AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF


Abstract approved

Paul Kopperman

Many authorities state that the development of macabre images were a result of the plague that first swept through western Europe 1347-1350. However, many aspects of the macabre were already in place prior to the plague. A more realistic explanation for the macabre is in the modification of religious belief, specifically the development of Purgatory. The Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead was chosen as the focus of study because its popularity peaked in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, seemingly coinciding with the arrival of the plague. Depictions of the Legend tell of three nobles on a hunt who come across three corpses. The Dead are presented as a mirror upon which the Living meditate to remind them everyone dies, so they should repent of their sins now.

Anxiety about death and bodily decay began before the plague. Vision literature and ghostly visitations helped “prove” that a place of purging existed. After the Church officially recognized Purgatory, the earliest known version of the Legend was written by Baudoin de Condé. When Purgatory was accepted as doctrine in 1274, anxiety about the soul’s punishment after death created a greater focus on death and decomposition.
Other macabre images developed from the Legend. As in the Legend, the *danse macabre* was to be a mirror to the living. However, in depictions of the *danse*, images of the living are from different stations in life. The different classes represented allowed viewers to have a closer connection to the *danse* than to the nobles in the Legend.

Another image was the *transi*, or cadaver, tomb. Double tombs depict an image of the person during life on the top, while at the bottom is an image of that person’s cadaver. These tombs were often built by the patrons prior to their death so they could meditate on their own image in life and death. While some recent publications persist in claiming these developments are related to the arrival of the Black Death, these images first appeared at least half a century after the first outbreak of the plague.
The Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead:
The Development of the Macabre in Late Medieval England

by

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Robin M. Sandeno, Author
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The Late Middle Ages was a time of contradiction: hair shirts were worn under expensive clothing, indulgences in pleasure were followed by expressions of piety, acts of killing were expunged by offering charity, and the Church's vows of poverty were challenged by its actual wealth. Attitudes toward death and decay was no different: The miracle of undecomposed bodies of saints was an effort to deny decay, while art portraying regular mortals provided visible reminders of putrefaction, leading to a contemplation of, and fascination with, death and the macabre.¹

Many propositions have been made for the derivation of the term ‘macabre,’ a French word that first appears in the fourteenth century. The most logical theory suggests a connection to the Biblical name of Maccabee. The Maccabees were honored as advocates of the dead because it was believed they had initiated the idea of prayers of intercession for the dead.² When the Church adopted and heavily began to promote belief in Purgatory, Judas Maccabee often was presented in the promotion, and his name


became connected to images of the dead. In a poem by Chrétien de Troyes, there is an occurrence of Judas Maccabee's name written as Judas Macabre.

The use of the word 'macabre' in art refers to the depictions of bodies of the dead, or of a personified Death. Many authorities have said that the development of the macabre in art was a result of the plague which first swept through Western Europe in 1347-1350. However, the plague could not have been the primary motivation for macabre images. While depictions of death reached a peak during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries when the plague flourished, many aspects of the macabre were already in place before the arrival of the plague. Other aspects of the macabre did not develop until a generation or more after the first thrust of the plague, indicating that other factors were necessary as a foundation for the development.

A more realistic background for the presence of the macabre in society can be found in the modifications of religious belief, supplemented by political turmoil. The development of Purgatory and changing beliefs about final judgement of the soul left people with a great fear of the state of an individual's soul and of death itself. Through the teaching of the mendicant order, monastic contempt for the world entered secular society and created anxiety about the body. The papacy's rule from Avignon and the Great Schism established an uncertainty about the authority of the Church.

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This paper will discuss the alterations of Church doctrine and how these changed attitudes towards death and the dead. The Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead and later manifestations of the Legend, such as transi tombs, demonstrate that the determining factor of the macabre was not the plague. Although the Legend reached its greatest development in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, evidence indicates that it was popular in England prior to the plague, and tomb imagery derived from the Legend appeared after the initial impact of the Black Death had subsided.
Religious Groundwork

The Church and Death

The macabre images which were so predominant in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries were built on centuries of changing Christian philosophy. As Christianity spread north from Rome, it assimilated elements of the Germanic hero-lord legends. The legends influenced society and a high value was placed on the ability of the lord to provide security and the necessities of life and, in return, his vassals gave loyalty and service. Christ, who had given his life to provide salvation, was considered the perfect lord. Owing to the Fall, mankind was in the service of the ultimate unjust lord, Satan, but Christ descended into Hell to replace Satan as man's lord. Christ was a hero who saved the Old Testament figures from Hell, promised eternal life, and purified the soul.\(^5\)

The concept that mankind was bound to Satan as lord since the Fall did not sit well with later theologians. St. Anselm reasoned that man's sin was so great that it could not be repaid by man; Christ's sacrifice was necessary to satisfy the demand for justice. Christ's heroic journey to Hell to become the new lord of all mankind was replaced by the concept of each individual's obligation to Christ for taking the blame of mankind's fall from grace. Due to this change, there was a greater emphasis on each individual's worthiness or inability to receive salvation.

The Church did not want death to be considered a natural occurrence. Death existed because of sin, and an entire lifetime of preparation would not be long enough for the majority of the people to achieve the goal of Heaven. Decay of the body was not just a natural process between the time of death and the resurrection which rejoined the body to the soul: It was the body's punishment for its sins.

At the same time, monasticism cultivated a contempt for the world and withdrew from it: Monks were the "living dead." When the mendicant orders of the Dominicans and Franciscans left the isolation of the monastery to minister to secular society, their sermons increased the preoccupation with death by vividly describing suffering in the afterlife. The Franciscans especially seemed to focus on visual images of decomposition and tortured souls. They used vivid descriptions of Hell, the horror of death, and the vanity of life to emphasize to society the necessary existence of the Church and its clerical hierarchy.

It was much easier to portray Hell and its torments in detailed and emotional images than it was to create a vision of Heaven and God. There were too many questions about the resurrection to describe what happened. Since at least the second century, theologians questioned whether the limbs of those devoured by cannibals rejoined in the resurrection, or if they were added to the risen body of the cannibal. This debate was renewed in the thirteenth century. Other questions were raised by Peter Lombard's

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7Delumeau, 89.
Sentences, including whether birth deformities and injuries sustained during life appear on the resurrected body, and would all hair and nails cut off in a lifetime reappear. The soul’s perfect happiness created by the sight of God was just as difficult to determine and express in words. In contrast, pain and fear were easy to describe and created an appropriate reaction by the people.

Development of Purgatory

The necessity to purge sins after death began before Christianity. In Antiquity, the underworld was a place where the dead of both the good and bad gathered, and no reward or punishment was offered. By the time of Virgil, the underworld had expanded to include judgement and punishment. Minos presided over a court for those who died by false accusations. Those who committed suicide are punished by suffering regret for their acts and their self-inflicted wounds remained visible. As the soul descended to the underworld, it confronted a fork in the road. The right road led directly to Elysium, the fields of bliss, and the left road to an unnamed place of pain for sinners. Those who must take the left road were punished until purged of their sins and then they were allowed to continue on to Elysium.

As the place of punishment took shape throughout the Middle Ages, anticipation of joining with God after death was replaced by dread for the suffering to come.

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Theologians debated the fate of the soul and the consequences of sin during life, while literature provided vivid descriptions of the place of purging and the punishments suffered there as seen through visions. These eyewitness accounts provided proof to Christians that a purgatory existed and the majority of souls received punishment before becoming worthy to enter heaven. This literature of visions of the journey of souls is an excellent device to follow the development of Purgatory.

Before Purgatory became a separate place, souls performed their penance in Hell. Pain in Hell and Purgatory were identical and punishments in both were inflicted by demons. The only difference between the two was that souls in Purgatory could eventually reach Heaven while those who descended into the pit of Hell had no escape. The frightening, and often painful, visions were made valid by the presence of holy guides to explain the necessity of Hell and to protect the dreamer from the demons inhabiting that place. In the vision of St. Furseus, dated 633, an angel tells the saint, “For as every man's body is set on fire by unlawful desire, so when death frees him from the body, he must make due atonements for his sins by fire.” Another seventh century vision was seen by Drythelm. His vision actually provided two holding places for souls who do not enter Heaven right away. One place was a valley of flames and cold for the punishment of souls who had delayed confession and had not amended their ways during

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life, but had managed confession at the moment of death. They would enter Heaven at the Last Judgement. Some managed to reach Heaven before the Last Judgement due to prayers, masses, alms and fasting done on their behalf by the living. The other place was for those who had done good, but were not so perfect as to enter Heaven right away. They were dressed all in white and lived joyfully in a garden.\textsuperscript{12}

The vision of Tundale is recorded in 54 manuscripts dated between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{13} The original was written down by an Irish monk in Latin prose soon after the vision occurred in 1149.\textsuperscript{14} This was the most popular otherworld story before Dante's \textit{Divine Comedy}, and rivaled it in popularity in northern Europe through the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{15} Tundale is an Irish knight. As in previous visions, an angel guides his soul through Hell, which is divided into areas of punishment for specific types of sin. The eternally damned are led into the pit, never to leave, where they are punished by Lucifer himself. All souls who were not perfect in life suffer the punishments outside the pit of Hell. Tundale does not view just the pain of other souls, but suffers for his own sins. There are two other places the souls can go. A wall separates Hell from the place

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., 5.12.

\textsuperscript{13}E.T. Becker, \textit{A Contribution to the Comparative Study of the Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell, with Special Reference to the Middle-English Versions} (Baltimore: John Murphy Company, 1899), 81.


of the Bad, But Not Very Bad. The Not Very Bad are those with no crimes to pay for, but who also did no good. The angel explains that these souls, “All leued they well in honeste / Yette greuyed they God in som parte.” They endure wind and rain, hunger and thirst, but no darkness, stench or pain. Beyond the wall is a field for the Good, But Not Very Good. There is nothing unpleasant here, but neither are the souls granted God's presence. Tundale learns that:

The sowlys that thou syst here within
Han ben in peyn for hor syn
But they ar clansyd throw Goddis grace
And dwellon here now in this place
But yett hennis may thei noght
To the blysse of hevon to be brought
Thawye they ben clansyn of all ylle.

Another vision is based on a legend which says that Christ showed St. Patrick a cave in Ireland that could be entered to view what happened to the evil and good souls, and those who entered could purify their own sins while they were there. The cave actually was used c445-1497. *St. Patrick's Purgatory* describes the experiences of Owen, a knight of King Stephen. Written in 1153 or 1154, this vision is different in several aspects from previous visions. Owen physically enters the cave, so he descends to Hell in both body and soul. He is not provided with a guide, but is told by 15 unidentified men to call on the name of Jesus Christ for protection. Calling on Christ for assistance was

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16 Becker, 84.

17 *The Visions of Tundale*, (Edinburgh: Thomas G. Stevenson, 1843), lines 1525-1526.

18 Ibid., lines 1567-1573.
common in the Middle Ages, but seldom mentioned in vision literature.\textsuperscript{19} The punishments in Hell are general for all, and not connected with specific sins. Owen is grabbed by demons and inflicted with each of the punishments until he remembers to call on the name of Christ. There are no longer two areas for souls to await entry to Heaven. After the souls have been purged of their sins, they are brought to the earthly Paradise. Here they wear clothing of different colors based on the degree of their virtue. The souls stay in Paradise until completely worthy to ascend to Heaven.

The vision of Thurkill provides a place of purgatory that is separate from Hell. Also, the souls are received by saints rather than demons. Thurkill, a laborer in Essex, did not immediately tell others of his vision. He kept silent out of fear until an angel came in a second vision and told Thurkill the intent of his experience had occurred so he could be a witness to others. The vision was finally related in 1206.\textsuperscript{20}

Thurkill is escorted by St. Julian to the place where all souls arrive after death. The souls are all white, all black, or with varying degrees of white and black spots. St. Michael gathers the white souls and brings them directly to a place called the Mount of Joy. All other souls must pass through fire, a salty lake of cold, and over a bridge with sharp stakes and thorns to reach a church. How quickly the souls negotiate these hurdles depends on the quantity and degree of their sins. After successfully crossing the bridge, the memories of these torments are dimmed. St. Peter sends the spotted souls directly to

\textsuperscript{19}Becker, 92.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 96.
the place of purging, which is in the charge of St. Nicholas. The souls which are completely black are weighed to determine if evil or righteousness predominates. St. Paul and a demon preside over this process. The scale is a popular image in the Middle Ages, but rarely surfaces in vision literature. Souls that complete their penance join the white souls on the Mount of Joy to await admittance to Heaven. The Mount of Joy is a new location in the process and is not connected to Paradise.

With the growing belief that a place of purging was necessary before the soul was pure enough to enter Heaven, the Church began the process to make it official. In 1253, the pope wrote a letter requesting that the concept of a purging place be adopted. This letter was presented to the Council of Trent, which made the first official pronouncement in 1254 regarding a place of purging. The council provided Purgatory with its name and associated it with fire. Purgatory was accepted as Church doctrine at the Second Council of Lyons in 1274.

Art and poetry indicate that soon after the Church adopted the idea of Purgatory, Hell became less fearful to the imagination and was replaced by the fear of death. Horrific imagery continued with the belief that the majority of souls would receive punishment after death rather than immediately attaining the bliss of heaven. With the official acceptance of Purgatory, even greater attention was focused on reducing time

\[21\text{Gardiner, 257.}\]

\[22\text{Alice K. Turner, The History of Hell (Orlando: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1993), 231.}\]

\[23\text{Ibid., 124-125.}\]
spent in there, and what could be done to achieve this goal. There was a greater concern with ‘good’ and ‘bad’ deaths, and a quick, unexpected death was feared because it took away the opportunity for the final confession and forgiveness. With minds preoccupied with these thoughts, the dead were given greater consideration by the living. The Living could not forget the dead as the names of deceased congregation members were read aloud at church services.24

Changing Focus of the Last Judgement

As Purgatory grew from an unnamed place in the underworld to Church doctrine, the view of the Last Judgement changed as well. The Byzantine church rejected Purgatory, and the Eastern art of the Last Judgement shows Christ releasing Adam and the other Old Testament patriarchs from Limbo. The Byzantine Christians saw the Last Judgement as the completion of the cycle of mankind's fall and redemption, and preferred the positive image of resurrection over the image of the condemnation of souls.25 However, in Western Catholicism, there was a slow change from the Christian dead ascending directly to Heaven, to the belief in judgement of a soul's worth immediately at death.

In early Christian belief, the resurrection of the flesh was inseparable from the Last Judgement. Tertullian of Carthage said that since man will be judged according to


how he lived, his soul must be judged along with the flesh that accompanied him during life. The body and soul must be reunited after death before final judgement can occur. Until this judgement takes place, the soul is punished for the sins it committed while the body's punishment is deferred until reunited with the soul.26

Early Christian art usually portrays Christ as either seated or standing, an impassive figure above the chaos of the world.27 The Apocalypse to come is represented by the four beasts, which also are passive. At the funeral chapel of Bishop Agilbert, dated 680, a depiction of the Last Judgement shows the resurrection of the dead occurring at the Second Coming. Christ holds the Book of Life but neither judges nor condemns.28

During the twelfth century, the Last Judgement took on a more ominous tone and was more frequently depicted than previously. Christ became an active judge of souls. At Sainte Foy in Conques, Christ raises one hand to bless the righteous souls on his right side, and lowers his other hand to condemn the souls on his left. These latter souls are tormented by demons, and some are pushed into the mouth of Hell. While terrifying images appear during this century, such as the bodiless giant hands which grasp a condemned soul by the neck on the tympanum at Autun Cathedral, this was also a time when there was an increase in earthly pleasures and concern for the physical body. Art

26Gatch, 67.


28Philippe Ariès, Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present, trans. Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 29.
and literature had a greater focus on the positive aspects of worldly life. Previously, most religious commentaries had been written about the book of Revelation and the Apocalypse; now the most common treatises discussed the Song of Songs.\(^{29}\)

With the official acceptance of Purgatory, fear of judgement at the moment of death rivaled the importance of the Second Coming. The act of weighing the souls became more important, and Mary and the saints became active intercessors between Christ and human souls. The Book of Life was replaced by two books listing good deeds and bad deeds to account for the individual's life.\(^{30}\) Art identifies the naked souls sent to Hell by depicting headdresses associated with various stations in life. Churchmen of every rank are seen going to Hell, indicating that belief alone is not enough to be saved, and there is no assurance of salvation for anyone.

Thomas Aquinas believed that since the soul is rational and the body is not, virtue and fault come to the body only through the soul. Since the soul is responsible for good and bad, it is not necessary to wait for the resurrection of the body for the soul to receive reward or punishment for its deeds in life. The soul has the power of sensation, but needs the body to use that power. When the soul is separate from the body, it cannot know itself or other souls directly. Even if the soul is righteous, goes directly to Heaven and is allowed sight of God, it cannot attain perfect happiness until rejoined with its body. The


\(^{30}\)Ariès, *Western Attitudes*, 32.
cognition of the body is needed for the full understanding of the Divine.\textsuperscript{31} Likewise, a soul cannot attain ultimate punishment in Hell until rejoined with the body. Therefore, there is judgement of just the soul at death, and judgement of the combined body and soul at the Last Judgement. Since the soul is incomplete without the body, the second judgement after resurrection is necessary to reaffirm the earlier judgement of the soul at death.\textsuperscript{32}

In the early fourteenth century, succeeding popes confused the matter by issuing opposing statements about the Last Judgement. Pope John XXII declared that damnation of the wicked and full realization of the divine for the blessed had to wait for the Second Coming. Pope Benedict XII asserted that it was possible for the pure soul to see the divine before the Second Coming.\textsuperscript{33}

The early Church believed that Christian souls went immediately to heaven after death, making death an experience to be anticipated rather than feared. The changes in Church doctrine, particularly the soul’s journey to Purgatory, made death a source of severe anxiety.


\textsuperscript{32}Gatch, 99-100.

\textsuperscript{33}Bynum, \textit{Resurrection}, 283, 285.
Developments In the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries

The changing emphasis of religion on the more gruesome aspects of death and the afterlife certainly influenced the development of the macabre. Social and political ills intensified this development. Although the appearance of the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century often receives full credit for the growth of death images in art, it is actually only one of several disruptions to society. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England were besieged by famine, revolts, war, and religious and political conflicts in addition to the plague. The continual presence of internal crisis, not resolved in England until the beginning of the Tudor Dynasty, created an overwhelming sense of pessimism and dread. People did not fear the individual events as much as they believed the combination of problems signaled God’s disfavor and the end of the world.

Society Struggles

The eleventh century through much of the thirteenth century saw a growing population and economy, and more land developed for agriculture. However, with few developments in new farming techniques, the carrying capacity of the expanded productive land was soon exceeded. Additionally, the growth of urban centers both placed a great demand on food production and also removed farm labor. In the late thirteenth century, the rate of population growth slowed and leveled, and perhaps even declined.

Another difficulty was the shift in weather to a colder climate with longer winters and wetter summers. Crops, especially in marginal areas, began to fail. This failure, with
the addition of floods, created a famine in 1315 to 1317, with a continuation of near famine for a generation afterwards.\textsuperscript{34} Crops had barely begun to recover when the cattle were struck with disease from 1319 to 1321. This was followed immediately by another crop failure. The expansion of the frontiers of agricultural lands had ceased and even shrunk.\textsuperscript{35}

As the health of the people declined with these failures, the health of the government also declined. The strong and forceful Edward I was succeeded in 1307 by his much weaker son. Edward II was unable to gain the respect of his nobility and allowed himself to be advised by inappropriate favorites. The nobles, unable to gain influence with Edward, hanged his favorite, Piers Gaveston. Unfortunately, the nobility itself was not united and there were several disputes between them, including an armed conflict between Lancaster and Surrey in 1317. Through the influence of yet another favorite, Hugh Despenser the Younger, Edward executed his opponents among the nobility, confiscated their land, and imprisoned their families. Disgusted with his tyrannical behavior, the queen Isabella and her lover, Roger Mortimer, led the nobles in revolt. Despenser was executed and Edward imprisoned, and eventually deposed in favor of his son, Edward III, who was age 14. Edward III was to prove a much more capable ruler, but the forced removal of the rightful king from his throne created anxiety. In spite


of Edward II's incapability to rule, he was placed on the throne with the Church's blessing. It was uncertain what God's response would be to the removal of His anointed, and what possible punishment might be inflicted on the people for this action.

Edward III renewed war with Scotland, and in 1337 claimed the right to the French throne, which began the Hundred Years' War. Although the wars were fought on foreign soils and brought no damage to English land, the economy suffered tremendously. To pay for simultaneous wars on two different fronts, Edward borrowed from Italian bankers as well as local individuals and guilds. Revenues were increased by raising existing taxes and creating new ones.

When the plague first struck in 1348, the population was already weakened by a shortage of food and a difficult economy. As there was no known cause for the plague, and it struck suddenly and arbitrarily, it was considered divine retribution for the sins of the people. The plague continued to reappear every few years, although in less severity, until the eighteenth century. Franciscans already had begun teaching the horrible nature of death and the need to reform. The plague served to re-emphasize the friars' sermons about the transience of life and the equality of death.

The rapid decline of population caused by the plague created a labor shortage, especially on the manors. Forests and marshes reclaimed agricultural lands. In order to attract and retain laborers, the lords were forced to offer wages for services rendered, and their demesne lands were reduced or eliminated and distributed to the peasants. As the

lives of the peasants began to improve under these conditions, the lords tried to retain their previous feudal powers. The Statue of Laborers in 1349 attempted to place a limit on wages the peasants could receive.

From 1377 to 1380, there was fear that France would invade England.\textsuperscript{37} Intensified war efforts created the need for renewed tax increases in 1377, 1379 and 1380. The peasants finally revolted in 1381. Among the demands were the abolition of poll taxes and serfdom, exchange of services for rent, and renunciation of the Statue of Laborers.

The king at the time of the Peasant's Revolt was Richard II, who had come to the throne at age ten. Like Edward II, he relied on favorites to advise him. With his forced abdication in 1399 and his subsequent murder, the Plantagenets' line ceased to rule England. In addition to the anxiety created by the removal of another king from the throne, the succession was in dispute for the first time in 200 years. Civil war erupted.

In spite of the economic hardships the Hundred Years' War had brought, it always had been seen in a relatively positive light. It had brought unity and purpose to a nobility that had been divided under Edward II. In the name of his claim to the French throne, Edward III vowed to establish another Round Table, creating an atmosphere of chivalry and heroism. By contrast, the War of the Roses was seen as another punishment from God. It was the embodiment of death, decay, and disorder.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{37}Hollister, 302.

\textsuperscript{38}P. Tristram, \textit{Figures of Life}, 9-10.
The mid-fifteenth century brought tremendous political disorder. Henry VI came to the throne in 1422 at the age of eight months. The Hundred Years' War turned against England's favor in 1435, and the claim to the French throne was finally lost in 1453. As an adult, Henry's mental condition began to deteriorate. His opponents in the civil war took this opportunity to replace him in 1461 with their candidate, Edward IV. Henry's faction returned him to the throne in 1470, but in 1471 Edward regained control and both Henry and his heir were killed. At Edward's death, his brother Richard took the throne away from the young Edward V. Edward and his younger brother disappeared, supposedly killed. It was not until 1485, when Richard was killed at the Battle of Bosworth Field and Henry Tudor took the throne, that internal political turmoil finally eased and England believed a new age had begun.

Contempt for the Church

Just as secular society enjoyed a period of growth in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, so did the Church. The Church had security, power, and its extended reach. All of these began to diminish at the end of the thirteenth century. In 1291, the last Christian stronghold in the Holy Land, Acre, was lost to the Muslims. The Church as an institution suffered criticism and a loss of authority. When the popes moved their seat of power from Rome to Avignon in 1305, England increased its efforts to remove papal control of its clergy. In 1307, Parliament passed acts limiting the authority of the papacy in England, including an act against the popes' tax collectors.
The Avignon Papacy resulted in a decline in power and authority of the Church. The popes made unpopular decisions such as the destruction of the Order of the Templars, and condemnations against the vow of poverty taken by the Franciscan order and the existence of popular urban religious movements. Abuses such as selling offices, pluralism and absenteeism increased. The clergy were often illiterate, uneducated in matters of theology, or lacked a true vocation. Church councils continually passed legislation to remove these abuses, but the popes did little to enforce them, overlooked abuses in exchange for a monetary payment, or granted a dispensation.

During these years there was also an increase of clerical concubinage. Illegitimate sons were allowed dispensations to hold benefices and be consecrated. Many were allowed to inherit their father's religious position. In the first part of 1337, Pope Benedict XII gave 207 dispensations to illegitimate sons; 148 were sons of priests. In July of 1342, under Clement VI, 614 dispensations were given: 484 were for sons of priests who were also younger than 26; 25 was the minimum age required for ordination, a rule also frequently ignored.

With the increasing ignorance, indifference, and immorality of the clergy, and the flagrant abuses of Church authority, the mendicant orders gained more popularity. Lay

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39 R.W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Middlesex: Harmondsworth, 1975), 44.


41 Ibid., 175.
piety increased, but in ways that circumvented traditional Church authority. Clerical teachings were overshadowed by increased vernacular writings, sermons, and criticisms. There was a rise of confraternities like the Brethren of the Common Life, guild sponsorship and participation in religious plays, and the use of personal Books of Hours. Others turned away from Christianity and toward older superstitious practices, such as astrology and black magic.

The papacy returned to Rome in 1376. Before two years had passed, the cardinals and popes themselves broke the unity of the Church. Two popes, and later three, claimed to be the head of the Church. In the 1390's there was an swelling of anxiety regarding the end of the world. The Great Schism was shown to be related to prophecies of the reign of the Antichrist described in the book of Revelation. Calculations by mystics such as Joachim of Fiore said the end was due. Sermons resounded with impending doom. Adam Usk wrote in 1400 that the two popes had, “Sorely vexed the world by leading men's souls astray and racking their bodies with divers terrors.”

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42Finucane, 50.


44Camille, 229.

45Flick, 287.
Rise of Individualism

While the social, political and religious upheaval created fear and anxiety, another development was taking place that was much less traumatic than war, plague and famine, but still contributed to the fascination of the macabre. The doctrine of Purgatory changed the concept of the universal salvation of mankind to an individual's death and redemption. The emphasis that friars placed on the agony suffered by Christ, rather than the defeat of sin for the glory of all, created concern for every individual's death and fate of his soul.

Revival of portraiture in the mid-fourteenth century, that is, the likeness of the actual person rather than an idealized image, reflected the development of the individual.\(^46\) This rise in individualism placed a person at greater jeopardy: While persons could work to remove time in Purgatory, they also could unknowingly make decisions that were harmful to their soul. It was believed that perhaps demons would be able to deceive them into choosing the wrong path.

With the concern that the papacy might be misguiding the people, and the Church's inability to provide help against the years of hunger and sickness, confidence in the established Church hierarchy decreased and piety became more personal. Mysticism allowed a direct connection between an individual and God without the intervention of sacraments or clergy. Astrology also provided an individual connection; the unique characteristics of each person determined his or her future.

Throughout these years, the clergy struggled to regain authority over the laity. The fear of death and punishment already was pervasive and the clergy discovered that images of skulls, worms, fire, and other horrors were a way to frighten the people back into the churches. In order to continue receiving the same level of response to these images, it was necessary to continually add details and elaboration.47

However, the imagery of the macabre influenced society in ways beyond the control of the Church. Literature bemoaned the fact that everything achieved in life was lost at death and that heroes who brought glory to mankind no longer existed.48 Secular art depicted demons hovering around the living and the Church’s inability to dispel them. Death and Purgatory became more than a consequence of sin. They created a sense of uselessness and despair of existence.

47Beaty, 44-45.

Attitudes Toward the Dead

As stated earlier, the people of the Middle Ages had conflicting ideas about life, and this included death. Sometimes death was God's messenger and sometimes it was God's enemy. Sudden death was often seen as a punishment sent by God, so there was a stigma attached to it.\textsuperscript{49} This attitude had existed since the days of Homer, when sudden death was caused by a shot from Apollo or Artemis. Sudden or premature death was thereby explained as a righteous punishment for behavior of the deceased.

From the age of the patriarchs, visions of the afterlife or communication with the dead was considered a guarantee for the existence of an afterlife.\textsuperscript{50} An importance was placed on seeing the dead in dreams, as sleep was a relative of death. While the body must rest, the soul does not and so during sleep the soul could travel and witness things beyond the earthly world.

The Body

The Old Testament taught that dead bodies were impure. Whoever touched the body of a dead person was unclean and must cleanse himself on the third and seventh day or he would defile the tabernacle. If a man died in a tent, even the open vessels in the tent were made unclean. In a field, if someone touched a body killed with a sword, either the

\textsuperscript{49} Ariès, \textit{Hour of Our Death}, 12.

\textsuperscript{50} Gatch, 142.
corpse a man or his bones, or even a grave, the person would become unclean.  
Pagans also believed the dead were unclean and had the bodies buried outside the walls of the city. Christianity introduced to the Greco-Roman world the belief in the resurrection of the body which reduced the fear of death and the dead. Christianity even made the body an object of veneration in certain instances; not only the body of Christ became holy but also the bodies of saints and martyrs. Basilicas were built within city walls and martyrs were buried in them. As the association of altars with tombs of martyrs grew, the faithful increasingly desired to be buried close to those martyrs so as to be near them at the time of resurrection.

In the late thirteenth through fourteenth centuries, it was believed that the soul expressed itself through the body. Since this connection existed, the body displayed the state of the soul. Therefore, since the souls of saints were blessed, their bodies were believed to be incorruptible. Etheldreda, the wife of King Egfrid, remained a virgin and eventually retired to a convent, living a holy life. When her body was disinterred 16 years after her death to be placed in a new coffin, it was not decayed, her burial clothes were fresh, and an incision made just before her death was found to be healed.

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51 Numbers 19:11-16.
53 Bede, 4.19.
were saints' bodies undecayed if disinterred years after death, but they were claimed to be
sweet-smelling, sometimes emitted light, and a few even sprouted flowers.\textsuperscript{54}

Corruption of the body was believed to occur due to sin. During life, the sins of
the body caused the production of fleas, lice and other vermin. Decomposition of the
dead came not from the worms in the earth, but the worms of sin which dwelled within
the body.\textsuperscript{55} Worms appearing before death or at the moment of death displayed the evil
nature of the deceased.\textsuperscript{56} Innocent III wrote of man:

Alive, he brings forth lice and tapeworms; dead he will beget worms and
flies. Alive, he produces dung and vomit; dead he produces rottenness and
stench. Alive, he fattens one man, dead he will fatten many worms.
What, then, is more foul smelling than a human corpse? What more
horrible than a dead man?\textsuperscript{57}

Bodies were usually buried quickly, within a few hours or a couple of days after
death. The bodies themselves were not feared, as seen in a story of \textit{The Golden Legend}:
A man recited prayers for the dead every time he passed through the graveyard; when
attacked by enemies, he fled to the graveyard; the bodies, in gratitude for his prayers, rose
with weapons to defend him.\textsuperscript{58} Fear of the dead came from the process of decay
indicating the presence of sin and concern for the contamination of the living from that

\textsuperscript{54}Camille, 205.

\textsuperscript{55}Ariès, \textit{Hour of Our Death}, 120.

\textsuperscript{56}Camille, 178.

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., 171.

\textsuperscript{58}P. Tristram, 161.
To escape the process of decomposition, it became popular with nobility and royalty of thirteenth century Northern Europe to boil the corpse, separating the pure bones from corrupt flesh. In spite of the Church's teaching that death leveled all, nobility and even high ranking clergy wished to be remembered as they were in life, and not as an indistinguishable heap of bones. Effigies provided a likeness of the individuals in the clothing and symbols of their life to remind the people that they retained an exalted position even after death. The first royal effigy was that of Edward II, who died in 1327.

In spite of the aversion to decay, the cemetery was a popular meeting place for the public. At the Cemetery of Innocents in Paris, along the walls and arcades of the charnel where bones were piled, shops and stalls sold a wide variety of goods, from rosary beads to food. In 1394, Pope Clement IV believed the revelry in cemeteries had gone too far and restricted dancing, prostitution and boules-playing.

Ghosts and Spirits

In Homer's time, there was a clear separation between the worlds of the living and the dead. The dead Patroklaus appeared to Achilleus in a dream asking to be buried. His spirit could not pass over the river into Hades until his body was buried. Once there, he

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59 Camille, 177.

60 Finucane, "Sacred Corpse," 47.

61 Camille, 195.
could not recross the river to visit the living. Patroclus could make only a request; he had no power over the living. If Achilles chose not to follow that request, the spirit could do nothing either to force acquiescence or gain revenge for unfulfillment. There are no rewards for the good or punishment for the bad. Only three individuals are placed outside of the commonality and are punished in Hades: Sisyphus, Tantalus and Tityus. They are punished because they tried to unbalance universal order.

The souls were passive and "senseless dead." Even so, they were sometimes visited by the living and asked about past or future events. However, the dead did not always know what was happening currently in the land of the living: Achilleus had to ask Odysseus how his son was faring. The soul of Teiresias the Theban alone had been granted knowledge of the present after death.

By the fifth century BC, separation between the spirit world and the living had disappeared. Charon the ferryman now guides the spirits across the river, and can allow the dead back across the river to go to the land of the living. Spirits roam the world of the living. They are no longer passive or helpless, but complain, terrorize and sometimes

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65 Ibid., 11.492.
injure or kill the living. The belief that everyone who dies must go to Hades is changed. Heroes can escape Hades and live in a type of paradise. The ghost of Anchises appears to Aeneas as he sleeps. Anchises says he is not in Hades, but the garden of Elysiam with other righteous souls. Some, like Heracles, even can become a god. The common treatment of souls in Hades is replaced by individual destinies depending on actions in life: The individual has gained some control over his soul’s future existence.

People believed that the spirit stayed near the corpse, especially in violent, premature deaths and suicides. With the recently dead, the spirit was still in connection with the body and witches could use pieces of the body to gain control of the spirit to carry out their evil. A person could write a curse on lead or pottery and put it into a grave of a newly deceased. The ghost would take the curse to demonic powers to fulfill or carry it out itself. The ghosts came back to complain that funeral rites or offerings were not done correctly, name their murderer, and offer advice. While spirits sometimes appeared of their own accord, they more often were summoned and some were reluctant to come.

The ghosts of early Medieval Christianity once again became more passive. Augustine said that only the dead saints and martyrs actually visited the living, and that the appearance of ghostly family and friends really were just creations of the imagination

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66Finucane, *Appearances of the Dead*, 4-5.

67Virgil, 5:965-968.

of the living. The dead could not do anything physically, positive or negative, to the living. However, the living could aid the dead with prayers, or could send messages to the departed through angels or a dying person.\(^6^9\) Like Classical ghosts, the early Christian ghosts came to offer advice and guidance, tell the living where lost or hidden items could be found or help solve murders. Sometimes they complained that they did not receive a proper burial or offerings, or requested that their bones be put in one place rather than separated at different shrines.

Early Christians tried to separate themselves from Greco-Roman beliefs, and so down-played ghosts, magic and superstition. However, as missionaries came in contact with Germanic tribes and Celtic peoples, traditional superstitions of the region were used to attract converts. At the same time, the belief in a place of purging began to grow. Both of these increased contact between the worlds of the living and the dead.\(^7^0\)

Ghosts of ordinary people could haunt if they had not been buried properly. The spirit of a murdered priest named Hewald, whose body had been tossed into the river, appeared to a monk and told him where the body could be found for proper burial.\(^7^1\) The dead also warned the living of their own impending demise. A nun who had died appeared a year later to a fellow nun and told her she would die at dawn, which she did.\(^7^2\)

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\(^6^9\)Ibid., 37.

\(^7^0\)Ibid., 42.

\(^7^1\)Bede, 5.10.

\(^7^2\)Ibid., 4.8.
As the belief in ghosts continued to grow, Augustine's theory about the appearance of spirits was discarded. Spirits of ordinary people could appear to request prayers, masses and alms. Although they most often appeared to family and fiends, they could request these things from strangers. If a spirit had died before completing a penance, it could request the completion of the penance by another. When the spirits appeared, their sins appeared as dark spots, and they often showed the result of punishments inflicted on their souls. When the prayers, masses or penance had been completed by the living, ghosts returned to display their pure white souls and thank those who had helped them achieve heaven.

Those already damned and who could not benefit from prayers visited the living to warn them of the importance of confession, absolution and Last Rites at the moment of death. They also warned that if the confession was done improperly or with a lack of faith, it would not be effective. If the dead had not confessed before death, they could return and confess and be absolved. Originally, even those excommunicated and those with mortal sins could be absolved. During the thirteenth century, forgiveness for mortal sins became more difficult, and only those with venial sins could be absolved after death.  

Although religious belief at this time still taught that the Last Judgement took place at the Second Coming, stories continued to tell of spirits who had already been assigned to heaven or hell. Spirits would appear to the living and request their aid from

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suffering in the place of purging. Gregory the Great tells of a Roman deacon, Paschasius, who was very pious. At his death, a miracle of healing occurred at his bier. However, the pious Paschasius had continued to support an individual who had lost a papal election. For this minor fault, and in spite of the miracle occurring due to Paschasius' piety, his soul suffered. His spirit appeared to a bishop and requested prayers to release him from suffering.\textsuperscript{74}

As the Middle Ages progressed, ghosts gained more access to the world of the living and were able to influence the behavior of surviving family and friends. Decay of the body was not a natural biological process, but was a result of sin. Art and literature vividly portrayed this decay to remind the living of inevitable death and the necessity of repentance.

\textsuperscript{74}Gatch, 146.
The Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead

When Europe rediscovered how to make glass mirrors in the twelfth century, the number of manuscripts with 'mirror' in the title suddenly rose. This type of writing provided both negative and positive examples of character, action or destiny. Using the mirror provided in the text, the reader saw himself and all of mankind as subject to Fate. The goal of the text was to make the reader aware of the transience of life and the necessity of reforming behavior in preparation for the afterlife. 'Mirror' appears in more titles in the period 1200-1250 than in the preceding three centuries. By 1300, 2/3 of the mirror titles recorded came from England. In the following century, England produced half of the total mirror titles.75

The Legend of the Three Living and The Three Dead functions in the same manner as the "mirrors" of contemporary literature: It presents a vision of all the vanities of man reduced to a corpse. In the Legend, three men meet three dead forms who warn the men to reform their lives in order to achieve salvation. Typically, the Legend, both in literature and art, includes a variation of the phrase, "As you are now so once were we. As we are now so you shall be."

The Legend does more than just portray images of the dead or of Death personified coming to claim his victims. By giving the Dead a voice, the Legend fed into the same anxiety created by the use of fear for the soul's destination after death as taught

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in sermons. W. A. Pantin says of the Legend, "It used to be fashionable among historians to connect such gruesome themes with the Black Death, but that is quite unnecessary, for they must always have been among the stock-in-trade of the moralists." As discussed previously, the themes of bodily decomposition, the suddenness of death and the need for repentance began in the thirteenth century, well before the plague came to Europe. Not only do the figures of the Dead represent what the Living will become, but their words affirm that horrible future reality and, additionally, rebuke the living for enjoying the material world.

The Legend developed in written form in the second half of the thirteenth century and quickly became widespread; the best known versions were from France and England. It became a popular art form by about 1300, appearing in illuminations, such as in the psalter of Robert de Lisle, c. 1310. Only a short time later, it became a popular subject for English wall paintings.

**Literature**

There are many precursors in literature to the Legend and it is impossible to determine from which the Legend is descended. A probable influence is *A Message from the Tomb*, in which bones talk to the living about reforming their lives. Another inspiration may be *Les Vers de la Mort*, written between 1193-1197 by a monk named

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76 Delumeau, 67.

Hélinant. In his writing, a personified death visits people to warn them of the inevitability of death, so they still have time to change their lives before the end comes.\textsuperscript{78}

The earliest version of the Legend itself appears to be that of Baudoin de Condé. He was a minstrel at the court of Margaret, Countess of Flanders, 1244-80.\textsuperscript{79} During the same time period there are two other French poems, one attributed to Nicholes de Marginal and the other author unknown. These and others written shortly thereafter all describe three young men, proud and noble but not differentiated by age or attitude, who meet three dead men. The Dead are emaciated but not yet skeletons. They occasionally may be distinguished by the rank they held in life, but this is done to reinforce the leveling brought by death rather than an effort to develop individual characters. A discussion follows the meeting as the Dead warn the Living of the unavoidable end of life.\textsuperscript{80} The speeches often are repetitive and in some cases, convey no feeling of anxiety or urgency.

In Condé's version, the first of the Living is horrified at the sight of the Dead and flees in terror. The second greets the Dead as sent by God while the third dwells on the horror of their decaying bodies. The first Dead says he was once rich, young and handsome, and warns the Living they will one day be like him. The second Dead reminds them death seizes all, nobles and commoners alike, and that death is a mirror

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\textsuperscript{78}Leonard Paul Kurtz, \textit{The Dance of Death and the Macabre Spirit in European Literature} (Geneve: Slatkine Reprints, 1975; reprint 1934), 12.

\textsuperscript{79}P. Tristram, \textit{Figures of Life}, 163.

\textsuperscript{80}Kurtz, 18, 19.
placed in front of men by God. The third Dead emphasizes that there is no escape from
death and so encourages repentance. All three urge good works in order to be saved:

Vous serez comme nous sommes
d'avance mirez-vous en nous
puissance, honneur, richesse ne sont rien
a l'heure de la mort
il n'y a que les bonnes oeuvres qui comptent.
[You will be as we are
Behold yourselves betimes in us
Power, honor, riches are nothing
At the hour of death
Only good works count.]

Although there are many English literary works based on the inevitability of
death, often discussed by a dead person or worms, the agents of decomposition, there are
only two known British versions of the Legend, and these are written 200 years after
Condé's version. Even with only two British works, the literature of the Legend was so
commonly known in England that Chaucer could allude to the Legend in the Pardoner's
Tale without including all of the elements of the original Legend. Chaucer portrays
three living who have not heeded the lessons of the Legend. They seek out Death to
defeat him instead of recognizing the inevitability of death. They are offered material
wealth, and unable to avoid the sin of greed, gain their own deaths. Chaucer does not
provide three corpses, but his Tale still connects the reader's mind to the Legend.

81Kathleen Cohen, Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol: The Transi Tomb in the
Late Middle Ages and Renaissance (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 34.

82Philippa Tristram, "Olde Stories Longe Tyme Agoon: 'Death and the Audience
of Chaucer's Pardoner," in Death in the Middle Ages, eds. Herman Braet and Werner
Verbeke (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1983), 166.
The first of the British Legend poems is found in a compilation of works by John Audelay located in one manuscript in the Bodleian Library. The only known date for Audelay is from a biographical notation at the end of Poem 18 which mentions that the first 18 poems were completed by 1426. At the end of Poem 55, Audelay mentions he served as a priest to Lord Strange of Shropshire, probably Richard le Strange who was lord 1397-1449. The poet was known to be blind and deaf and the manuscript was written by three other hands. It is unknown if the manuscript was dictated by the poet or written from memory at a later date.\(^3\)

It is questionable that the poem of the Legend is an original by Audelay. It is more alliterative and complicated than the rest of his work and contains 160 words that do not occur in his other poems. The structure seems to indicate an earlier style of writing, and the vocabulary probably indicates a more northern dialect. In these respects, there are some similarities to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.\(^4\) It is probable that Audelay dictated a poem he had heard elsewhere.

The English seemed to prefer creating a more individualistic Living and Dead than the French and usually provided some superfluous details. For example, the Living are usually in the pursuit of hunting or hawking when they meet the Dead, and the surrounding land, the horses and hounds, and servants accompanying the Living are described. The poem attributed to Audelay contrasts the action and violence of the hunt


\(^4\)Whiting, xxiv, xxvii.
with the frightening but solemn meeting with the Dead. The poem is unusual in that it includes a narrator who is not one of the three Living or three Dead. The Narrator witnesses an exhausted and frantic boar followed by a large hunting party. He then recounts what happens to the three kings in the party, but does not explain how he knows. Although he personally witnessed the hunt, he does not apparently witness the meeting with the Dead. The Narrator emphasizes the function of the poem as a mirror. Even before the kings learn the errors of their ways, the Narrator directs the poem to “be lede þat wold lestyn and lere” [The people that would listen and learn.]\(^{85}\)

Another unusual aspect is that the Living must pass through a portal of winds and a mist before reaching the Dead. They pass out of the mist into a flowering field where the Dead make their appearance. Their coffins and graves are nearby and they are described as having “Lost þe lyp and þe lyuer seþyn þai were layd loue” (Audelay, ln 45). There is no indication of a difference in age or importance of the kings, but their different reactions to the three Dead are described carefully.

The first king is already full of anxiety, owing to the mist. When he sees the Dead, he is very afraid of them and believes them to be ghosts. He cries out, “Now al my gladchip is gone, I grede and am agast” [Now all my gladness is gone, I cry out and am aghast] (Audelay, ln 57) and, “Bot was me neuer so wo in þis world þat Y wyst” (Audelay, ln 60). In spite of his fear, he stands his ground.

The second king is described as a man of might and power. The Dead are loathsome to him, but he believes the kings have been diverted from their intended course to be taught a lesson. He also makes a connection between their prior hunt of the boar and their current situation as the pursued of the Dead.

The third king believes the Dead to be demons. He is even more afraid than the first king and suggests they flee:

My hert fares fore fregt as flagge when hit foldus, 
Uche fyngyr of my hond fore ferdchip hit feldus. 
Fers am I ferd of oure fate; 
Fle we ful fast þer-fore. 
[My heart goes for fright as a flag when it folds, 
Each finger of my hand for terror it clasps. 
Terribly am I afraid of our journey; 
Flee we full quickly therefore.] (Audelay, In 85-88)

The first Dead is quick to reassure the Living. He identifies himself and his companions as the kings' "fathers of old" (Audelay, In 93). It is unlikely he means they are literally ancestors of these particular men, but they are human dead rather than demons. He chastises the Living for their treatment of those with whom they have no bonds. The Dead indicates he was dignified and handsome while alive, but now, "Lo here þe wormus in my womé þai wallon and wyndon" [Lo here the worms in my womb they swarm and wind] (Audelay, In 98). He says the kings have been made lords but are unworthy of that rank as they do not remember the dead with prayers.

The second Dead warns against the desire of the flesh because it lies, "Foe werto schuld ye leue hit, hit lyus; hit ledys youe be lagmon" [For whereto should you believe it, it lies; It leads you astray] (Audelay, In 113-114). The third Dead says the Living
should use the example of his life to recognize their own errors, "Makis your merour be me" (Audelay, ln 120). He describes himself as full of mirth when he was alive. He enjoyed insulting others and so was hated by all ranks of life. He urges the Living to "Bot turn youe fro tryuyls" (Audelay, ln 130).

The visit from the Dead makes an effective change in the three kings. The Narrator says they never oppressed anyone again and, "Bot ay þe hendyr hert after þai hade" [But ever the more gracious heart after they had] (Audelay, ln 136). They built a church to praise God, and wrote on the wall that “To lyte will leue þis, allas” (Audelay, ln 142).

The other known British poem is by Robert Henryson, a Scottish poet. He graduated from the University of Glasgow in 1462 and was possibly a school teacher in Dunfermline. His poem, *The Thre Dead Pollis*, involves talking heads rather than full skeletons or corpses. It is uncertain if the heads speak in unison or each speaks a portion on behalf of all. There is no mention of any Living present in a confrontation. Rather, they address their words to youth, ladies and pride in a generic way. As there is no Living to react in horror to the appearance of the heads, they must describe themselves to invoke the fear of the reader. They refer to their "holkit ene" [hollowed-out eyes] and "peilit pollis bare" [peeled heads bare]. As with the other poems of the Legend, the Heads are a mirror to the reader always to be kept in mind, "This sair exampill to se

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quotidiane / Sowld caus all men fra wicket vycis fle” [This sore example to see daily /
Should cause all men from wicked vices flee] (Henryson, In 15-16).

Although “The hour of deth and place is uncertane” (Henryson, In 12), there
seems to be less concern for an unexpected death leaving a person unprepared. Instead,
you focus on death in old age, “O febill aige, ay drawand neir the dait / Of dully deid,
and hes thy dayis compleit” [O feeble age, all drawn near the day / Of doleful death, and
have thy days complete] (Henryson, In 49-50). You do emphasize that death comes to
all, both rich and poor, and that death creates equality:

Quha was fairest or fowlest of ws thre,
Or quhikl of ws of kin was gentillar,
Or maist expert in science or in lare,
In art, musik, or in astronomye?.
[Who was fairest or foulest of us three,
Or which of us of kin was gentler,
Or most expert in science or in knowledge,
In art, music, or in astronomy?] (Henryson ln 43-46)

The Heads discuss how worldly things will vanish, such as beauty, but unlike
Audelay's Dead, they don't urge the reader away from those things or demand specific
reforms. They urge only that the reader ask for grace and mercy contritely:

Fall on thy kneis, ask grace at God, and greit,
With orisionis and haly salmes sweit
Beseikand him on the to haif mercy
...For mercy cry and pray in generall.

(Henryson, ln 52-54, 59)

Through prayers by the living, both the souls of the living and the dead for whom they
pray will be saved, “Throwch your prayar that we and ye may ring / With the hie Fader be
eternitie” (Henryson, ln 61-62).
Art Programs

The depiction of the Legend in English art appeared first in illuminations. A miniature from the end of the thirteenth century illustrates a manuscript of Condé's poem. A psalter that dates around 1290 features an illustration of the Legend. The psalter of John de Lyle, commissioned in 1339 as a present for his daughter, Audere, places the Living and Dead in two groups. The Living are crowned and stare at the skeletons. Two of the Dead are draped in disintegrating shrouds.

The Legend is classified as a morality-type painting, along with the Seven Deadly Sins and the Seven Acts of Mercy. While the three Dead usually tell the Living that they will inevitably lose their worldly beauty and become corpses, the Legend is not primarily a warning that all must die, but an admonition against Pride, the worst of the Deadly Sins. Contemplation of a dead man's bones was already a practice of the Middle Ages as a remedy against Pride.

There are no less than 28 examples in England of the Legend which either exist or have been recorded on the walls of parish churches, and certainly many others perished unrecorded. Very few subjects in the period can equal that total. The only complete

87 Delumeau, 70.


remaining murals in England are Wickhampton, Hurstbourne Tarrant, Kentford, and Raunds, all from the mid-fourteenth through fifteenth centuries.

The other wall paintings have been lost for a variety of reasons. The first attack on images in England occurred at the end of the fourteenth century with the Lollard adherents of Wycliffe, followed by a more serious attack when England broke with Rome in the 1530's. There were peaks of destruction in the reign of Edward VI and the beginning of Elizabeth's reign. The most extreme destruction occurred during the Commonwealth, 1649-60.¹¹ Paintings were either broken from the walls, effaced or white washed. Some of the paintings hidden by white wash were rediscovered in the Victorian era. However, certain themes, such as the Legend and the mouth of Hell, so revolted the Victorians that they quickly covered them over again. Other damage done to paintings include the dampness of the English climate, other art or monuments placed over them, rebuilding and restoration, improper preservation techniques used in the early twentieth century, and the change in the colors due to pigments used. Seventeen examples of the Legend recorded at the end of nineteenth century are now gone, either destroyed during World War II or through deterioration.

In 14 of 21 wall paintings of the Legend still clearly visible in England, the Living are crowned as kings. Most of them are on foot and carrying hunting birds, but four display the kings on horseback. Eight, including one recorded though no longer visible, differentiate the figures into ages (Age, Middle Age and Youth). Four surviving

¹¹Craiger-Smith, 102-103.
paintings and one which has been destroyed, do not. The ages of the rest are unclear due to the state of the paintings. Those that differentiate in age are from the early to mid-fourteenth century, those that do not are later.92

The Dead are usually stiff and awkward, lacking the more imaginative poses displayed in miniature illuminations. The Living are shown with more power and exactness. It is not uncommon for the Dead to appear in three different stages of decomposition, with the most recently dead addressing the oldest of the Living and the most decomposed addressing the youngest. Typically, the most decomposed, often just a skeleton, was the most wealthy and powerful in life.93 They are sometimes portrayed lying in open coffins, but most often are standing.

In the thirteenth century, wall paintings in England changed due to new patrons and commissions. Previously, paintings were produced mainly for the aristocracy and larger churches. In the thirteenth century, there was a trend of smaller land owners founding and endowing parish churches in imitation of their lords.94 These land owners could not afford the best painters and the complex and polished art they provided to the nobility, so decorations in the provincial churches were aimed at straight-forward illustrations and based on popular religious teachings.

92P. Tristram, Figures of Life, 234.

93E. Tristram, 113.

94Craiger-Smith, 19.
About 1300, the Seven Deadly Sins depicted as a tree diagram with Pride as the head began to appear in books of religious instruction. The same diagram was used to show Virtues and Vices. The Seven Sins were often paralleled with the Seven Mercies: Gluttony versus drink to the thirsty; Greed versus sheltering the stranger; Pride versus clothing the naked. When combined in art programs with the Legend, the Last Judgement, or the weighing of souls, the viewer was presented with a powerful message. The Legend warned that reform was necessary for salvation. The Seven Sins depicted what should be avoided and the Seven Mercies demonstrated correct behavior. The Last Judgement or weighing of souls demonstrated what happened to those who did and did not reform.

Preceding the Black Death by about 20 years, the wall painting of the Legend at Wensley in Yorkshire includes the traditional inscription, "As we are nove thus sal the be...bewar wyt me." This inscription is placed perpendicularly between the figures of the Dead, and is written in English, rather than Latin.

Although most paintings of the Legend are in churches, a painting dated concurrently with the one in Wensley is in the great chamber or solar of a secular building. The painting in Longthorpe Tower, Northamptonshire, is, like Wensley, a straight-forward illustration of something which alters an attitude toward life.

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95 Ibid., 55.
96 E. Tristram, 114.
97 Pantin, 241.
Charlwood in Surrey is the only surviving example in England with the Living presented on horseback. Most often dated in the early 1300's, some authorities have dated it as early as 1290, and others as late as the fifteenth century. The Dead are not skeletons, but resemble mummified forms with white ribs. All the Living are youths with curly hair, dressed in fashionable styles.

The painting in Widford, Oxfordshire, has one of the best preserved scenes of the Legend in England and is dated c1325. The care and minute details are reminiscent of images in miniatures. The Living represent the three ages of life: youth, middle age and old age. The youngest is dressed well, has a hawk on his wrist and a dog at his feet and does not even notice the Dead. The second Living tries unsuccessfully to draw the youth’s attention to them. This display of a hawk on the arm of the youngest Living and his total absorption in it is suggested by some to be a warning against excessive indulgence in the pleasures of the chase.98

The first painting to show an exaggerated component of decay is at Peakirk, Northamptonshire, still dated nearly a decade prior to the plague. The Dead are displayed against a background of naturalistic flies, beetles, maggots and other insects connected with putrification.

In late fourteenth and fifteenth century England, there was a decline in the naturalism of figures in wall paintings. Compared to the Early Gothic, Late Gothic paintings tended to emphasize bright colors and strong contrasts rather than gradual

98Williams, 33.
tones, and figures were less detailed and more freely composed. Painters often used the popular woodcuts as models, which led to a more stiff flow of lines. Also, the expansion of window size in churches decreased space for painting and extended sequences or histories could no longer be painted. The overall composition became less a matter of relating the parts to a whole, and more of an effort to fit all the traditional requirements in the available space. The most important stories and figures were moved to the stained glass windows. Less attention was given to overall composition of wall paintings and more emphasis was placed on the key features of the subject, such as the corpses of the Legend.99

While many architectural structures currently being built during the years of the plague were left incomplete or were delayed in completion, art did not seem to suffer the same fate. In spite of the decline in skill and the slump in the economy due to the plague, there appears to have been no decrease in commissions for art or the amount of money paid for it. Edward III complained in 1361 that painters were not working for him because others were paying them more.100

In the complete painting at Wickhampton in Norfolk, dated late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, the pleasures of hunting are given great attention. Usually a background detail, the hunt is here predominately in the foreground. Directly in front of the Dead, but ignoring their presence, is a huntsman with hounds on leash who are

99Craiger-Smith, 24-26, 28.

100E. Tristram, 3.
chasing a hare. This image may reflect a portion of the *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, or *Remorse of Conscience*, written by a monk in 1340. A passage in that book says that the holy man should keep his eye to heaven and forget all else, just as the hound keeps his eyes on the hare.\(^{101}\) Therefore, the figures in the foreground reinforce the warning of the Dead that the mind should not focus on things of the material world, but on the spiritual.

Other depictions are not so subtle, and increase the gruesomeness and might of the Dead to emphasize the point. At Paston, Norfolk, the Dead are hanging skeletons, swaying with the wind. In the Legend of Ditchingham, Norfolk, which no longer exists, all of the kings were elderly. Their fading existence is contrasted with the Dead who are still powerful. Their might is demonstrated by their tall, narrow crowns, and their ribs drawn to look like coats of mail.\(^{102}\)

As the fifteenth century progresses, the Dead actively become hostile to the Living. At Belton in Suffolk, the Dead are skeletons which leap at the Living with staves. The Belton painting, unable to be preserved, was photographed in 1938. The first king who gallops away cries, “I wyl fle.” The second Living hides his eyes and cries, “O marvellous syte ys that I se,” and the third, bearded and dignified, faces up to the Dead and says, “O benedicite, what want ye?”\(^{103}\)

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\(^{101}\)Ibid., 114.

\(^{102}\)Williams, 39.

\(^{103}\)Williams, 37.
The Reformation stopped any further progression of the Legend in England. In France, however, this line of hostility continued through the sixteenth century. The Living are shown fleeing the Dead and ravens, emblems of decay, are often depicted. In the Grimani Breviary, 1480-1520, The Legend is depicted below a deathbed scene. The Dead are not only armed, but are fighting and killing the Living. This transition changes the focus of the Legend. Previously an object of contemplation and meditation, the Legend acquires an almost entirely negative aspect.104

104 Craiger-Smith, 48.
Art Forms Associated With the Legend

As depictions of the Legend shifted toward the more gruesome aspects of death in the late fourteenth to fifteenth centuries, new art forms evolved from it. From the end of the fourteenth through the sixteenth century, withered and decomposing corpses were often portrayed in art and literature, especially in France, England and the Germanic countries.\(^{105}\)

**Danse Macabre**

The new art form most directly connected to the Legend was the *danse macabre*, or Dance of Death. Although similar depictions of skeletons appear in Greek and Roman art, they are not participating in a dance with the living. The concept of *memento mori* (remember that thou shalt die) in the Greco-Roman world was a reminder to celebrate life now; in the Middle Ages it meant to repent or be doomed.\(^{106}\)

The Dance and the Legend are based on the same precepts: vanity is useless as everything gained in life will be destroyed, and therefore, the world should be held in contempt. The fundamental difference between the Legend and the Dance is that in the Legend, people are warned and given the opportunity to change their lives. The Dance allows no choice to the living but forces them to submit to fate. In spite of its gloomier

\(^{105}\)Delumeau, 51.

character, the Dance provides more personal identification than the Legend.\textsuperscript{107} The Living of the Legend are usually three kings while the living in the Dance come from all walks of life, including women and children. Any individual viewing the Dance could find an illustration representing their own station. In the Legend, the dead are men who had died. In the Dance, the dead do not represent the actual future form of the persons they accompany, but are agents sent by Death.\textsuperscript{108} Later, they are figures of Death itself and their dance becomes more wild and exaggerated, as if they are celebrating the death of the living rather than leading them to the inevitable.\textsuperscript{109}

Authorities agree that the oldest known wall painting of the Dance of Death was at the cloister of the Cemetery of the Innocents in Paris, 1424-25. The painting is now destroyed, but its likeness has been preserved in woodcuts dated 1485 and 1486. If this is indeed the oldest, it was created some 75 years after the Black Death. The Dance at the Cemetery of the Innocents was comprised of fifteen pairs of figures; each pair being comprised of a living figure with a dead figure. The living alternate between spiritual and secular ranks. Preliminary verses accompanying the painting referred to it as a mirror for the people who passed by. In the same time period that the Dance was placed on the wall, the Duc de Berry commissioned the Legend to be carved above the portal. Together, these two depictions taught a lesson similar to the combination of the Legend

\textsuperscript{107}P. Tristram, \textit{Figures of Life}, 167.

\textsuperscript{108}Delumeau, 82.

\textsuperscript{109}Kurtz, 180.
with the Last Judgement in the previous century. The Dance gives examples of those who have already suffered death and its inescapable claim on the living, while the Legend reminded those still alive that there was yet time to change.

After viewing the fresco at the Cemetery of the Innocents shortly following its completion, the Benedictine John Lydgate returned to England and there introduced the Dance with his poem, *The Dance of Death*. He writes that the painting in Paris was, “To schewe this worlde is but a pilgrimage / Geuen un-to us owre lyues to correcte.”¹¹⁰ The message of any depiction of the Dance is so that, “In this myrrowe eueri wight mai fynde / That him behoueth to go upon this daunce” (Lydgate, 7.49-50).

For Lydgate, the dead figures were not representatives of death, but Death itself. In his poem, he writes paired verses of the call by Death to an individual and that person's response. Death criticizes the living for having placed their happiness on material goods. In the call of Death to the Abbot, who is proud and grown fat on his wealth, Death says, “Who that is fattest I haue hym be-hight / In his graue shal sonnest putrefie” (Lydgate, 30.239-240).

Only two characters do not receive a call from Death. One of these is entitled, Machabre the Doctor. He summarizes the meaning of the Dance: life is transitory and the Dance of Death is the fate for all. The other character is entitled, “The king lying dead and eaten with worms.” His speech is reminiscent of the Dead in the Legend, but while the Dead address the Living, the king directly addresses the reader:

¹¹⁰Lydgate, 5.37-38. All quotes from the Ellesmere manuscript. (Hereafter, quotations for *The Dance of Death* will be noted parenthetically in the text).
Ye folke that loken upon this purtrature
Beholying here alle the estates daunce
Seeth what ye ben and what is yowre nature
Mete unto wormes not elles yn substauence
And haue this myrroure euer in remembraunce
Now I lye here som-tyme crowned kynge
To al estates a trewe resemblaunce
That wormes fode is fyne of owre lyuynge.

(Lydgate, 80.633-640)

Lydgate later wrote verses to accompany a Dance painted on the wall of old St. Paul's churchyard in London during the reign of Henry VI. The Dance gained in popularity and became a more common topic than the Legend. Although the Legend continued to be painted until the sixteenth century, the Dance remained in favor into the eighteenth century.¹¹¹

**Literature**

Death, and man's response to it, became a popular topic for literature. The personification of Death carrying a sword or dart representing death as punishment was common in the fourteenth century after the plague. A development from the Legend and the Dance is Death with an hourglass or scythe.¹¹² The hourglass represents the passage of time while the scythe is connected to the cycle of growth and harvest of the fields. The scythe separates the body and soul, setting the soul free from the corpse.¹¹³

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¹¹¹Kurtz, 214.


¹¹³Camille, 135.
Plays for the nobility were presented in private halls, and placed more emphasis on philosophical discussions rather than the vivid visual presentations of death and suffering seen in the mystery plays. The play *Pride of Life*, written on the back of priory accounts of Christ Church in Dublin dated 6/30/1343 to 1/5/1344, was probably written in the first half of the fifteenth century.\(^{114}\) In the play, the King of Life, encouraged by Strength and Health, boasts of his invincible power, “He dredith no deth for to deye.”\(^{115}\) His queen reminds him he cannot escape death but, unable to convince him, sends for the Bishop. The Bishop warns the King to think of death. Unlike the Living of the Legend, the King dismisses the warnings and challenges Death. The Bishop responds that Death will “Giue ye dethis wounde / For thin(e) outrage; / Within a litil stounde / then artou but a page.”\(^{116}\) The play does not include a confrontation between Death and the King. However, there are suggestions throughout the text that the King will not be the victor of such a meeting.

Instead of a discussion about the approach of death, the fifteenth century *Disputacione betwyx the Body and Wormes* draws attention to the decomposition which the body endures after death. Like the poem attributed to Audelay, *Disputacione* begins with a narrator. The Narrator enters a church and sees an effigy tomb with the verse:

> Take hede unto my fygure here abowve


\(^{115}\)Ibid., line 28.

\(^{116}\)Ibid., lines 438-443.
And se how symtyme I was fresche and gay
Now turned to wormes mete and corrupcone
But fowle erth and stynkyng slyme and clay
Attend therefore to this disputacione written here
...To see what thou art and here aftyr sal be.\textsuperscript{117}

The Narrator then has a dream in which the body within the tomb speaks with the worms devouring it. The body is distressed at their actions but the worms remind her that their "mesyngers" of lice, nits, worms and fleas were sent to the body during her life to warn her of the decay to come.

The personification of Death was nowhere stronger than in deathbed images and handbooks called \textit{Ars moriendi}, or \textit{Art or Craft of Dying}. These books received the most popularity in England, France and Germany.\textsuperscript{118} The original \textit{Art of Dying} was the \textit{Tractatus} or \textit{Speculum, artis bene moriendi}, written 1414-1418 by order of the Council of Constance.\textsuperscript{119} This was written to instruct Christians how to die to the glory of God and the salvation of the soul. A shorter version, the \textit{Ars moriendi}, often included woodcuts illustrating the fight for possession of the soul between angels and demons, and Death leading away the deceased. The Caxton version reduced the entire book to 11 woodcuts with no text at all.\textsuperscript{120} The advantage of these block-books over the longer version is that

\textsuperscript{117}P. Tristram, \textit{Figures of Life}, 160.


\textsuperscript{119}Beaty, 2.

\textsuperscript{120}Duffy, 317.
the woodcuts provided graphic illustrations increasing the anxiety of death that even the illiterate could understand.

In the fifteenth century, judgement was believed to take place at the death bed rather than at the Second Coming. Saintly figures and demons gather to view the account books. The dying person must witness the struggle for his soul. God and his court watch this final 'trial' of the dying to see if he will be tempted to despair over his sins, pride in his good deeds, or love of material goods. These final moments will either cancel all his sins or his good deeds.

**Tombs**

The Black Death is often given credit for the display of decomposing corpses on tombs. However, as with the development of the Legend, this cannot be an accurate explanation. Too great a time lapsed between the plague and the appearance of decayed corpses on tombs, and the portrayal of a dead or dying figure begins long before the plague. Prior to the late tenth century, effigies are portrayed as alive.\(^1\)\(^\text{21}\) They are horizontal on the tomb slab and their heads often rest on pillows, but the figures' hair and the folds of drapery suggest a standing position. These figures often are shown as active, such as making a gesture of blessing, crushing beasts beneath their feet, taking oaths, or conferring favors to another. There is a gradual change toward showing the person actually dead: the drapery folds over a recumbent body, closed or partially closed eyes,

and gestures and other secondary figures are omitted. The earliest English effigies to be displayed truly recumbent, as shown in the fall of drapery, are Henry II (died 1189) and his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine.\textsuperscript{122}

Another early tomb style, found only in England displays the dying. These tombs, nicknamed “dying Gauls,” portray prostrate knights who grimace and struggle in the grip of death, yet still attempt to draw their swords. The first known monument of this type is in Dorchester and depicts a knight who apparently died in the Fourth Crusade.\textsuperscript{123}

Tombs often carried inscriptions from the Legend. The deceased acted the part of the Dead, describing the folly of his life and the current state of his body. The tomb of the Black Prince (died 1376) at Canterbury contains an inscription with these sentiments:

\begin{quote}
Such as thou art, sometimes was I,  
Such as I am, such shalt thou be.  
I little thought on th'oure of death,  
So long as I enjoyed breath.  
But now a caitife poore am I,  
Deepe in the ground, lo here I lie,  
My beautie great is all quite gone,  
My flesh is wasted to the bone.\textsuperscript{124}
\end{quote}

Inscriptions such as this did not complete the lesson of the Legend by actually warning the passersby to reform their own lives. However, the juxtaposition of the inscription on


\textsuperscript{123}Ibid., 56.

\textsuperscript{124}Boase, 98.
a tomb did force the viewer to be aware of his or her own demise. As the Legend was a familiar topic, the viewer could still attain the correct meaning of the story without the full text.

From the eleventh through twelfth centuries, effigies progress into higher and higher reliefs until they are nearly separate from the tomb slab. At the end of the thirteenth century, tombs become freestanding, highly ornamented and painted. The bishops and aristocracy who are buried in these tombs often requested that they be placed at prominent locations of the church, such as the center of the choir or at the side of the altar. These tombs were criticized for their display of vanity and pride of life. In an effort to show humility, as well as to accommodate the greater and greater numbers of those who wanted to be buried in the churches, brass slabs embedded in the floor became stylish.\textsuperscript{125}

In England, monumental brass engravings originate in the late thirteenth century. Brasses commissioned by high-ranking patrons were being produced in standard formats by 1310. In spite of the original intent of the brasses to show humility by its plainness and the fact that people step on it, illustrations were added to the simple inscriptions until brasses were as elaborate as the standing tombs. The thought that stepping on the brass was a sign of humility altered to the idea that stepping on them made the name and station of the deceased more visible.\textsuperscript{126} Also, wealthy merchants discovered that it was

\textsuperscript{125}Panofsky, 53.

\textsuperscript{126}Binski, 91-92.
acceptable for them to have brasses, while standing tombs remained basically for the upper class.\textsuperscript{127}

Brasses with representations of death and decay become fairly common in England in the later fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries. Bodies are shown in various stages of decomposition, some with worms wriggling through them, and most often shown in a winding sheet or shroud. The will of Thomas Morys, a grocer, requested that a brass be made for him and his wife. He described how the couple should appear, "And the images that should be on the stone engraved like two dead carcasses as piteously made as can be thought, holding up our hands in our winding sheets."\textsuperscript{128} Innocent III wrote, "Who just now was decorated with gleaming gold, now lies naked in the tomb. The man who just now dined upon delights in his living room, is now dined on by worms in his grave."\textsuperscript{129} In the vision of St. Patrick's Purgatory, great toads sit on the breasts of sinners. While snakes and frogs on the body were popular in France and Germany, there are only three tombs in England with snakes or frogs, and all of these are from the early sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{130}


\textsuperscript{128}Norris, 197.

\textsuperscript{129}Cohen, 43.

\textsuperscript{130}Ibid., 78.
Brasses are not the only tomb monuments to depict decomposing corpses. In the early fifteenth century, transi tombs begin to appear. Transi is from the French verb transir, to die, used in the twelfth to sixteenth century. The noun for a deceased was transi or transiz.\textsuperscript{131} As with the brasses, the transi tombs portray the deceased in various stages of death: a body covered with a shroud, a corpse with its intestines slipping out, a skeleton covered with stretched skin, or perhaps with snakes, frogs, and worms over the body. The gaunt corpse, often shrouded, is dominant in England. Of the 264 tombs depicting a corpse, some of which are known only from descriptions, 146 of them are in England.

Double-decker tombs show a living effigy above, called a gisant, with the transi below. These tombs appear to be basically in northern Europe and mostly absent in Spain, southern France and Italy. Patronage was almost always clerical at first, and only later used by lay people.\textsuperscript{132} The transi is used most often by the monarchy and other nobility, although there is no royal double transi. Just as wall paintings of the Legend are most popular in England, the double transi tombs were most favored by England. No matter what the rank or wealth of the individual in life displayed by the gisant, the figure of the transi was a reminder of inevitable death. Inscriptions on these tombs spoke of the

\textsuperscript{131}Cohen, 10.

\textsuperscript{132}Binski, 140.
certainty of decomposition. Thus, the *transi* was a mirror to the living, just as were the Dead in the Legend.\(^\text{133}\)

By the time *transi* tombs were being constructed, the single most important reason for these tombs and the rituals that went with them was to try to decrease the amount of time spent in Purgatory. Although elaborate tombs were criticized by some, Thomas Aquinas wrote that all which attracts the attention of the onlookers, both during the funeral and at the tomb which causes them to pray for the deceased is advantageous to the soul.\(^\text{134}\) One of the first *transi* tombs was commissioned by the French Cardinal Lagrange (died 1402), and the first in England was the double-decker tomb commissioned by Archbishop Chichele in 1424. These men perhaps chose to show themselves as a decaying corpse due to their anxiety concerning the wealth they received and the power they wielded in secular government while under a spiritual oath of humility.\(^\text{135}\) They were not the only ones to feel anxiety regarding death and the need for humility to gain salvation, and many chose extreme measures of humility regarding the disposition of their body. Some ordered that their corpses be displayed nude, to be whipped, dragged behind a horse, or even thrown to the dogs. *Transi* tombs could express humility and penitence without having to undergo mortification of the flesh during life, or mistreatment of the physical body before burial.

\(^{133}\)Ibid., 139.


\(^{135}\)Cohen, 7.
Transi tombs demonstrated not only humility for the future state of the patron's body, but also served as a mirror for those who saw it. Some transi tombs were completed during the lifetime of the patron, such as the double transi tomb of Archbishop Chichele, erected in 1424. The visual and written aspects of his tomb acted as a personal mirror for meditation until his death in 1443. The gisant of Chichele is dressed in sumptuous clothing and has all the symbols of his worldly station. The tomb is elegantly carved with many brightly painted figures. The transi below is nude, lying on a shroud, and is enclosed in iron bars. The inscription reads:

Pauper eram natus, post Primas hic elevatus
Iam sum prostratus et vermibus esca paratus
Ecce meum tumulum.
Quisquis eris, qui transieris rogo memoreris
Tu quod eris mihi consimilis qui post morieris
 Omnibus horribilis, pulvis, vermis, caro vilis.
[I was a pauper born, then to Primate raised
Now I am cut down and ready to be food for worms
Behold my grave.
Whoever you may be who passes by, I ask you to remember
You will be like me after you die;
All horrible, dust, worms, vile flesh.]  

There were few double transi tombs outside of England, and most of these appear in Germanic countries. The first double-decker transi with recumbent figures to originate on the continent is that of Archbishop Johan von Sierck (died 1456). The transi

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136 Delumeau, 95.
137 Cohen, 16.
138 Ibid., 42-43.
tomb continued in England until the first part of the seventeenth century, longer than in other countries.

In case the humility expressed on brasses and *transi* tombs was not enough to significantly reduce time in Purgatory, an increasing number of wills requested quantities of masses to be said within a short time after death. Some called for as many as 10,000 masses to be said within 24 hours after death. Masses also were sought over a period of many years; popular lengths were 10, 20 or 99 years. Eventually, England developed the chantry, a private chapel with an altar, which allowed masses in perpetuity. Bequests in wills paid for the chantry and a stipend for a priest or priests to pray for the soul.

Many who could not afford chantries or finances for prayers placed inscriptions on their tombs which solicit passersby to pray for them. Some even promise the passerby they will receive time off in Purgatory themselves in exchange for aiding the deceased. Even if no exchange of help was offered, the passerby knew if he prayed for the deceased now, then someone else might pray for him after his own death. On the tomb of John Leventhop and his wife, in Sawbridge, Hertfordshire, is the following inscription:

> En jacet hic pulvis putrede vermis et esca
> Est famulus mortis nam vita jam caret ista
> Hic nil scit nil habet nec virtus in de relucet
> Cerne luto vilius horror terror fetor orbis
> Opprobrium cunctis ac est abjectio plebis
> His Frater aspice te spira suffragia pro me.

[Behold here lies dust, corruption, food for worms
He is a slave of death for he lacks life
Here he knows nothing, has nothing, nor does his

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strength shine forth
Look at something cheaper than dirt
Horror, terror, stench of the world
He is a reproach to all men, and rejected by all
See yourself here, brother, and plead for me.\textsuperscript{140}

The art forms which derived from the Legend all provide a more personal connection to those living in the real world. The Legend provided anonymous figures of both Living and Dead, and their conversation was limited to themselves. The Dance provided a more personal connection to the viewers but the images of the living were not of a specific individual. The tombs allowed the greatest expression of the Legend by depicting an image of a known person. While the patron was alive, he could view both the effigy which represented his present state, and the \textit{transi} which illustrated the decomposition his body would endure. To other viewers, the image combined with the direct appeal of the deceased, provided an intimate link between themselves and death.

\textsuperscript{140}Cohen, 72.
Conclusion

Over the last several years, some historians have begun to recognize that the Black Death was only one process in the development of the macabre. However, the plague still receives premier credit by many. In a recent publication, Colin Platt insists that all macabre images after the mid-fourteenth century are due to the plague. He claims that images such as the Dance of Death, cadaver brasses and transi tombs did not appear until after the plague. While true, these images first appeared at least half a century after the first outbreak of the plague. Platt mentions a transi tomb of John Baret, who died in 1467, whose epitaph calls on the passerby to look at the transi and be warned. Platt insists that this tomb and its epitaph are directly connected to the fear caused by the 1348 plague, even though the Black Death occurred over a century earlier and Baret did not die of the plague.141 Furthermore, the Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead first was written three quarters of a century prior to the arrival of the plague. Manuscript illuminations and wall paintings of the Legend also were evident before the plague. The arrival of the plague apparently did not change the presentation of the Legend nor alter its depictions. It is not until the late fifteenth century that increased hostility appears in depictions of the Legend.

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Paul Binski states, “Cultures respond in certain ways to events because they are already predisposed to do so.”\textsuperscript{142} While the plague did indeed have an impact on some elements of the macabre, it was not the determining factor. Images of the macabre began in the twelfth century, long before the plague. Death images escalated when Purgatory was adopted as doctrine, and death, and what happened after it, became much more frightening. The fourteenth to fifteenth centuries, the greatest peak of the macabre in England, saw many other disruptions in addition to the plague. Within these 200 years, four kings were deposed and murdered. Four kings came to the throne as children. There were battles between the nobility, and revolts against them by the peasants. The Church left Rome and then split in two. Famine was endemic. In fact, the largest cause of death in England during the two centuries after 1349 was starvation, not the plague. In addition, the macabre must be connected to the rise of individualism and enjoyment of the pleasures of life, and the sense of failure in the loss of achievement due to inescapable death.\textsuperscript{143}

In light of these facts, historians cannot assign the presence of the plague as the cause of the macabre; it is too simple an answer. Mankind in the later Middle Ages was besieged by numerous conflicts and concerns, and in particular with issues of the Church and the religious faith that was so pervasive in Medieval life. The fascination with decay

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{142}Binski, 129. \\
\textsuperscript{143}Ariès, \textit{Hour of Death}, 138-139.
\end{flushright}
and the development of macabre images was a result of a complex combination of occurrences, of which the plague was only one factor.
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APPENDIX OF PLATES
Plate 1
Tondal and his guardian angel in Hell facing the beast Archeron, the devourer of the avaricious. (Photo source: Thomas Kren and Roger S. Wieck, The Visions of Tondal: From the Library of Margaret of York, 45.)
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