subtle differences in goals, explicitly introducing their subjects with care.

After establishing a basis on which to make interpretations, I turned to the actual Dance of Death art pieces. For primary image sources, there was little question that Hans Holbein's early 16th century and Michael Wolgemut's late 15th century art pieces would of the highest priority. Holbein's and Wolgemut's woodcut images represent the facets of the Dance of Death that matter most to this essay.   In addition to sorting through many illustrated medieval texts, a search of ARTSTOR provided other useful images from the appropriate time. After the images, I chose Robert Browning's 1842 version of The Pied Piper story because of its fidelity to the original legend, its lyrical nuances, and the

abundance of theoretical work on the poem itself. By studying Browning through Emma Buchheim (1884), Arthur Dickson (1926), and John Dirckx (1980), I found much more historical information than I would have by just focusing on the Pied Piper legend. Though from an art history perspective, Louise Marshall's "Manipulating the Sacred: Image and Plague in Renaissance Italy" (1994) was one of the most helpful works I encountered. Her purpose and intent in writing mirrored mine, namely to reevaluate previously studied works from a more objective point of view. She uses Dance of Death, as well as the plague, as context for her article on later art, giving me significant information for my own work.

Overall, simply researching this thesis taught me much about my topic and my field. The pieces about the Black Death and Christianity usually spread themselves so far across time, with my secondary plague sources ranging from 1931 to 2008, that searching for details becomes difficult. Because their fields, including history, theology, and philosophy, have more extensive reputations in academia, their topics have been in the research world longer and so have a wide area from which to pull. Many dance history works are guilty of the opposite, usually focused on only one dance at one time in one location, leaving it to the newer scholars to fill in the gaps along the way. The necessity for this type of micro-research has its place, but I often found myself wishing for more information across an era or location. By no means do I claim, though, that historical analyses of the Black Death are exhausted. Assessing the place of each of these three veins, the Black Death, medieval Christian faith, and dance, helped me understand even more why I wanted to do this work. Dance has come so far in terms of availability of academic sources, but still has much more to go. Though performance may currently be a popular topic in other areas of study, there are less texts right now from a dance perspective that link the field to the outside. Rather, others reach in, instead of dance reaching out.

Placing the Dance of Death within Dance History: Methodology and Goals

In her 2001 essay, "'Taken by Night from its Tomb:' Triumph, Dissent, and *Danse Macabre* in Sixteenth-Century France," art historian Rebecca Zorach sums up the burden of those who study this past art of dance. She writes:

> It is not my intent to complain of the difficulty of establishing a point-by-point rendering of what actually happened. I want rather to acknowledge that in performance we confront a moving target and that we ourselves (that is, scholars, critics, observers) do not necessarily 'stand still.' The stilled and bounded object, the fixed viewing position, are nowhere to be found. (224)

Zorach cites the absence of a "still and bounded object" and dance historians especially understand this idea. Any historian, especially one studying bodies in performance, walks between two opposing biases. The first is to project such a modern perspective onto the subject that the research pulls the past too far into the present, rendering objective and compassionate study impossible. The second is to keep such a distance from the subject that the past becomes something alien and strange. A balance is necessary to appreciate the people and events that came before. It is impossible for scholars today to be impartial to their own generation's history, but it is also disrespectful to ignore the circumstances and norms of a time. As one of the most personal arts, the barest version of dance consists of a single instrument—the performer's body. Because of this intimate and internal connection, dance resonates as a historical image of the body and bodily perceptions. As with literature, sculpture, and other more fixed forms of art, dance represents so much more than performed movement. Similar to a fossil cast into the earth, dance reflects moments in time.

Tracing the ephemeral veins of its history amid more physically tangible works, such as literature or sculpture, requires a different set of techniques. The loss of any art is a tragedy whose aftershock pulses through generations. In the absence of a completed and enduring product, the dance genre repeatedly falls victim to this passing. Without notation, recorded materials, and heritage performances by trained dancers, many dance works, and the artistic philosophy and history around them, cease to exist. Those that remain become vital to the field as lone survivors who bear witness to the rest of the artistic and academic world. For these reasons, dance researchers must repay the favor

and treat historic works with new, thoughtful, and respectful inquiry, even if scholars from other fields have already discussed them. Dance students, instructors, and even enthusiasts have a responsibility to look at dance from their own points of view in order to learn as much as possible about it and to help preserve it in the annals of academic research.

Just as one dance could never speak for all, though, one critique, theory, or analysis cannot reveal every insight a particular piece or genre has to offer the current dance community. Indeed, this goal would be detrimental to such a young historical field as dance.[1] Instead, using several different methods and questions to build an academic conversation around the art, scholars today can solidify it even more firmly in the present and future. Because dance is also a relatively new area of research compared with others such as the history of literature, music, and visual art, the analytic techniques proven valuable in other relatable academic fields are an important place to find new interpretations. By looking at dance during a particular historic episode, and using analysis typical in other fields, scholars can learn more about the people, the art, and the time.

From this perspective, the plague epidemic of the 14th century provides a powerful example of the challenges of this mode of research. The Black Death and the subsequent writings about it span decades, disciplines, and academic stances, attesting to its prominence and intrigue in many fields. Because of its physical expanse over several countries and its frequent resurgence over the course of centuries, the Black Death influenced the generations that survived it. As with any epic disaster, natural or manmade, the survivors carry the weight of memory into the future. Instead of asking what the Black Plague did to people's minds, writers can ask what was on the minds of the people. An excellent approach to this concept is a study of what sorts of mortal warnings people gave to later generations and how dance captured those feelings. That is, what lessons about life and death did they want to pass on and how did they use dance to do it? More specifically, what were they afraid of, and why? For the Black Death, the automatic response could very well be "death" and not "dance." On closer examination, though, dance connected to the terror of the 14th century sufferers. Tales of caution that feature the moving body, namely the Pied Piper of Hamelin, and visual images of dance

from and about this medieval period reveal distinctive viewpoints about physical and spiritual existence. Narrowing the focus in this way reveals even more about the possible effects of the plague on its victims. By doing so, readers can understand more about other responses of fear and their relationships to art, both in and out of similar disasters.

In terms of documentation during the mid-14th century, the writings available to scholars today include items such as church registries, eyewitness accounts, and physicians' notes (Aberth 5-7, Marshall 486). Such "factual" data does little to illuminate the spirit and mind of the people. Death statistics underscore the terrible effects of the Black Death, but using primary artistic, narrative, medical, and spiritual sources to delve further into the effects of the disease exposes an even greater perspective. Few victims wrote about their first-hand experiences during the plague. Illiteracy in a non-print culture poses one major issue, in addition to the fact that, even with opportunities to record, there were more pressing concerns in a day's work than accurate journaling. For these reasons, even insightful documents leave voids for research today. As such, scholars must be open-minded when considering different perspectives of the same event. In this case, they can ask what dance reveals that other art forms cannot, such as when people were unwilling to discuss fears about their bodies, would they be more willing to discuss fears about dancing?

This project focuses on understanding possible interpretations of the deadly dancers in Dance of Death works, specifically what they meant and revealed to the generations that survived the Black Death. Such an analysis requires in-depth understanding of both the body and the soul's role in medieval life. The functions of both influenced dance as a physical art that manifests inward emotion, but also exist too closely together in the medieval mindset to separate. The physical and the spiritual went hand-in-hand, so that seeing one is only possible by seeing the other. For these reasons, this essay begins with historical and medical contexts for the Dance of Death. Chapter One, "The Medieval Body," discusses the physical issues around the Black Death, including causes and aspects of the plague, the burdens left for the living, 14th century medical thought, and how the idea of the soul fit into the idea of the body. Chapter One also presents examples of how medieval dance existed in healthier times, detailing the role and types of proper social dancing. Building from the physical to the spiritual, my

second chapter, "The Medieval Spirit," discusses the Catholic Church as the main venue for community and faith in Western Europe and its failing at the time of the Black Death. It also illustrates concerns of Purgatory and mutations of the body and soul, such as the Flagellant movement and dance manias, which complicated previously held beliefs of the medieval faithful at a time when they desperately needed comfort. As with the preceding chapter, "The Medieval Spirit" touches on the role of dance in the Church during happier times before the Black Death.

After the foundation of the body and soul, the second half of this thesis analyzes the actual Dance of Death. There is a chapter each dedicated to the Dance of Death images and one story version of the Dance of the Death, "The Pied Piper of Hamelin." Chapter Three, "Death and the Dance," goes further into the physical and spiritual role of the dead body, then presents and interprets various famous images of the Dance of Death, including selections from Hans Holbein's woodcut series and Michael Wolgemut's image of graveyard skeletons. Overall, the discussion of the Dance of Death focuses on these skeletal identities, asking the questions: Who are they? Where did they come from? Why are they dancing, and doing so with such joy? The answers to these questions are the key to understanding why the Dance of Death was not as negative as previous researchers attributed. The final chapter, "The Pied Piper and the Dance of Death," expands on the analysis of the third, but with a different perspective. It describes the story of the Pied Piper, its history, and its connections with the Black Death, as well as its role in the Dance of Death genre, offering another example of a fatal leader of the Dance.

Within these four chapters, my goal lies in exploring one possibility of what dance may have meant to the people. Using these deathly performers situated in the context of a great physical and spiritual failing, dance becomes something more than just a social art form. Their connotation for the survivors of the plague becomes a macabre comfort. Analyzing the art in this way helps dance historians potentially see more than just the historical role of practiced dance forms, but dance's philosophical and emotional implications, as well.

CHAPTER ONE: THE MEDIEVAL BODY

Causes and Ramifications of the Plague

> *It rolled like a fog out of the mysterious East, a crawling miasma exhaled by earthquakes and volcanoes, by the rotting dead in graveyards and battlefields, by decaying matter in marshes and swamps (Getz 276-277).*

The plague as an anthropomorphic entity appears as a common metaphor in current descriptive historical writings. 20th and 21st century authors often give it a personality, a series of progressive actions, and distinct goals that appear unknown to its victims. This practice does not stray far from the medieval feeling that the plague possessed human-like qualities of ill intent. It was a strange traveler, a bringer forth of poison, with distinct movements and patterns. At first for the Western Europeans, this poison seemed foreign in origin and intent, but, as the unrelenting devastation continued, that explanation did not encompass the severity of the plague. As it continued to kill, the medieval population soon felt that the Black Death came from elsewhere, but it came because of their actions. Getz's quote conjures images of the plague rising from a hazy place in the diseased earth, methodically moving from east to west. Today scholars know what the medieval people only suspected through observation, that the plague did travel in this way, from Asia to Italy and up through the rest of Western Europe, through merchant lanes with strangers coming from various places. The people saw it as an airborne congregation of all the toxic exhalations from the dead or dying that, as Getz notes, "rolled" toward them with unstoppable aim.

Though there were other historical outbreaks of the plague, for the 14th century Europeans there had been none in recent memory (Ziegler 15). There had also been no natural disaster, manmade crisis, or spiritual catastrophe in their or their recent ancestors' lives on the same level as the Black Death. Despite this relative ignorance, immediately before the plague arrived, the average medieval citizen already lived a hard existence. They started to be "weakened by malnutrition, exhausted by [the] struggle to win a living from [an] inadequate portion of ever less fertile land" (Ziegler 23). These difficulties came about mainly from the once-welcome occurrence of population growth and agricultural expansion. Cantor describes the late 13th century combination of "unusually

warm weather" and "adequate moisture" that helped develop food supplies and fend off illness and death, eventually peaking Western European population at roughly 75 million before the Black Death (Kelly 16). The unprecedented prosperity began to make life uncomfortable, straining land, space, and food resources, but it could not last, and famines started to take their toll in the early 14th century (Cantor 8). These struggles still did not prepare the people for what was coming. The shock that the plague brought was unlike anything that came before. In this way, the Black Death acted as a predatory alien that entered a weak and susceptible land ripe for destruction. In perspective, Hecker puts the dead at 25 million throughout Western Europe, which would coincide with the often-used loss of a third of Kelly's 75 million. These numbers include 100,000 in Venice, 50,000 in Paris, and over 100,000 dead in London (22). That these losses occurred in only the few years between 1347 and 1350 emphasizes their profound impact.

The medieval population reacted to what they saw with understandable confusion and fear. The disease itself disturbed witnesses and horrified its prey. Porter details the bubonic plague, one aspect of the Black Death:

> After a six-day incubation, victims suffer chest pains, coughing, vomiting of blood, breathing troubles, high fever and dark skin blotches…as well as hard, painful egg-sized swelling (buboes) in the lymph nodes in the armpit, groin, neck and behind the ears. Restlessness, delirium, and finally coma and death generally follow. (124)

In addition to this prevalent bubonic form, Ziegler notes the complication of a second illness, the pneumonic, or pulmonary, plague, which had a swifter mortality rate and "attacks the lungs" (17). Though the bubonic version killed the most people, the pneumonic plague was not slight, and most of Europe suffered from an awful combination of both. "The link between the two," Ziegler explains, "is to be found in an attack of the bubonic plague during which the victim also develops pneumonia" (17). McNeill also emphasizes that double threat of the plague combination's transmission from both fleabites and person-to-person exhalations (166-168). Whether together or alone, the two diseases were brutal, with few recoveries once symptoms developed. United into one plague, they became the Black Death.

Along with pain and violence for its victims, the plague also assaulted the surrounding caretakers. Porter's notes of "delirium" meant that sufferers were not always

coherent and, as Kelly details, there were reports of "agitated victims shouting madly from open windows or walking around half-naked or falling into a stupor" (21). Whether or not the plague actually affected the nervous system to cause such madness, the pain alone would have been sufficient to transform a loved one into a wild stranger. Another terrible aspect of the Black Death was the incredible stench given off by the ill (Kelly 21). Not just the victim, but the family, too, had to smell the infection of the plague while the sufferer still lived. The stink of rotting dead tissue still attached to the victim's body clung to the air without mercy and was revolting to the point of being almost unbearable.

For the medieval people, the Black Death's putrid air especially manifested the descent of God's wrath. Like the Old Testament punishments, European Christians saw the plague as a condemnation of their guilt (Ziegler 24). This interpretation was not unusual or unreasonable. At that time, both the learned and unlearned believed that the plague, like many other disasters, happened at the will of God. Little distance existed between medieval science and spirituality. Rather, the two united to form what many medieval scholars and physicians viewed as a sort of informed faith. For example, Getz notes that the "plague was at once both natural and supernatural—natural in that it arose from natural causes: corrupt air, earthquakes, or malign planetary conjunctions; and supernatural, in that it was God's awful remedy for sinful behavior" (273). Getz is correct in this distinction, but the medieval population would not have seen it as so distinct. For them, natural *was* supernatural, and vice versa. Any medicinal cures or palliatives came from divine inspiration and direction. God's decree of death, not any lack of potency or healers' skill, decided the success of treatments. Doctors could help, and may have even succeeded in healing, but the preservation of life was still at the mercy of God's will. Ultimately, science and medicine only went as far as God allowed (Aberth 5-6).

To further complicate matters for the Black Death's ailing faithful, there was no way of knowing which sin or sins in particular caused the anger of God, and thus no way of immediately remedying them. There were any number of human failings from which to choose that stood as evil enough on their own. Also, the plague was so potent and created such mental anguish that degradation and sinful behavior often became the result

of people giving up all hope. Campbell describes a 14th century increase in "lawlessness" and "outbreaks, both popular and intellectual, against authority" (129). Hecker also notes: "Morals were deteriorated everywhere, and the service of God was in great measure laid aside" (25). If God had abandoned them to this disease, many then wondered about the purpose of remaining close to Him. In this doubly painful way, Getz notes that "behavior could be both the cause and the effect of the plague," trapping the people in an unbroken circle (274). The Black Death appeared powerful enough to feed on itself in this way, cursing the living many times over.

Daily Life during the Plague

For these reasons and more, daily life became agonizing under the Black Death. The dying passed swiftly and painfully, but the living often endured the most tribulation. With massive amounts of dead, burial became difficult and funerary rites nearly impossible. First, clergy died at the same rate as the lay population, and often more so because they worked to comfort the dying. Without them, there was no one to perform holy rites. Also, it was physically arduous keeping up with the sheer amount of grave-digging. As strong men fell ill, the practice of burying the dead grew cruder, until many villages resorted to throwing loved ones in large pits. Many survivors did not have the physical strength or stamina to keep up. Honoring and mourning the dead became more a matter of disposing of the body as fast as possible, especially when many families had other sick members that needed their care.

More than holy blessings and grave-digging became issues for the survivors. Each death in such a small community erased a special group of skill sets and talents. Tailors, cobblers, cooks, and any other job vanished if its practitioner caught the plague. Villages that had once thrived became gaunt spaces. Cattle and other livestock wandered starving through the lands, their caretakers long dead (Getz 269). Crops became wilderness, as nature reclaimed parts of the now unguarded land. Some who could move on to other places tried, but many other villages either would not allow newcomers bringing the disease or were in a similarly dire position themselves. The people were trapped with no recourse. In just a few short months, and sometimes even weeks, the ramifications of the Black Death could wipe out an entire community. Exact population numbers vary, but Ziegler notes German sources that claim hundreds died daily, totaling thousands in large provinces during the year 1349 alone (62). Physicians and clergy, when they somehow managed to stay alive, offered little support to the people. Spirits were low and all previous prevention and treatment, including prayer and medicine, appeared useless against the Black Death.

The Four Humors

> *The rags of a poor man who had died of the disease being strewn about the open street, two hogs came thither, and after, as is their wont, no little trifling with their snouts, took the rags between their teeth and tossed them to and fro about their chaps; whereupon, almost immediately, they gave a few turns, and fell down dead. (Bocaccio 6)*

This famous excerpt of Giovanni Bocaccio's Introduction to the *Decameron* depicts a poignant representation of the plague that, whether wholly true or exaggerated, captures the vulnerability of the living against the disease. The plague posed practical and intellectual challenges to medieval physicians. Its strength, speed, and intense symptoms left little room for analysis of the sick. Most practitioners aimed instead for prevention, depending on clean or "pure" air to stave off the illness (Kelly 171). They encouraged burning of fragrant herbs and other flora and fauna, such as juniper, rosemary, and pine, and, when outdoors, carrying a "smelling apple, a kind of personal scent that, like a gas mask, would protect against noxious fumes" (Kelly 172). They believed these odiferous remedies kept clean air in the body, while keeping poisoned air out. This prevention hinged on the fidelity of the practice, also ensuring they did not go near moist or unclean places.

At the time of the Black Death, medieval medicine based its practice on the "New Galenism," which combined progressive European ideas of fluid with traditional Greek medical philosophy (Kelly 165). The 2nd century doctor, Galen, emphasized a universal balance within the body, equating the equilibrium with health (Cantor 9). Of this New Galenism, the four humors comprised the foundation of most medical thought and their maintenance was a high priority for physicians. Kelly notes that "the theory of the four humors created by Hippocrates and expanded and elaborated upon by Galen could explain just about anything, from ulcers to pestilences to the dangers of hot, moist air" (165). A balance of all four necessary humors—phlegm, black bile, yellow bile, and blood—was the only way to good health and an excess or deficit of one meant sickness. In addition to the fluids, the humors also had elements and traits for which each was responsible, and which needed balance, as well. Blood, hot and moist, connected with air, while phlegm, cold and moist, connected with water. Yellow bile was warm and dry,

connected with fire, and black bile was cold and dry, connected with earth. Of these four, blood and air were the most important to health, acting as the greatest remedy and posing the greatest threat.

The balance of the four humors is critical in understanding perceptions of the plague, bodies, and dance at that time. As a disease that caused fever, sweat, pus, blood, and other wet symptoms, medieval physicians would have immediately connected the Black Death with a "blood" disease, one dealing also with heat and moisture. This combination was potent and deadly, creating great fear among doctors who could at first only guess at the difficulty they faced. Prominent medieval physician Ibn Khātimah noted that people of a hot and moist temperament were especially vulnerable to infections like the plague because those with compositions similar to an attacking disease would not possess the proper humors to defend itself (Campbell 63).   He also believed that physicians could, by treating the weaker humors in a particular body, create a necessary defense against an attacking illness (Campbell 64). Despite this trusted logic, medieval physicians would have quickly seen that any previous methodology, including Khātimah's, was no match for the plague. The connections of the Black Death with air and blood were ominous.

Air and Blood

In the medieval mindset, any danger to the body was also a danger to the soul. The emphasis on a belief of the plague's airborne transmission resonates next to this medical basis of the humors. Any bad air that entered the body immediately poured into the bloodstream, doing extensive damage as the veins carried it to every organ (Getz 271). Kelly presents an excerpt of the critical medieval handbook, the *Compendium de epidemia per Collegium Facultatis Medicorum Parisius,* which explains, "corrupted air, when breathed in, necessarily penetrates to the heart and corrupts the substance of the spirit there and the heat thus destroys the life force" (169-170). This "substance of spirit" existed within the body, but was on a different physical plane. Medieval thought contended that the soul lived inside the body, separated only after death (Le Goff 83, Paxton 44). This partnership between the respiratory and bloody aspects of the plague emphasized both physical and spiritual danger.

Blood as a fluid was the most important, and most dangerous, of all the humors, "since it contained and transported the three others" (Bildhauer 24). For the medieval population, it was a critical element for both physical and spiritual health. Writes Bildhauer, "In medical thought and practice, the key to understanding the body was to understand the state of the blood" (23). Physicians searched for insights of the blood from "urine diagnosis, through an analysis of the colour and consistency of samples from bloodletting and through examining the external appearance of a patient and taking his pulse" (23-24). Overall, although fluids like urine and sweat were tools of diagnosis, they were really just ways to access the blood of a patient. In medieval thought, human bodies were vulnerable vessels of loose organs and fluid not to be filled or shaken too much. Bildhauer continues, writing, "…putting such an emphasis on the adjustment of fluids within a closed system, where a flow through the skin meant a 'loss,' a removal from the system, medical practice affirmed the concept of the body as a normally enclosed container" (25). For these reasons, internal balance was the key to health. With the exception of air and food, though, there were few external resources for healing. Skin held everything together, a critical fact when looking later at the bare skeletons of the Dance of Death. Even a minor rupture was a serious emergency, not only for the wound

itself, but for what it also meant to the rest of body. Several symptoms of the plague appeared to coincide with this logic, including accompanying fever, or hot blood, as physicians would see it, and the wet seeping of wounds, which often combined dripping blood and pus.   Monitoring of fluids and air was critical for health, but almost impossible during the plague epidemic. Because of this reasoning, the symptoms of the Black Death were especially terrifying to any witnesses. Even the sight of an ill person, certainly unpleasant in its own right, would instill great fear.

Those that were brave enough and attempted to treat the disease faced a daunting task. The difficulties in any type of ministering to victims lay in the plague's fickle descent. Whole families could fall sick, or none, or only the children, or only a single parent. Just as often, the healthy perished while the frail lived. There was no way of telling who would become sick next, hence the medieval interpretation of invisible poisoned air as a cause. Families only had each other to care for them, though, and one member could not abandon the other for fear of contagion. Loneliness and terror became the reigning emotions. Kelly writes, "In plague, fear acts as a solvent on human relationships; it makes everyone an enemy and everyone an isolate. In plague every man becomes an island—a small, haunted island of suspicion, fear, and despair" (177). Kelly's description of people as islands is especially apt. It is easy to imagine the people, lost and cast ashore within their homes, crying for help and going unheard, wondering if anyone would come to their aid and realizing, as the days went on, that they were truly alone.

Dancing as Symptom, Dancing as Cure

Just as tending to air and blood affected the entire health of the medieval body, the broader notion of caring for the individual also meant caring for the community. At this time, a single body did not necessarily belong only to the man or woman, but also to the immediate surrounding world. The movements of bodies, whether via actions or illnesses, impacted the bodies of others nearby. As Cavanaugh writes:

> The medieval social imagination is dominated by the image of the body, drawn from both classical and Christian sources… In the medieval period, this organic imagination of society is fused with a hierarchical social ordering in which the three estates of clergy, lords, and peasants are arranged from superior to inferior, but are bound together in mutual obligation. The health of the whole body is ensured only by the fulfillment by each of his or her proper role, which is divinely ordained. (591)

There are three critical aspects of Cavanaugh's explanation. The first is how each piece of society fit together as a body. This unification was a physical, living entity and not the machine that society would become in later centuries.[2] Second, each function and purpose rested in divine will. Existence was not something over which fallible human beings had much control. Their purpose was to play their part and nothing more, which meant, third, it was only performing a deed (or a life) well that kept proper order. The "health of the whole body," as Cavanaugh puts it, rested on both the physical and moral actions of the people. When things began to change, like loss of control over individual bodies for example, the threat to society was extreme. In this way, bodily manifestations like dance became both solution and problem for physical and spiritual ailments. Davies writes, "Once [sic] reject the age old division of body and soul and accept instead the unity of the material and the spiritual, then dance cannot be decried as an activity exclusively physical" (95).

Before the Black Death arrived, while under the certainty of the four humors, medicine appeared easier. The internal fluids provided a guide for all aspects of life, including exercise such as dance. However, one of the difficulties for 21st century scholars studying dance from this time was, as Jennifer Nevile puts it in "Dance Performance in the Late Middle Ages: A Contested Space," the "almost schizophrenic" perceptions of the practice (303). It was either entirely wholesome or an extension of the

devil's vicious intent. It is important to first study the physical issues surrounding dance before moving to the spiritual. Where medieval health was concerned, there are certainly complications enough with dancing movement.

As a practice for healthy people, dance was respectable exercise and social habit. When practiced well, it brought goodness. Gugliemo Ebreo, in his 16th century dance manual, On the Practice or Art of Dancing, supports dance "for the honest and chaste of heart only," further sanctioning it as "both a science and an art" for those "with a joyful spirit" (91, 93). He also references the necessity of dancing as connected to the health of the four humors (87, 89). Ebreo's notes illuminate the perception of dance as a potent endeavor, capable of moral and physical highs and lows. Therefore, under proper supervision, dancing was a constructive leisure activity for the medieval people. Arcangeli cites its prescription by many medieval physicians, who claimed the vibrating air was good for the humors (Dance and Health 15-16). However, because of these same connections to breath and air, dancing could quickly turn hazardous to the body. For example, pregnant women and those with "excitable" personalities should never dance, for fear of over-agitation of the blood (Dance and Health 15, 18). This "over-agitation" meant not only illness or danger for the victim, but, through an increase of temper, could also manifest bad behavior that affected the whole community. Dance also "helps transpiration of excessive humours," which doctors considered a critical aspect of health (Dance and Health 15-16). Getz quotes one medieval physician as emphasizing "the importance of pure air in the prevention of [the plague]" (272). Having proper air in the body, aided by dance, meant that circulation was at a healthy rate and illnesses such as the plague could not take root.

Like every other aspect of medieval life, spirituality infused the art both literally and figuratively. It was critical that only people appropriate in body and spirit danced, as Arcangeli noted, and not those with physical ailments such as "vertigo," "nausea," "asthmatics," and the "obese" (Dance under Trial 18-19). Such bodily hindrances, according to the medieval mindset, went hand-in-hand with a flawed spirit. Another major objection to dance had little to do with the form itself. Its connection to the sins of lust or gluttony made it an easy target for over-zealous critics. Dance's place among such faults includes overindulgence in immorality, either as an opportunity for inappropriate

sex or as an accompaniment to "inane rejoicing" (Dance under Trial 129). The intent and circumstances like this are critical for dance and its reputation. It was not inherently wrong or sinful but, like so many other actions of the body, could be, and that was enough to warrant hesitation. For example, Arcangeli notes the common practice of critics who "justified their disapproval [of dance] by listing negative circumstances, more than condemning the nature of the action itself" (Dance Under Trial 139). The form was neutral in nature, but that did not exempt it from even circumstantial accusations. Because of this potential threat, dance's place in medieval life held deep implications for anyone desiring physical and spiritual health during the Middle Ages.

Movement and Music

Dance, along with skillful music, proved an important element for a wholesome life, but only when performed honorably, as decreed by clergy and physicians, who made the recommendations of such boundaries. In concordance with the balance of the humors, harmony between dance and music was critical. The late 14th century "Music Playing and Dancing" plate from The Medieval Health Handbook: Tacuinum Sanitatis, lists the standards of dance:

> *Nature*: To move the feet and body in rhythm with the music. *Optimum*: When there is a strict correlation between the music and the movements of the body. *Usefulness*: By participating, looking on, or listening with joy and accord. *Dangers*: When the accord among the musical notes is lost. *Neutralization of the Dangers*: When the accord among the musical notes is restored.

The strong emphasis of appropriate rhythmic accompaniment surpassed actual descriptions of the dancing movements. Arcangeli presents one prominent medical text, the 11th century Arabic Taqwin al-Sihha, a foundational work that would later become the English Tacuinum Sanitatis. In it, the author "argues for a strong correlation between dance and music: their harmonic accord is regarded as responsible for the benefits they bestow upon human health" and he explains that "the context of this theory is a medieval medical tradition in which a happy state of mind is considered as having a good effect on human health" (Dance and Health, 11). The combination of music and the dancing bodies is potently hazardous without the moral intent necessary for health. On a broader note, Arcangeli reminds readers that, "the movement of a dancer was often considered strange, because it is not everybody's everyday 'normal' behavior. A dancer looks like somebody who has stopped moving in the ordinary way, has suspended the usual control over his or her body, and is either acting in an extraordinary way or being possessed by an external force" (Dance under Trial 147). When done properly and with correct supervision, dance loses this strangeness within its accepted social practice. As the Tacuinum Sanitatis notes, the danger comes with misalignment, be it of the body or soul. The moment something shifts and the dance movement becomes unusual or questionable is when it becomes dangerous.

The proper method for dance during the later Middle Ages and early Renaissance was within a group of like-minded, wholesome individuals (Dance and Health 15, 17, 21-22), which included men, women, and children of the local community. The most prominent social dance during the mid-14th century was the Carole, a form that included versions called the Farandole and the Branle. The Carole, as Wood defines, was a "linked" dance with hand-holding, music, and singing (11). One version, the Farandole, consisted of "a line of dancers in single file, each holding the hand of the next" (Wood 11). The dancers often traveled outside, skipping and walking, following the lead of the person at the head of the line (Wood 12). This dance was quick, not at all solemn, utilizing fast and slow steps and different movement designs, including "Threading the Needle" and "The Snail" (Wood 18). "Threading the Needle" used the hands as arches under which the dancers took turns running through, while "The Snail" curled the line in on itself and back out again. The athletic and playful style of the Farandole, as with any chain dances, elicited exuberance and glee in its participants.

Next, the Branle, sometimes called "Round," was a circular dance in which the performers stepped to the right and left with joined hands (Wood 12). Thoinot Arbeau's 16th century dance manual Orchesography, describes the movement of the Branle:

> keeping the heels together and turning the body gently to the left for the first bar; then to the right, glancing modestly the while at the spectators, for the second bar; then again to the left for the third. And for the fourth bar, to the right again with a discreetly tender sidelong glance at the damsel. (55)

Wood elaborates on this description, explaining the performance as first a step to the left, one to the right, another to the left, culminating with a hop on the left foot while "swing[ing] the right forward and across the left with a straight knee (15)." Making eye contact with others in the circle, flirtation, and gentle joking prevailed in the Branle. Both dances, though simple in movement technique, brought great joy and fostered social relationships, such as courtship, within the community that practiced them. Wood notes the lack of virtuosity and the requirement, rather, of "perfect team work" in quality dancing (12). Like everything else in the medieval body, balance was essential. Ultimately, the movement was less important than the appropriateness of location, companions, and musical accompaniment.

Like the dance movements, the music that joined the Farandole and the Branle emphasized cooperation among instruments and melody. Simple combinations of horns, strings, and woodwinds, usually a trumpet, fiddle, and a flute, respectively, provided a steady flow for all dancers to keep time. In Timothy McGee's <u>Medieval Instrumental Dances</u>, he notes the prominence of the vielle (a precursor of the violin), lute, harp, pipe, and tambourine in 14th century music (26). While not all of the available instruments possible, McGee's list coincides with other documents and artistic renderings depicting popular music. In several examples, the Dance of Death skeletons particularly liked the pipe and small drums. The music itself often stayed instrumental, with a single dancer or all in a chorus together adding the vocal song. John Stevens notes in <u>Words and Music in the Middle Ages</u> the lyrical presence of repetition and rhythm, the former usually following a leader's call and the latter being simple enough to recall easily (186-191). Stevens writes, "… 'all choral dance-songs, all dances sung and performed in company, must have a metrical base'— a strictly measured rhythm— words as well as music are likely to contribute to this effect" (196-197). These lyrics and rhythms are extensive and varied but their ease in recollection ties them together. As a popular field for current historical musicians, reconstructions of such songs bring the modern listener closer to the music, and the dance, of the time.[3] Listeners can hear the prevalence of percussion instruments, often drums, keeping an even beat and smooth flutes and pipes playing with the harmony. Each dancing song usually had only one to three instruments at a time, creating more flexibility for smaller communities. In this way, it was easier to gather a group quickly together for song and dance, using only a few musicians and as many dancers as wanted to join. The simple melodies ranged from quick to slow, but the basic rhythms in each song remain the same, as Stevens claims. Therefore, it is easy to imagine the music that would accompany a lively Farandole or a stately Branle. Before the Black Death, the uncomplicated joy of music and dance acted as a cheerful outlet for life's minor stresses. After the Black Death, dancing and music remained, but changed. Now, new balances of life needed to be measured and reconciled, cooperating with the sick and the dead.

To understand the feelings of helplessness, Engel describes the beginnings of the dancing fervor that swept Europe during the plague:

> News traveled slowly in those days, and the tales of horror had hardly time to precede the fearful visitant himself. Hygiene was unknown. Superstition reigned everywhere. As village after village, town after town, fell a prey to this pestilence, the people of Europe were seized with terror and religious hysteria. The water of the well, the fruit on the tree, the air itself seemed poisoned…

He continues, illustrating the people's final grasp at control:

> At the point of deepest, direst misery, what is it that suddenly kindles the expiring flame of life, whips the flagging forces of humanity into a ghastly but magnificent assertion of their will to live? It is the dance, the fury of dancing! (522)

Engel's excerpts paint a startling picture of several facets of life, including dance, during the plague. Though his description may fit better with the reactive dancing manias, as discussed in Chapter Two, his point of dance as a refuge is important to note in respect to health. Before the Black Death, the four humors were a balanced and reasonable way for medieval physicians to treat their patients. As a gyrational exercise, dance had the greatest connections to breath and fluid in the body, and so the relationship to the plague was that much more severe. Dance was one way to measure health, as well as joy, when incorporated into celebration and praise. This logical progression of life began to break down when faced with the plague. Engel notes that dance did not disappear, but evolved to meet the emotional needs of the people, needs that were significantly different in the mid 14th century than they had been even a few years before. As the balance of life fell away, many people turned toward a familiar remedy—their faith in their once-strong Church. Unfortunately, there was to be little solace there, too, and dance continued to reflect the physical and emotional pain of the people.

CHAPTER TWO: THE MEDIEVAL SPIRIT

"The Privatization of Medieval Christianity"

Cantor penned the above phrase as a way to describe the frantic spirituality of the 14th century after the Black Death (204). For the medieval community, church meetings and masses were more than weekly obligations. The clergy were the teachers and leaders of their world. Küng describes the medieval church, writing, "Instead of the early church's liturgy of the people, there was a liturgy of the clergy, which offered a sacral drama in an incomprehensible sacral language (Latin) to the people, who looked on passively" (64). "Passively" is the critical word, as faith was like a product, passed from the priest to those in the church who took it gladly and without question. This system had its flaws, of course, but it functioned up to a point to meet the emotional needs of the medieval congregation. That is, until the Black Death swept through the land and cleared away people by the thousands. Priests, deacons, monks, and other clergy fell, leaving villages and towns abandoned of salvation. The honorable ones that stayed alive could not keep up with the illnesses and death. In caring for the sick, they also fell that much faster. The dishonorable ones fled, took bribes, and hid (Campbell 138). No matter the type, the men that once held the keys to God vanished just as quickly as everyone else.

For spiritual support, most Christians had one option—the Catholic Church. During the 14th century, the Pope, or any other religious authority, had not yet codified the Sacraments of the Catholic Church. Several religious men proposed variations of Sacraments, both major and minor, that ranged from only the Eucharist to dozens of possible graces. However, Bishop Paul Lombard's list of the Seven Sacraments, those known as doctrine today, was the most popular of the time, and therefore accepted as dogma, even though the Vatican did not officially cite as such until the 1400's (Lagarde 35). These Sacraments included Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Marriage, Holy Orders, Penance, and Anointing of the Sick. Though not all were necessary for entry into heaven, Baptism, Eucharist, and Penance were integral to a decent Christian existence. Men and women should choose from either Marriage or Holy Orders. Anointing of the Sick was critical as an extension of Penance, and important when considering the time of Black Death. With the final confession and blessing that came with the Sacrament,

believers could enter into the kingdom of heaven unburdened, free of sin, and readily at peace. Those that did not receive the Anointing, also called Last Rites or Extreme Unction, remained in Purgatory, weighed by the things they could not confess. Without this final Sacrament, a Christian life lacked finality.

The idea of Purgatory manifested itself in two elements, both of which created significant problems for the medieval Christians. Gordon and Marshall explain these foundational beliefs surrounding the Christian dead:

> The prominence of the dead in late medieval Latin Christianity was pre-eminently the result of the conjunction of two compelling ideas. The first was the gradual evolution and eventual formalisation of the belief that the majority of the faithful dead did not proceed immediately to the beatific vision, but underwent a painful purgation of the debt due for their sins in the intermediary state (and place) of Purgatory. The second was the conviction, predicated upon the theory that all faithful Christians in this world and the next were incorporated in a single 'communion of saints', that the living had the ability (and the duty) to ease the dead's sufferings in Purgatory. (3)

The bonds between spirits in Purgatory and the remembrances of the living created a symbiotic relationship that perpetuated itself in a legacy of faith. You prayed for the dead so that the living would some day pray for you. The Sacraments held one vital key to the terror during the Black Death since it was not an end, but an unholy one, that Christians feared most. Death was a familiar entity, though not an unstoppable one, with the Sacraments and God on the side of the living. Without them, though, there was reason to fear what death brought. Before Luther's Reformation and the later ideas of a personal faith, the way to heaven was through the Sacraments of the Catholic Church.

In 1349, a critical edict came from an English Bishop who, as clergy fell in numbers too great to replace, wrote these words: "'The Sacrament of the Eucharist, when no priest is available, may be administered by a deacon. If, however, there is no priest to administer the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, then, as in other matters, faith must suffice'" (Ziegler 97). This simple announcement may appear innocuous enough to readers today, but was horrifying in its deeper meaning for the medieval faithful. It meant that the people were alone. Though this decree did not span across all of Europe, it captured the destitution and, as Ziegler claims, the "demoralization in the infected areas" (97). The Sacrament of Extreme Unction was the final step for Christian men and

women to ensure their place in Heaven and meant less time atoning for sins in Purgatory. Without it, as well as without the Eucharist, many died feeling lost, abandoned, and alone. When this type of death happened, responsibility rested with the surviving family to help expedite the penance with prayers and blessings in the deceased's name (Paxton 66). It was more than a ritual, but the only way to relieve the burden of a sinful life before resting peacefully. Practically, it was also a ceremony with specific actions and words that few lay people witnessed more than once, if ever. Even if average men and women wanted to perform the service, most would not know where to begin. Still, it was difficult to imagine which was worse for these dying faithful—to have these sacraments carried out without the authority of a priest or to go without them entirely. Both were painful and frightening for a Christian follower who saw them as necessary for salvation.

For medieval believers, death was not an end for either the deceased or the living, but instead a new step in the process of life as a Christian. Even after the passing, both sides still had obligations to the other. The members of the Church on earth and the Church in heaven stayed connected (Cavanaugh 602). Gordon and Marshall note that "the dead established a claim on the memory of the living, and, explicitly or implicitly, and in a virtually contractual manner, required the 'counter-gift' of prayers for their souls in Purgatory" (5). These obligations become not only burdens, but terrifying curses when the plague survivors could not fulfill them. These depressing emotions of loneliness, abandonment, and fear did not bode well for the living. The living bodies of the faithful were alone with their dead.

Moving Away from the Church

Left without the guidance and authority of the clergy, the people's faith in the Church broke down, and faith in other things began to take its place. Poor communities revived old myths and legends, many of which contained dead bodies left behind. There was often a moral or ethical tone to these practices, and many did keep the orders of the Church in mind, but they possessed a distinct feeling of gloom. Hecker eloquently describes the spiritual state of many, writing, "the pious closed their accounts with the world—eternity presented itself to their view—their only remaining desire was for a participation in the consolations of religion, because to them death was disarmed of its sting" (31). Hecker's point contextualizes the Dance of Death, since the destruction of the plague removed the "sting" of loss. With the failings of the Church on earth, people turned toward other things to regain some semblance of faith.

As one extreme reaction to the Black Death, the Flagellants, or Brotherhood of the Cross, represent a dark turn in medieval Christianity. They were a group who believed that offerings of their flesh and blood for the sins of their brothers and sisters would appease God.[4] Originating in Germany in 1349 and gaining momentum as they moved to other nearby cities, they beat themselves with whips and other tools, often leather knots with iron tips (Ziegler 54-71; Hecker 32). They allowed their blood to flow as an offering to God, inflicting pain on themselves and spectacle on those around them. Besides the health risks involved with this huge scale of mobile open wounds, the Flagellants posed serious spiritual threats to people of many different faiths. They entered public spaces, usually church grounds, formed circles, preached, and whipped themselves before moving on to another village (Hecker 32-35). For those who believed in their cause, their power of authority cast serious doubts on the clergy, who appeared impotent before these imposing figures. Those that did not believe in their acts still witnessed horrific displays of gore and condemnation. When the plague continued despite their penance, the Flagellants turned toward the Jews as a cause for the disease. Torture and death became the new message of the Brotherhood, who exterminated, according to Hecker, Jewish people in the several thousands (38-39).

A mutation of social dance and bodily fear, dancing manias were another reaction to the Black Death. Though these manias pre-date the plague, they became associated with the disaster due to their prevalence as a responsive approach. Originally, the manias related to the Church in their role as either miraculous events or possessions, depending on the circumstances (Backman 170-171). Other versions created problems for clergy due to their disruptive nature, specifically during Church events. One story from 11th century Germany tells of a small group "led by the wiles of the Devil" to dance in the churchyard instead of attending Mass, causing the priest to urge them to stop or come inside the church. He had one boy try to pull his dancing sister away, but he was only able to tear off the arm, which did not bleed when separated from the body. This arm later became a relic within the church. The priest finally excommunicated the dancers for one year, during which they never stopped dancing (Backman 173-175). Though the origins were unclear, the medieval population believed these dance manias to be both a spiritual and physical ailment.

During the years of the Black Death, Hecker writes of "a strange delusion [that] arose in Germany, which took possession of the minds of men, and, in spite of the divinity of our nature, hurried away body and soul into the magic circle of hellish superstition" (80). Dance historian Carol Lee further explains that such delusions "were characterized by large numbers of people, often entire town populations, dancing until they collapsed or died of exhaustion" (11). The manias pushed people to their physical limits both internally and externally. The dancers flung their bodies to extremes, while their audience resembled the stricken faces of those that also experienced the spectacle of the Flagellants. The dancers sometimes traveled out of cities, crossing great distances to other places. Dancing manias could be "formless and nameless," but often took on the movement of a Farandole, with unstoppable frenzied chains led by someone at the front of a line (Lee 11). Daniels cites these dances as possessions, an explanation with profound spiritual and psychological interpretations (46-47). Either way, the drive to act was at the heart of the dancing manias.

There are general epidemics of these manias described as people dancing "without ceasing until they collapsed through sheer exhaustion" (Davies 52) or begging to be trampled as a plague cure (Kelly 293). It appears that men and women, both the

sick and the healthy, of all ages danced (Backman 170-181). The stories surrounding such events originate mainly from around Germany, an important fact when later discussing the Pied Piper of Hamelin. However, confirmation of facts about them often appear more as myth or rumor, lending validity to the idea of a Dance of Death mythology, but making historical details difficult to pin down. There were categories, too, of broader dance manias that became prevalent during the Black Death. One version was St. Vitus's Dance, which Daniels describes as movement with "wild delirium" and "frenzied leaps and turns" (48). The saint allegedly cured the disease, which allegedly affected to the nervous system. Though the dance existed before the Black Death, some believed it to be either a response to a stricken nervous symptom (Kelly 21) or a psychological reaction to the plague. The Italian version of an equally agitating dance was the Tarantella, allegedly due to the bite of the tarantula (Daniels 48). Though the manias came before and after the Black Death, they later became synonymous with the disease, due to the desperate and frenzied nature surrounding both.

The (Dancing) Body and the Church

Dancing was difficult to categorize for Christians because of its ambiguous virtue. The Church allowed and even encouraged dance in certain social situations and holidays, with clergy often joining the commoners in revelry. In the later years of the 14th century, the Church began to condemn dance, feeling they should distance themselves from the revelries of lay people (Daniels 33). Biblically, dance appeared as proper praiseful action, an outburst of pure joy, and one of the body's most sinful talents. Biblical characters credited dance as an expression of exultation in faith and love, a rejoicing of purity that was incomplete with simply words and song. Dance went hand-in-hand with joy. For example, in a moment of victory when the Ark of the Covenant entered his city, King David "and all the house of Israel were dancing before the Lord with all their might" (2 Samuel 6.5). The message is that David's joy could not be contained within his body, and so became dance. However, there were also complications around dance in the Bible that made it a difficult practice to categorize, including the dance around the golden calf (Exodus 32.6) and Salome's deadly seduction (Mark 6.22, Matthew 14.6). Each of these movement transgressions, though, still contains a sinful type of joy. The dissent occurs not because they dance, but because their dancing joy originated in the wrong place and context. Worshipping the golden calf spoke to a lack of patience and faith from the Israelites and Salome's failing was really her diabolical request for the head of John the Baptist, and not her enchanting movement. Despite the legends that sprung up around these examples of morally negative dancing, the actual words of the Bible do not condemn the movement—only its use in their respective circumstances. As these examples show, dance alone possessed little power for good or evil. It was the circumstances around dance, as well as who did it, that created the positive or negative influences. Even steadfast medieval disapprovers agreed that dance was not sinful, but rather "morally neutral" (Dance Under Trial 130). Ultimately, dance in the Bible was a manifestation of joy, and most medieval Christian communities associated it as such, with the Psalmist writing, "You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy" (Psalms 30:11). For these reasons, medieval

dancing before the Black Death could be threatening, but was more often a positive experience.

In the realm of spiritual community, dance was a method of both celebration and of teaching in the Church. Christian congregations across Western Europe participated in annual festivals that incorporated music and dance. Backman separates such dance and festivals into the "sacred and the popular," as categorized by participants (50). When clergy performed, the celebration was sacred, and when they observed or monitored, it was popular. For example, the Festival of Fools was an occasion for role-reversal in which clergy masked themselves and the people elected a false Pope for the day (Backman 51-52, Daniels 29). This event allowed the Church members to "perform ring-dances, sing indecent songs… leaping and jumping…through the church without shame" (Backman 53). Exuberance nearing on ecstasy marked these dances. Backman also describes a tamer Children's Festival, in which a young boy acted as "child-bishop" and performed prayers and service (64-66, Daniels 30). The celebrators, even those not in the forefront of the festivals, relished the chance to move in a different way than they had to every other day of the year. The popular dances were often less formal in the sense that they were parts of the sacred festivals, and varied from country to country (Backman 95). Though the actual dance movements for both types vary, scholars can be sure that, as noted in Chapter One, they must be in line with the music accompaniment and even the most intense dances still kept to the topic at hand—joy in their faith.

In addition to general merriment, the Church used theatrical movement to re-enact popular Biblical stories in Mystery and Miracle plays. "Mystery," also called "Passion" plays, refer to the Passion and Death of Christ, while Miracle plays depicted lives of the saints (Freund 38, 58). Again, though the people respected the Mass, it was exciting to watch familiar stories with such new and expressive movement. In addition to the Plays, Freund cites the initiation of the Feast of Corpus Christi in 1264 as a celebration appropriate for the staging of various works, with either clergy or, with bishop approval, the town trade guilds (38-39). The acting holy men or guild members recreated Biblical stories and other religious messages, such as hymns and prayers, for the public (Daniels 34). These were often located in the actual church itself and included processions with music (Daniels 35-36). Though of a different category than the social dances, the

medieval population still considered this physical use of bodies as a form of dancing (Daniels 36). This type of Biblical embodiment brought both education and pleasure to players and audience, infusing the familiar stories with new life and uniting the communities in a common mythology.

Ultimately, before the plague arrived, the medieval population expressed their joy and faith in social and liturgical dance. During and after the plague, they continued this practice, but, like so many other aspects of life, the disease changed it. Dance was a part of life and continued to be, but the form could only mold to the mind and spirit of its people. As in the Bible, when there was time for joy, dance was present, but dance also appeared during some moments of great evil. Rather than attributing these values to the art, though, dance only displays the internal workings of a people. The once-easy faith that used the art of dance to express their happiness would now mold it to meet their current state of mind.

CHAPTER THREE: DEATH AND THE DANCE

Dancing and the Dead

For Christians past and present, this familiar passage solidifies their faith:

> *Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised."* (Matthew 27.50-52)

It describes a moment that held profound meaning and acted as a seal or promise. Jesus came to a material world to fulfill an owed death, and in this moment, he had, saving them all. Even the inanimate world responded with destruction and mourning, in the torn temple cloth, as well as the shattered earth. The raising of the dead was another of many ramifications from Jesus's passing, showing the flexibility with which the dead and the living could cross into each other's realms. It was an equally profound and terrible moment for believers, but one that should not have repeated. For Christians, Jesus's horrific death meant that nothing of the sort would happen again. However, for the medieval faithful, the arrival of the Black Death felt strangely reminiscent of biblical disasters and prophetic events like Jesus's death. Their terror and inability to cope, as well as the lack of any assistance from other more earthly authorities, such as physicians, felt for many like a turn toward the apocalypse. Indeed, in the months before the plague struck, rumors flew of earthquakes, meteors, and fireballs across Europe, all predicting doom (Hecker 14-15). The above biblical excerpt contains many familiar ideas to the medieval Christian people: an agonizing demise, parallel destruction in both church and secular land, and revival from the "sleep" of death. For them, events such as these were plausible and connected. That all three should happen simultaneously was more than reasonable. When the Black Death arrived and its terrible decimation began, the medieval people expected the type of destructive impact brought by moments like the death of Jesus.

Such devastation was, at that time, the nature of a deity angry with his flawed congregation. The Christian population would not attribute any sin with powers like those of the Black Death's to an individual fault, but that of an entire community's

transgressions. It was the type that hailed back to the time of Old Testament, when God wiped out entire nations with which he was displeased. Though the medieval man and woman would have been familiar with this type of desolation in story form, it was a different thing to experience it firsthand. There had been severe illnesses, droughts, and other bad years in their families' lifetimes, but the plague was shocking. Ziegler writes, "the plague was not only all-destroying, it was totally incomprehensible. Medieval man was equipped with no form of defence—social, medical, or psychological—against a violent epidemic of this magnitude" (7). Ziegler's use of the term "violent" is no exaggeration. The plague killed within days, but the brevity did not signify a weak killer. The plague attacked in revolting ways. Flesh decayed on the bone at an astonishing rate, leaving black marks of rot on the flesh of the sick. Numerous people died each day; so many that the living could not even keep up with effective disposal, let alone honorific burial.

Few descriptions can capture the horror of the disease. Everything about it was nightmarish. The period of the Black Death was a time when all fail-safes failed and every authority vanished. Each person was a potential victim, a terrible enough fact in and of itself, but each person was also completely helpless. The medieval population understood well the idea that each of them owed God a death, but there had once been precedents in place. Before, doctors could help the sick, clergymen could comfort the dying, and the wealthy could hide from crisis behind their fortune. Once the Black Death arrived, everything changed. Physicians, priests, and noblemen now fell as regularly as commoners. Ziegler notes, "Death had always been a preoccupation of medieval man; now it became an obsession…Never before had those set in authority over him been shown so clearly to be no braver, no better, no wiser and no less vulnerable" (120). Ziegler's explanation elaborates the idea of death as a great leveler in whose arms all were equal (Kelly 292). Truly, there was no protection and no escape.

While dance certainly did not occur only as a reaction to this crisis, some fears of dancing did. The criticism of dance during the period around the Black Death, including dance as death's quintessential image in the Dance of Death, revealed more than scorn for the art form. Dance, as manifested in occurrences like the dance manias, became a venue for releasing anger and fear, representing ideas such as contagion, sin, and loss of

control. Disapproval of dance during the Black Death was also a condemnation of failing bodies, both physical and spiritual. However, upon close examination, there is more to the story beneath the surface of the Dance of Death. Joy in dance as it once existed before the plague did not disappear completely, but rather twisted itself to reflect the feelings and thoughts of the age.

The Dance of Death: Images

There are few artistic images of dance from the exact years during the Black Death, but many that refer to and depict it in later years. Some came decades or centuries after the plague to reflect on the event's spiritual and artistic significance (Aberth 160). Of these works, the most famous representations are of the Dance of Death. While often titled as such, the Dance of Death addresses an artistic idea or genre more than one specific work. The theme became iconic of the struggles during the Black Death, as well as the later perspectives of death in daily life. Using these dancing images is important when analyzing its connection to the plague for two reasons. First, though certain pieces historically came much later, the time after the Black Death subsided allowed for reflection and truthful assessment. It would have been difficult, both emotionally and physically, for creators to have worked extensively during this sparse time when survival was key above all else. Cantor notes that the "increase in death consciousness in the fourteenth century may very well be the work of retrospective imagination that historians of all kinds frequently exercise" (212). Second, though metaphorical, the presentations of fear, joy, and dancing in these images coincide with writings of the mid-14th century. Because of this overlap, it is reasonable to believe that later artists were accurate in their capture of feelings during the time of the Black Death.

As a first example, Figure 1 depicts an anonymous German painting entitled "Dance of Death." Estimated of the 16th century, it shows a line of dancing reminiscent of the chained Farandole. As is most typical in Dance of Death images, at least one skeleton appears for every person, with each bony dancer possibly charged to one human in particular. Most of the skeletons are unencumbered with accessories. The only clothed skeletons are the leader, in a brightly colored, or "pied," costume (a fact that will become more relevant later in this paper) and the drummer adorned with a vibrant hat. The festive and colorful costumes of these two performers lend a more positive impression than a black or other more morbid garb. They, as with the rest of the skeletons, appear to be enjoying themselves.

In this way, the skeletons' emotional state is especially important for any interpretation of their dance. They look happy, with some, as in the lower right corner,

appearing close to ecstatic. With their arms lifted and clasped hands held high, their movements are not solemn or subdued. Several skeletons have one dancing foot off the ground, lending an impression of hopping or skipping which, we can guess from the medievalist emphasis on proper musical accompaniment, marks time along with the drum. As noted earlier, the Farandole was not a quiet or sorrowful dance. The movements were exuberant, as anyone who has followed a dancing chain knows. Walking alternates with running as the dancers struggle to keep their movements even with those of the leader. The outstretched arms in some, as in the lower left corner, compared with the lowered arms in others, in the upper left corner, show the different movement speeds that can happen with a long line of people. Some end up straining while others fight to keep from bumping into each other. The last dancer in the chain, a skeleton slightly to the right of center, holds an hourglass high, unashamed at the task of the deathly performers who lead the humans to their timely demise.

A second example in Figure 2, Michael Wolgemut's 1493 woodcut, "Dance of Death," portrays five skeletons in the midst of revelry. The lack of living participants presents a different image of the Dance. These skeletons, some fresher than others, in a similarly joyful mood as those in Figure 1, do not appear to be "working." No humans to bring to their death means the viewers get a glimpse of the skeletons' recreational activities. Their movements of raised arms and legs, as well as the act of touching one another, are reminiscent of the other Dance of Death works. These skeletons, too, are joyful in their dance, with skipping movements in the legs and sternums raised high, accompanied by a piper. They are curved at the waist, but not bent so low as to appear broken or defeated. The two performers in the center especially portray the joy and gaiety in the dance. Their mouths are open, as if singing or shouting with joy, or perhaps it is the closest way to smile and laugh when you do not have any lips. They leap in the air, one faces skyward and the other with its hand in the air, waving. While it is less clear what these skeletons are happy about, the argument remains that their joy is due to the end of earthly hardship. This piece especially lends credence to the argument that the skeletons do not dance out of malice. Without the presence of the living, their alleged targets fall away. Here, the music plays for them alone and they still dance, regardless of

who watches. They are free, unburdened, and dancing together, with a vibrant and friendly connection still present between these five after death.

Third, Hans Holbein's 16th century "Dance of Death" woodcut series depicts another traditional Dance of Death example of individuals moving to their death with the skeletons. Unlike Figure 1, these dancing partnerships are more personal, with Holbein focusing in each image on the death of a sole human instead of a large parade of the living. In such a narrowed scope, the emotions conveyed become more resonant with each character. There are numerous versions of the same story in the forty or so woodcuts, but in "The Old Man" (see Figure 3), the Dance is especially poignant. Here, the skeleton does not grapple with a resistor, but gently, almost compassionately, lends a guiding hand to the Old Man. Unlike other woodcuts in which a vain struggle brings turmoil to the faces of the humans, in this image, there is a respectful dignity about the task. In the same way, no explicit, excited dances mark the image, but this absence may be due a more reverential, or at the very least courteous, tone. The dancing moves less like a vibrant Farandole and more as a formal partner dance. The skeleton plays a psaltery, a "triangular" harp that some medieval artists attribute as King David's instrument of choice (Stevens 42). The tone of this image does not evoke sadness, as it would with a child prematurely at the end of life, but rather a peace when, accompanied by music, the skeleton aides an Old Man in pain. Death does not appear cruel or menacing here, even though the open grave clearly conveys the intended end of the Dance. Whether the Old Man goes willingly or does not have the strength to fight is unclear, but either way, the music still plays gently and respectfully for him.

More representations of the Dance of Death follow these same artistic patterns, including several images with corresponding literary devices. [4] The accompanying texts that align with such Dance of Death images often narrate a moral lesson of *memento mori*, always remembering death as close by. The images listed above have today become more iconic of the Dance of Death, but do not encompass the entire genre of art. [5] What they do highlight is the use of music and movement to express the emotions of the living and the dying. Though the logistical specifics of each work vary, they had a common audience in the faithful survivors of the Black Death, those who would continue to dance as their life persisted.

Figure 1: The anonymous "Dance of Death," 16th century

Figure 2: Wolgemut's "Dance of Death," 1493

Figure 3: Holbein's "The Old Man," 1525

The Dance of Death: Analysis

Beginning the analytical work of this particular project requires noting the many similarities in the images, despite type of material, image location, and even country and time of origin. These elements lend credence to the idea of the Dance of Death as a theme, rather than a specific work or series of works that share a title. In the Dance of Death, there are usually both living humans and skeletons. The most striking elements, indeed, are these images of dancing skeletons and the more reluctant humans. While certainly reminiscent of death, the skeleton is an insightful choice of representation for several reasons. First, it is dry and clean. The skeleton has only a little remaining vestige of corporeal humanness, be it organ, flesh, or hair. Second, the skeleton is unrecognizable as the person it was, and so they all look similar to each other. Third, it appears to grin, because of its lack of formative tissue to display other varied expressions. These aspects appear simple enough, but reveal much about the Dance of Death, questioning prior interpretations of these images.

That the skeletons are harbingers of death is apparent. They are material characters from a different spiritual world, though they keep what earthly adornments remain in bone, hair, or organ. When hair and organs do appear, they are sparse. The hair is in patches or short chunks on the skull and the organs are usually almost completely gone. The intestines are especially popular remainders, with the last few inches often flopping out visibly beneath the rib cage. The humans wear their normal everyday dress so that observers can better identify who they see, be it queen or priest. The skeletons always touch the humans, either their skin or a piece of their clothing, lending an impression of dance partnering. Occasionally, the humans' feet will point in the opposite direction of the skeletons', illustrating resistance or attempted flight. However, most people appear to accept their fate begrudgingly, mourning and following in the direction of the skeletons.

Previous interpretations of the Dance of Death by historians have been negative and fearful, insinuating a message of dance as a tool of evil or vindictive powers. Many scholars agree that one broad message is that of death as a constant and inescapable presence, a "universal equalizer" (Gertsman 143), which is reasonable considering the

persistence of the skeletons dancing with all types of humans. Further detailed versions
of the Dance of Death's meanings, however, often take a fiercer turn. For example, in
her article, "The Dance of Death in Reval (Tallinn): The Preacher and His Audience,"
Gertsman first casts the skeletons as leaders moving in a "mockingly playful fashion"
(143), but then establishes a graver scenario by pointing out the "diabolical nature of this
dance" (152). She writes, "The appearance of jesting skeletons, the embodiment of all
that is grotesque, would have suggested to the audience that the dance is performed by
sinners, and that the devil himself works through those with too much worldly ambition"
(152). Gertsman's analysis is from pieces of Bernt Notke's large church painting in
Revall, now Tallinn, Estonia, a replica of his earlier Lübeck Dance of Death work (see
Figure 4). Created between 1463 and 1493, the colorful depictions are more vibrantly
realistic than Holbein's or Wolgemut's softer animations, and as such do appear more
menacing. The skeletons, with full-color corpse tones, sharper lines, and detailed
anatomy, appear more as the threatening undead we know today. However, their origin
and purpose for dance still resonate with the other Dance of Death images. The skeletons
smile and play music, leading the people to death, though this macabre task does not
necessarily mean they perform the work of the devil. For the medieval people, death was
painful, but could just as easily be the work of God.

Gertsman's interpretation of these images illustrates the general historical
viewpoint of the Dance of Death genre, one reasonable, but incomplete. Most non-dance
scholars dismiss the Dance of Death themes as either an obsession with death or a
horrific warning.[6] However, as with so many aspects of movement, deeper meanings lie
underneath the immediate surface. Holbein does include other woodcuts in his series, for
instance "The Abbess," that could coincide with Gertsman's beliefs (see Figure 5).
Death here may appear more malicious, but the skeleton does not actually dance, leaving
a question as to the nature of the evil. If such malice is there at all, is it the death or the
dance that poses a threat? Also, because The Abbess does not appear willing to leave her
home, the skeleton's nasty-seeming grin could just as easily be a grimace of exertion.
The hourglass in the lower left corner again reminds the viewer that the skeleton takes
her away from life not because of ill intent, but because her time had come. Still, images
such as "The Abbess" do not accurately illustrate the entire range of woodcuts, nor of the

Dance of Death genre as a whole. It and others like it are not the whole story. Even with the disturbing edge to "The Abbess," Holbein still carved a very different evocation in "The Old Man." Death is gentle, not appearing to mock or revel in the Old Man's pain at all.

The emotions of the skeletons are quite unlike those of the humans, though, and this is the critical point for dance's representation. Just as in the Bible and in medieval daily life, dance most often represented joy, not menace. There are examples of dance used as a force for evil, as previously discussed, but in its purest and most prevalent form, dance was an honorable expression of positive emotions. These images represent nothing different. The skeletons are happy in their work of bringing these people away. Yet, the question at the heart of the Dance of Death is why exactly these skeletons are happy. The answer poses deep implications for the treatment of dance in medieval and later centuries.
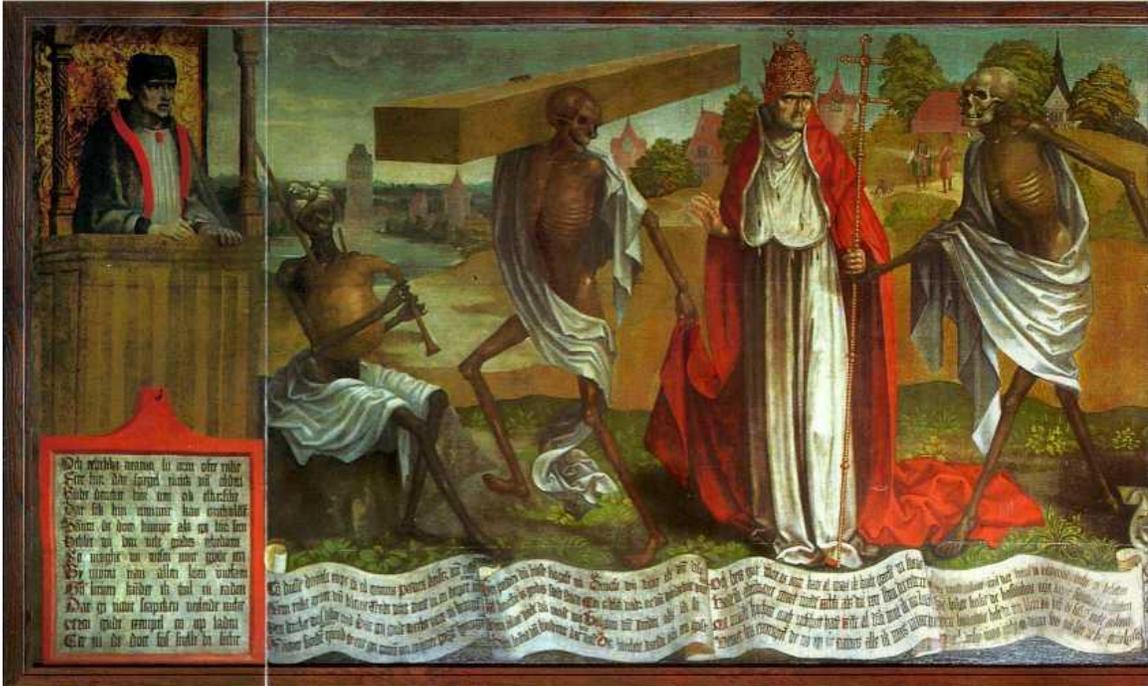
Figure 4: The first section of Notke's "Dance of Death," between 1463 and 1493

Figure 5: Holbein's "The Abbess," 1525

Joy and Death

These elements of glee in the dancing skeletons combine to create an impression of lightness in both physical weight and emotional burden. The skeletons appear joyful in their tasks, with little physical adornments to weigh them down. They may have shed the elements that made individual human beings, but in doing so, they also left behind the cares and pain of the world. On the one hand, it is reasonable to say that the skeleton could be a morbid and horrific character, bringing ominous death to the resistant living. Yet, on the other hand, there is much for the medieval sufferer to envy in it. The skeleton was not the most repugnant image they would have seen nor is its job as wicked as it appears.

For its sufferers, the plague brought disgusting symptoms and humiliation, as family members watched their loved ones' bodies pulse with rot and decay. The disease assaulted the senses; bringing seeping pus and blood, putrid stenches, and fever to anyone it touched. The sick coughed blood and fought for even the smallest bit of comfort amid painful growths, splitting boils, and wet delirium. Once dead, the plague victim was not an honored family member deceased, but a filthy problem that the living must solve, getting the body out of the house as fast as possible to avoid further contagion. Family and friends had to burn any bed sheets, clothing, or even possessions of the dead. There was no room for sentimentality or respectful mourning. Memory was the only thing left to consider the dead, as any precious mementos or family heirlooms could contain poisonous remnants of the illness. Losing not only the person, but the material reminders of his or her life, was especially difficult. Things that should have passed to future generations could not even be sold for desperately needed funds. These keepsakes were especially valuable because of the numbers of dead within a family. A single son may live on, with nothing left of his father or his father's father. When one person died, others in the house were likely to follow in the fatal footsteps.

Losing a third of the population is a startling but abstract statistic, though to imagine it rather as one in three people dying makes it more vivid. In addition, the rate is an average across Western European over the course of a few years, meaning some communities lost much higher numbers than others. The plague did not discriminate and

often struck several family members at once or in quick succession, leaving no room for rest. In addition, the speed of the plague, from symptom to death often about 3-7 days (Ziegler 9), left no time for pause. Indeed, one of the only few mercies of the disease was how swiftly it killed. The living had to fight against the wave of dead constantly, struggling against the physical and emotional burdens the lifeless bodies left behind.

The skeleton, though, has none of the livings' symptoms. It is dead, but in this finality shows none of the terrible processes of the dying. It left behind all human trait and uniqueness, including the pain of individual death. It also carries no valuables with it, except for the occasional musical instrument to facilitate the dancing. They are truly free. In this way, the skeleton, though a beckoner of death, is also a tempter. The skeleton offers something that goes against the Christian morality of the medieval time: a wish, a yearning, for death. The dancing bones promise no more heartache, no more toil, and no more decay. They represent an action completed, with the only remaining task to beckon other loved ones to join the dance. Cantor notes one prominent historian, Johann Huizinga, interpreting the Dance of Death as an example of "pessimism, lassitude, and loss of confidence on the part of the courtly culture of the late medieval aristocracy unable to confront and control the realities of life" (202). This interpretation depicts the slackening faith in previously-held beliefs. The negative emotions of the Dance works originate from the individuals unwilling to let go of their earthly existence, a now especially futile endeavor as the order of the world appeared to slip away. Despite the dark imagery, the overall message of the art is not as gloomy as some believe. The medieval population was more than familiar with the idea of death, and some authors even describe them as death-obsessed (Aberth 162, Ziegler 120). Because of this frame of mind, the medieval people would not be especially shocked at what the Dance portrayed and would have understood its underlying meaning. Though certainly "pessimistic," as Huizinga claims, this negativity changed but did not erase the feelings brought by dance. The joy in dance was now bittersweet instead of light, morbid comfort instead of hope. At some point, this flawed existence would fall away, and when it did, there would be time for dancing. The agony of illness and the hard work of common life would eventually end.

Claiming these deathly performers as singularly evil and meant to terrify broadly and dismissively generalizes their purpose in dancing. When viewers step back and look at the images again, keeping in mind the medical and spiritual situations at the time of the Black Death, there is another story. Ultimately, the skeletons pose an interesting enigma. Their dancing separates them from the more ominous versions of death, showing camaraderie instead of a threat.

No Joy without Pain

The victims of the Black Death understood the complexities and reconciliation of opposites. For example, the death of Christ was sorrowful, as both the temple and the earth reiterated in their rending, but his passing brought about salvation for the faithful. Just as pain and joy mingle in the constant presence of death, there is happiness in the knowledge that it will eventually end. These ideas were conflicting and complex to be sure, but it is not fair to call the responses either purely pessimistic or purely optimistic. Joy erupted in moments of terrible pain, just as even the sweetest moment held deep sadness. For many families, keeping a child may have meant losing a spouse, or vice versa. There were very few untouched by this decimation, but the survivors did not necessarily see themselves as the luckiest ones. A battle on both sides of happiness and sorrow constantly barraged the medieval man and woman, who searched for respite wherever they could.

Marshall writes that, in later centuries, "Renaissance worshipers' ability to cope with the continuing presence of plague in their midst rested precisely on the secure conviction of multiple means of accessing supernatural aid" (529). In short, the people left behind from the 14th century plague desired even more connections to spiritual assistance. After abandonment by the clergy and physicians, a reasonable place for them to turn would be their family and friends, the ones with whom they once danced. Therefore, another interpretation of the skeletons' identities is that of deceased loved ones returning from the beyond to fetch those close to them. When considering medieval ideas such as the give-and-take relationship of Purgatory and the living's responsibilities to the dead, the connections of affection and friendship cross these lines of worldly existence. The ones who had cause to mourn were the wealthy or corrupt, wanting to hold onto the riches and bounty of earthly life instead of the spiritual gifts of love and faith. Death, for medieval Christians, was another progression of the soul's journey, not an end, which was a comforting thought to those who had already lost so much.

In a more material context, a dead body within the Church was not necessarily an object of fear. Medieval Christians revered the relics of the saints and the physical

evidence of miraculous events. Backman explains the medieval Christians' beliefs that realized:

> …the relics of the martyrs possessed supernatural powers, that they exercised an extraordinary influence in driving out sickness…Even the dust which was collected from the vicinity of the graves, the water which the tomb was washed and every object which had been in contact with it, possessed something of the powers of the relics. (41-42)

Items of clothing, mementos, and even body parts had their place as honored religious artifacts. Processions and festivals, many that included dancing, often focused on these items (Backman 86, Cantor 85). Though the mythology around these pieces signified an absence of corruption or decay, the community felt little qualms about placing even the most disturbing body parts on display. In the earlier mentioned tale of the dance mania in Germany, the young girl's detached arm became a focus of divine power. These beliefs lend credence to the fact that the skeletons themselves would not have caused fear or horror. Death, not bones, caused anxiety for the medieval believers.

Further, the New Testament promised, "[Christians'] citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory" (Phil. 13.20-21). The Christian faith emphasized a turning from a physical, earthly body to a spiritual one. It took time for the deceased to reach their final destinations in either heaven or hell. Therefore, the dead believers could return for their loved ones when it was the latter's time to pass. It may even be one of their special tasks that they must complete to move on from Purgatory. Further, the humans' fear in these images could simply be fear of the unknown. In fact, for Christians and their faith's promise of a beautiful and pain-free life after death, leaving the world would not necessarily be a tragedy. Considering the pain and burden during the Black Death, death was, for many, a blessing in disguise.

Re-Interpreting the Dance

This moment is where the dance becomes a critical maker of meaning for scholars. Today, when readers see the Dance of Death images, they appear grotesque and horrific. 21st century social norms bring to mind threats of Halloween demons haunting the living with maliciousness. Even the cliché of having "skeletons in the closet" denotes shameful secrets that could emerge and destroy you. In short, today's skeletons are often a moral menace, decadent with sin. As one 21st century example shows, the album cover for the popular heavy metal band, Iron Maiden, portrays the Dance of Death as threatening and laden with sin (see Figure 6). Unlike the medieval skeletons who, facing right or left, concern themselves with only their tasks, this one beckons outward toward the viewer, attempting to lure them into sin with anonymous sexual acts (hence the masks and nudity) and various other malevolent activities that include wild animals and stranger mythological creatures.[7] It, as with other more recent skeletal art, frightens, warns, or hurts, while rattling bones and pointing emaciated fingers. Many historians attribute these emotions to the medieval Dance of Death images, which is not necessarily historically accurate. Having the images of skeletons brings a darker element to the message of the art, but those figures are not the same as the one from Iron Maiden's Dance.

Furthermore, there are also several art works that convey death *without* dance.[8] The above examples are not the sole interpretation for the time. Death existed in many more ominous forms. Though it is not wise to say that death overall was more positive to the medieval people than scholars today believe, death paired with dance is a separate evocation than death alone. It is important to make that distinction. For this specific analysis, and for dance history in general, dance makes the change.

It is a modern assumption that the skeletons in medieval thought came with evil hatred in their hearts, gleefully pulling away the living to unimagined horrors. There is little evidence to suggest that skeletons were the most grotesque thing presented to the medieval population. Even if it was not to the same degree, these people knew death and hardship before the plague. Then, during it, they watched as loved ones writhed before their eyes amid wet fever and rotting flesh. They died painfully with vile symptoms that

assaulted the senses. As such, the skeletons would not be the most horrifying bodily image in the medieval mind, and certainly not the most evil.

Figure 6: The cover for Iron Maiden's heavy metal album, "Dance of Death," 2003

CHAPTER FOUR: THE PIED PIPER AND THE DANCE OF DEATH

Why Browning?

Besides visual images of the Dance of Death, certain stories also depict the pain of the Black Death and its connections to dance. One famous legend, that of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, illustrates several of the fears and issues surrounding dance and the body. The tale circulated around Western Europe and pre-dates the actual plague epidemic by about one hundred years (Buchheim 207, Dickson 330, Dirckx 39). It survived, though, and interpretations of the story by authors such as Goethe and the Brothers Grimm evolved to make it an allegory for the experiences of the Black Death (Dirckx 39). One of the most prominent and thorough versions was that of Robert Browning's 1842 poem "The Pied Piper of Hamelin." Though writing from a different era and, as such, a separate perspective from that of the medieval people, Browning's poem stays close to several other versions of the tale. The language may be different from that of the 14th century, but the story and its elements are faithful depictions of the myth. It revealed a great deal in terms of the physical fears, tenuous morality, and death in the mind of the medieval world. Looking at this story, and its treatment of the body, particularly with dance, illustrates their connections to the plague's complicated terror.

The Rat-Catcher's Tale

The story of the Pied Piper was an especially interesting one because of its popularity, its prevalence, and its many possible representations. It was a myth that floated through different lands, captured on paper by many authors, and belonging to many different communities. The origin of the story remains unclear, but some sources point to a traumatic event, the disappearance of a massive number of children, in 1284 (Buchheim 207, Dickson 330). Rumored commemorations of the events in church windows, houses, and the town hall highlight the mythology behind the tale, while wars and other enemies to historical preservation leave what little evidence remains contradictory and vague (Backman 181-188). While its exact literary origins are as of yet unknown, the legend of the Pied Piper became popular to 20th and 21st century readers in the guise of Robert Browning's poem. In the "child's story," as the author called it, Browning described the struggling German city of Hamelin in 1376 (line 275). Rats had completely taken over the town. "The people in a body" held a frantic meeting to find a "remedy" (31). It was when the Mayor finally begged for "a trap, a trap, a trap!" that the Pied Piper entered (42). A strangely dressed man with an even stranger appearance— "…light loose hair, yet swarthy skin, / No tuft on cheek nor beard on chin / …there was no guessing his kith and kin"—baffled the audience (61-64). "Pied" references the multi-color of his garment (Dirckx 39), a bright and exuberant cloth (see also Figure 1). The lighter-toned Hamelinites noted his dark appearance, though it was his unidentifiable origin that was most startling. One cried, "'It's as my great-grandshire, / Starting up at the Trump of Doom's tone, / Had walked this way from his painted tombstone!" (67-69). After offering his world-renowned services to the Mayor and agreeing on a steep fee, the Pied Piper went to work. Playing on his pipe, the rats of the city appeared. Browning wrote:

> Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
> Brown rats, black rats, grey rats, tawny rats,
> Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
> Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,
> Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
> Families by tens and dozens,
> Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives—

Followed the Piper for their lives. (111-118)

The rats leapt into the river Weser, save one, who carried a manuscript back home, detailing the auditory effects of the Piper's pipe, specifically "…a voice / (Sweeter far than bý harp or bý psaltery / Is breathed)," offering the rats an incredible smorgasbord (121-145). Then, when the rats were gone and the Piper demanded his compensation, the Mayor scoffed at him, refusing to pay. The angry Piper called for justice, but the arrogant Mayor only created more excuses, finally outright challenging the Piper to take any action at all. After a final warning, the Piper played again, but this time "all the little boys and girls" (203) came and he took them into the nearby mountain through a magical passageway while the townspeople stood frozen. Like the surviving rat before him, the final chapter of the story came to the Hamelinites in the form of a crippled boy who could not keep up with the parade of children, and so witnessed the line disappearing. The townspeople mourned and vowed always to remember the date of the tragedy, July 22, 1376 (269-275).
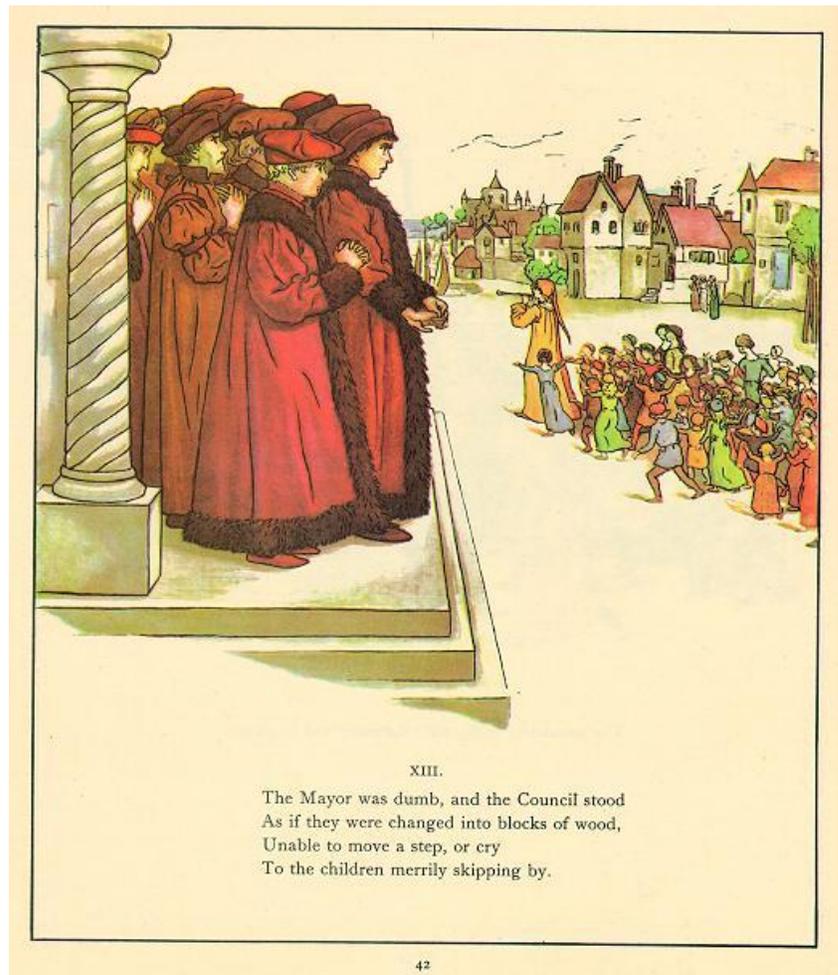
Figure 7: Kate Greenway illustrates the adults' immobility and the children's joyful dance in "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," 1888

The Pied Piper and the Body

Several important aspects of this story resonate deeply with the medieval body and its mechanisms. First, the Pied Piper did not look or dress like the Hamelinites and, as an unknown wanderer, fulfilled the role of a dangerous outsider. As a foreign threat, the townspeople were suspicious, but desperate in their troubles. The Piper also seemed friendly and no one was eager to question a man promising an easy solution. Next, the Piper used music to call the rats, controlling their will with his pipe. Readers know from the surviving rat's manuscript that the Piper tempted them irresistibly. His power was especially frightening because he did nothing physically *to* the rats. He never touched them or even acknowledged their presence, but simply played and overcame their will. Therefore, his control must have been of spiritual, and not physical, origin. In short, they had no choice but to move, rendering any strength of body or mind useless. There were few defenses against such power. Then, in a double offense, he did the same thing to the children, but this time also prevented the townspeople from intervening. Browning wrote, "The Mayor was dumb, and the Council stood / As if they were changed into blocks of wood. / Unable to move a step, or cry" (208-210). The children followed and the families could only watch, helpless (see Figure 7). There were victims all around and each one had lost their self-control in some capacity. In addition, the only two surviving targets were not as physically strong as the others. The rat, "stout as Julius Caesar" (123), and the child with the "lame foot" (250) logically should have been the most vulnerable. Here the opposite was true as their bodily setbacks actually saved their lives. Again, the physical ability was powerless against a more ephemeral tempter. These facts served as a reminder that, especially during the plague epidemic, the healthy were still greatly susceptible.

Finally, the element of dancing in the story solidified the horror of the Pied Piper. Because the children "tripping and skipping, ran merrily after / The wonderful music with shouting and laughter," they, in fact, danced away (206-207). The tiny parade was not just dancing, but doing so joyfully and ecstatically. Watching the entire young population so happily leave their parents and lifelong homes behind especially pained the Hamelinites. Though the adults could not hear the delicious promises of the Piper, the surviving boy later confirmed them upon his return. The happy dancing was grotesque to

the townspeople, and was one of the greatest scars they later bore. Browning even wrote that:

> The place of the children's last retreat,
> They called it, the Pied Piper's Street—
> Where any one playing on pipe or tabor
> Was sure for the future to lose his labour.
> Nor suffered they hostelry or tavern
>   To shock with mirth a street so solemn… (277-282)

The deeply affected Hamelinites banned dancing, and even any sort of merry-making, along the path of the children's demise. The town essentially forbade joy, even feared it, after the events of that July. The very image of the moving bodies not only haunted them, but did so purposefully. The townspeople refused to forget.

In addition, certain variations in the story have fascinated critics for decades and shed interesting light on the subject of dance. Because of the repetition of these debates, scholars can discover which aspects of the story readers felt should be accurately recorded, and therefore found to be most important. One example is the final fate of the children going "into" versus "behind" the mountain, as Emma S. Buchheim notes in "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" (209). She wonders if this confusion may have simply come from a careless grammatical error. The former preposition could be a fanciful elaboration on the truth or a mere translation issue. Advocating a stance of historical accuracy, some feel that the phrase should read as "around" the mountain (Buchheim 207). The travels of the children therefore would take them not to an imagined and mysterious death, but rather to the nearby land of Transylvania. Browning notes this possibility in the poem, as well (289-299). In addition to Browning's verse, scholars claim evidence for this aspect of the story as Hamelinite surnames and styles of dress appeared in Transylvania without warning in the late 14th century (Dickson 328-329, 334). This issue of discrepancy is an important one when considering the perceived causes of the Black Death.

As with the Eastern origins of the plague, lands like Transylvania were especially frightening during medieval times. The travelers and merchants that carried the disease became death-bringers, so that anyone not of a (western) community warranted suspicion. For the medieval people, strangers meant unknown origins. Even the Pied Piper appeared as weirdly ancient in his appearance and manners, further fueling his

skills as a spiritual threat. He was not physically overpowering, but his evil lurked in unseen ways, stripping the formerly healthy community of all strength. The strange and the mythical air surrounding foreign lands, like Transylvania, bred horror. Stories like the Pied Piper are some of the tamer and more poignant versions, while the vampire legends existing at this time are another possible feature of the unknown horrific preying on an inert population.[9]

Besides the elements within the story, possible historical sources for the work emphasize its importance to dance and plague. While it is difficult to say what single event exactly inspired the Pied Piper tale, similar themes and occurrences during the medieval period show that the story illustrated common fears of the people. One inspiration for the missing children may be the Erfurt attacks of 1237 in which the "young people were attacked, left their homes, and were found again at Arnstadt, where they had fallen down in the streets worn out" (Buchheim 208). Hecker cites this event specifically as a case of dance-mania (90). Buchheim wonders if something similar happened in Hamelin and mentions the battle "between the Bishop of Minden and the people of Hamelin" as a possible cause, though historians later refuted this latter example due to date inaccuracies (208). Another inspiration rests on the dance-related illnesses threatening the population of the time. Buchheim further lists the "Dancers of St. John" and other types of dancing manias, especially those that swept people into other towns or left them dying and dead (208-209). A final interpretation involves fears of the plague itself, as the children were possibly sent away either to protect them from the illness, or to let the infected perish somewhere distant to prevent further contagion. An even sadder possibility is that the children may have just died in great numbers. In such a case, the Pied Piper could be a representative of death, using the immobility of the adults as a metaphor for their inability to save their children. No matter the version, the fearful aspects of each possibility involves vanishing dancing bodies and, as Buchheim notes, "if any part of the story is true, it is the disappearance of the children" (207). While the mention of dancing in connection with the disappearance of several dozens of children may seem bizarre at first, this seemingly innocuous art form posed real threats to the medieval mindset. Dance at this time encroached on a very fine line for a population

struggling with the connections between their physical and spiritual selves. As noted earlier, dance's ambiguity made moral categorization difficult.

In the legend, it was not only the Piper's ability to control so many individual bodies that was terrifying, but his own physical representation of a promise broken that equally frightened the Hamelinites. The Mayor did not fulfill his end of the deal and the punishment was severe. When his role as Hamelin's guardian came into question, he responded with poor, even shameful, decisions. The Mayor's deceit came across as the true warning of the story, when Browning closes his poem with the lines: "…let me and you be wipers / Of scores out with all men—especially pipers! / And, whether they pipe us free fróm rats or fróm mice, / If we've promised them aught, let us keep our promise!" (300-304). The moral is not necessarily about finances, but about the value of keeping honor through words of promise. Though the townspeople cast the Piper as an outsider from his first appearance, they still had a responsibility to fulfill their role as a respectable community. When they failed, the body of society could not remain, as Cavanaugh wrote, "healthful." It is important to note that the Piper takes the children as payment, not as punishment. The children are not in pain because the Piper does not hold them accountable for their parents' actions. This story, as with other Dance of Death works, is not about dance as retribution. In Browning's version, the reader never knows what happens to the children, who are more than happy to leave. The skeletons in the Dance of Death images also take the living away even during happy moments because it is their time to go. The children, though young, have to leave to fulfill the pact that their parents made. In a truly medieval fashion, a community bears the consequences of even one individual's transgression.

These profound responsibilities of the individual to act as part of the symbolic communal body became especially difficult when dancing was involved. Of course, medieval dancing was still a joyful exercise and an important social aspect to help hold the community together (Dance Under Trial 143). The body of each person mattered to the community as a whole, as this story shows a single man bringing incredible heartache on his entire village. Browning further emphasizes this idea by noting that the Hamelinites met "in a body" (21), though the Mayor does the talking. The potential for disaster was great, though, when people did not keep their spirits clean. While there may

have been nothing initially unhappy about the children's minds, the Piper manipulated their thoughts and actions using only his music. He quickly became untrustworthy when he exacted revenge on the Hamelinites, but perhaps he always was. The townspeople might have listened better to Browning's old man who declared at first viewing the Piper that he appeared not a human at all but a remnant of death. This observation is especially interesting when compared to the pied skeleton in "Dance of Death" (Figure 1), who, dressed in festive clothes, still brings deadly circumstance.

The Pied Piper and the Plague

On this macabre note, the Pied Piper can now enter into historical context side-by-side with the Black Death. It is critical to see how the traits of each mirror the other, both representing significant fears of the people. Upon first glance, the Piper and the plague are travelers from the East. Physicians of the time attributed variations of the plague as coming from Asia (Getz 276, Engel 521) and the Piper emerged from there as well, having just removed "a monstrous brood of vampire-bats" (91). The connotation is clear. The threats are not of the native land, but are still potent. The possibilities of the unknown can be exciting, as the Hamelinites hoped at the Piper's promises, but ultimately risky. Browning's Transylvania dilemma even metaphorically mirrors the disease. The plague itself had similar mysterious connotations, as Getz writes, "Like Nosferatu the vampire, plague came to be represented as an immortal sleeping terror, awaiting the right conditions to awake and unleash its fury on mankind" (281).

Also, the imagined purposes of the Piper and the plague reflect the other. The Pied Piper story has a more direct cause and effect relationship, which some medieval readers probably found satisfying. As long as one performs their living duties well, they are safe. The Hamelinites did not, so they faced punished. At first, many considered the plague in the same way. An "enraged Christ" could be serving due judgment on the people, as Marshall notes (516). This type of punishment, though fearful, was, like the Piper, comforting in its transparent meaning. The purpose was clear and, Marshall continues, "patient endurance of present adversities would ultimately be rewarded" (516). Yet, if the cause becomes unclear, then so does the effect, and eventually, the ultimate purpose altogether.

These blurred edges and gray areas were not acceptable in the medieval world, especially with such a drastic disease attacking the people. Interestingly in the Piper tale, readers never know if the children are actually dead. Browning notes that the Pied Piper steers them away from the river at the last moment and heads to the mountain (219-220). This twist makes the story's ending difficult because the townspeople never know if their children end up dancing in heaven, or trapped in a ghoulish limbo inside of the mountain. The plague has similarly confusing effects because of its far-reaching touch and lack of

discrimination. Getz describes one of the first writings about the plague, noting that "plague tractates were rather long on causes and prevention but short on cures" and "[the plague] killed master and servant alike, and even physician and confessor; this distinguished it from other diseases, which was peculiar to individuals" (272-273). Everyone died, no matter the moral, financial, or spiritual standing and all people could do was guess its origin, much like Browning's Hamelinites. Now if the people performed their tasks in life diligently, there was a question as to whether or not the once-guaranteed societal body would function. Ultimately, their actions may not matter anymore, bringing an end to a time of orderly hierarchy.

To continue this idea of totality without reason, readers can even look to the rats in the story as another symbol. The vermin as a literary element have heavy meanings in connection to the Black Death. Today, as the known carriers of the plague, rats align with dying and decay, but in this story, are also victims of the Pied Piper. When Browning lists the different types of rats that perish, it may as well be a list of humans fallen to the plague (111-118). All manners of people die, with only a slim few bafflingly spared. Today, of course, we understand the more direct connections between the rats and the plague, which lends another facet to the story. Many reasonable questions could, and maybe should, have appeared in the Hamelinites' minds. For example, if the Pied Piper can control so many rats, might he also not control other living things? He has the ability to decimate, shown by the near complete eradication of rats, but he instills little fear right away. There is a prideful disbelief that he could do them any harm, but, like the Black Death, no one is safe if such a force chooses to strike. Only by chance can one in hundreds survive. Even then, the responsibility of knowing and repeating the tale of the tragedy taints the gift of living. In a way, it would be a blessing to forget or to die with loved ones. The Pied Piper, like the plague, offers a speedy and effective escape from the horrors of life, but it is the survivors left with the curse of remembering. As the lame boy in Browning's poem cries, "'It's dull in our town since my playmates left! / I can't forget that I'm bereft / Of all the pleasant sights they see, / Which the Piper also promised me" (236-239).

Ultimately, the Pied Piper and his supernatural powers alone did not cause fear. The townspeople were welcoming and joyful when his odd skills suited their purpose,

even acting somewhat smitten with the unusual man. In fact, it was his power over the human body that they found most terrifying. When, like the plague, he turned to humans and animals, the fear set in and the control he had over both the townspeople's and their children's bodies became the true horror. In addition, the transformative properties of music and dance used by the Piper further emphasized the fear of dancing and what it meant to lose control. When the body began to move, there existed a moment of the unknown now made visible, and a terror set in at the possibility of being overcome. Truly, there was a morbid sort of awe for what the Piper and the plague could do. Medieval storytellers used metaphor to express their fears about not only its effects, but the feelings of futility and helplessness surrounding this illness. In this tale, the adults represent the living audience, bound in futility against a spiritual superpower, one that controls bodies and minds. These warnings of susceptibility, left to later generations in the form of the Pied Piper legend and the Dance of Death images, reveal not fear of dying, but fear of losing control.

CONCLUSION

Overall, navigating the Dance of Death genre requires reaching out across several areas of study. Knowing about the body, the medical system, and the spirituality of the time is vital to objective and sympathetic analysis of the Dance's ideas as represented by art images and stories. However, the Dance of Death is not a simple or straightforward theme. As with any reaction to a historical catastrophe, deep emotions percolate underneath the surface of its artistic works. The physical connections between the disease and the Dance create complicated interpretations. Not only was the image of the Dance of Death prevalent in various art forms, but dance itself posed serious dilemmas to the body-stricken medieval populace. Their physical existence had once been rhythmic and reasonable. Sickness, death, and other various bodily failings came and went with their usual frequency. The Black Death, however, mutated previously held views of the body and spirit. The Black Death was an unquestionable force in the realm of history, and the Dance of Death is one important example of its influence.

In both the Dance of Death images and the Pied Piper story, what terror there is exists for the living left behind, not the dead taken away. The medieval Christian faith promised a joyful continuation of the soul after death. In the Pied Piper, as with the artistic Dance of Death images, death does not punish the dancers. The Piper story blames the lying adults, and the deadly skeletons, as an extension of the natural progression of human life, assign no fault at all. The Piper and the skeletons do not bring retribution, but serve as reminders of the certainty with which death will claim each individual and the futility of clinging to worldly vestments. Frugality and vanity are not external punishments, but internal pains brought by the living onto themselves. Death that comes for the innocent children and willing followers of the skeletons, though, is not as dark as scholars today may interpret. The Piper's song, like the skeletons' dance, speaks of joy and freedom, a release from the shackles of physical existence. If the Piper did lead the children to death, he arguably fulfilled his promise to them. For these people, a Christian heaven would contain unfathomable treasures and treats. In the Dance of Death, the lesson is not mourning in death, but the folly of pining over garments, jewels, careers, and other traits of earthly life. These things were non-

transferable to the afterlife, and as such, useless. To grieve over them was beyond ridiculous, especially for the skeletons that had seen the potential glory of the other side.

In short, the skeletons and children dance because they know where they are going. This joy in leaving life is not malicious, but excited and even compassionate. The deathly performers know what the people leave behind and dance in delight because of it. So a final question to ask is why skeletons to embody instead of golden angels or rosy cherubs representing this deadly parade? The answer, again, lies within the Black Death. Generations that survived and carried on after the epidemic needed reminders of the subsistence and actions of death, which, for them, had become a disgusting and harsh figure. For the medieval population, dying was ugly, even if the necessity of it brought spiritual beauty. There were no trumpets or falling flowers for the plague sufferers and no heavenly choir to guide them to their final rest. Their bodies lay in pits, untouched by priests and burdened by the sins of their life. Their deaths had been corrupt and painful, ripe with humiliating symptoms and little mercy. There was no romanticizing it. Life and the process of death were hard, but the afterlife, filled with peace and joy, was easy. After studying these thoughts about medicine, the body, the battles with the plague, and the struggles with faith, current analysis shows that, for the medieval people, death may have been agonizing, but was not eternally so. They had the potential and the promise for something more. For the medieval people, however horrific the method of arriving on the other side, there would be dancing, not in hell, but in heaven.

The mocking skeletons as gleeful death-bringers are one interpretation of the Dance of Death, but not the only one. The Black Death was too big and the medieval mindset was too complex to claim a single meaning for these ideas and move on to another historical conundrum. These are not problems to solve, but areas of exploration. Bodies and dance have always been complicated topics with many different emotions and fears attached within each culture. For the Dance of Death, future historical findings may confirm with certainty one, the other, or an entirely new meaning for these works. For now, though, the genre has room for several possible theories. Scholars of dance history and other performance studies owe their field rigorous analysis and inquiry, questioning the previous conclusions made by other non-movement based historians.

Ultimately, this thesis project is about dance, and even then, only a small piece of its story. Like so many other art forms, though, dance is not just a single subject to grasp and hold, peering at it while it pauses and waits for the observer to finish her work. Dance, like history, moves constantly and is impossible to pin down. Knowing dance means seeing the circumstances around dance. Just as a sculptor must understand the type of clay an ancient artist used for his work, a dance scholar must understand the body as a unique material existing in time and space. Not all bodies are the same, and not all bodily perceptions stayed constant throughout the centuries. For the Dance of Death, seeing the themes in the genre means also seeing the ravages of illness, the medical treatment of the body, the emotions and morals of the physical existence, and the logic and thought processes of a people.

The future research opportunities on this topic are immense, as this thesis project only scratches the surface of several broad fields. The history of the Catholic struggle with dance, including Biblical reactions to movement and song, the ongoing debates between Jesuits and Cistercian monks' view of dance and its place in sin, and the nature of clergy practicing dance, would fill books. Beyond organized religion, extensive cultural possibilities abound, including analytical work on the pre- and post-plague death dances, the role of dance amid festivals such as the Day of the Dead, and application of several prominent authors' work to the nature of these dances. Johann Huizinga and Kenneth Burke stand out as two ready options, including their theories of play and of dramatism, respectively. Death and dance are two constants across time and space, with each having a place in every community at any time in their history. The connections between both prove to be nearly boundless sources for new thought in dance history.

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<div align="center">NOTES</div>

[1]John Martin's 1946 <u>The Dance: The Story of the Dance told in Pictures and Texts</u> marks one of the first North American written works expounding and detailing the history of dance. Though there had been other previous dance reference works, their purpose often dealt with actual movement instruction in the context of social practice. They were eloquent "how-to" manuals. This intent is different than that of a dance history book, and of Martin's work, whose subject matter is knowledge for the general or scholarly public. Many dance historians mark this as the beginning of dance history, though it was not incorporated into prominent American college-level curriculums until the 1970's (for more information, see Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright's <u>Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader</u>).

[2] The metaphors of the body within a society are an interesting research path in and of themselves. I mean this reference as a note to the changes of the Industrial Revolution of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

[3] See, for instance, The Dufay Collective's *A Dance in the Garden of Mirth* and Christian Lindberg's *Unaccompanied*, among others.

[4]For example, see the illustrated poems <u>The Danse Macabre of Women</u> and <u>The Dance of Death, Printed at Paris in 1490</u>.

[5]As an example of the association of these images within the genre of the Dance of Death today, an early August 2009 Google image search for "medieval dance of death images" produces first and most prevalently the listings of Wolgemut and Holbein.

[6]Only a few of several possible examples:

    a. Getz categorizes the Triumph as a model for Dance of Death images, "with its yawning graves and rotting corpses" (285).

    b. Backman's work is interesting in that she establishes the history of the actual death-themed dances and mythology that pre-date the Black Death. However, she categorizes all Dance of Death works under the meanings they had in those previous decades, and not in the new turn of the plague. She notes that the dead "dragged" the living to "destruction" in the Dance images (149).

    c. Marshall, who has similar goals of artistic re-evaluation in her article as I do in this thesis, condemns Millard Meiss's dismissive interpretation of the Dance of Death images as pessimistic and hierarchical (488).

    d. McNeill cites Meiss for his mention of the "macabre" dances (183).

    e. Samuel K. Cohn Jr. cites multiple artistic interpretations of "cultural atrophy coloured by despair" in his "The Place of the Dead in Flanders and Tuscany" (see

The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, ed. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall).

f. Kelly is one author that notes these differences, although his interpretation may go too far in the other direction. He writes of death as "a jolly, ghoulish, jitterbugging democrat who insists on dancing with everyone at the party no matter how rich or poor, how highborn or lowborn" (292).

g. Aberth is one of the few writers who defends a more positive interpretation of the Dance of Death, claiming the skeletons were "more approachable and familiar than the awesome figure of the Fourth Rider of the Apocalypse" (161). He also chastises the overly negative of interpretations of Huizinga and Meiss (162-163).

[7]In her article, Marshall details a relevant aspect of the outward gaze, namely the intercession of the Virgin Mary for plague victims. In several images, Mary ignores the destruction around her and, in an unusual artistic style for the time, focuses on the viewer (506-510). This benevolent gaze is an interesting opposite for the modern Dance of Death image on the Iron Maiden album cover. There, Death's outward beckoning means to harm the viewers instead of protect them, but the idea of reaching outward is important when considering the other focus of the medieval dancing skeletons.

[8]See for example:
a. "Triumph of Death" (1562) by Pieter Bruegel I

b. Anonymous "Burial of Plague Victims" from the late 14th century

c. "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" (1497-98) by Albrecht Dürer

d. "Death as Chess Player" (about 1500) by Heinrich of Herford

e. Anonymous "A Disputacion betwyx the Body and Wormes" (about 1450)

f. Various images of *transi tombs* that represent "a specific dead individual" (Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol, Cohen 10). See also Celebration of Death: An Introduction to Some of the Buildings, Monuments, and settings of Funerary Architecture in the Western European Tradition by James Stevens Curl.

g. The legend of The Three Quick and the Three Dead, sometimes called The Three Living and Three Dead

h. "Death of the Miser" by Hieronymous Bosch (between 1450 and 1516)

[9]Another fascinating path of research spurred by this project consists of the connections between the Black Death and vampire mythology. Though vampiric legends existed before the Black Death and in places all over the world, the vampires as we know them today, or as Bram Stoker knew them, perhaps, resonate with this particular plague

epidemic in startling ways. In a scholarly vein, Getz uses Nosferatu as a metaphor for the plagues and notes several authors that compare the Black Death, and other infectious diseases like it, to an actual undead individual person existing throughout centuries (281). In addition, vampire mythology states that, for Europeans, a vampire came to exist when a dead person did not receive proper burial, the Last Rites, or was excommunicated from the Church (as discussed in Montague Summers's <u>The Vampire in Lore and Legend</u> and <u>True Vampires of History</u> by Donald F. Glut and D. Scott Rogo). The prominence of Purgatory or a simple "in-between" time before the spirit moves on is another factor lent to the vampire lore. Combined with the Pied Piper mythology surrounding Transylvania, the possible folkloric connections between vampires and the Black Death may prove enlightening in research of the body and spirit.

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