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The Dance of Death in Reval (Tallinn): The Preacher and his Audience*

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*Je cognois que povres et riches,
Sages et folz, prestres et laiz,
Nobles, villains, larges et chiches,
Petitz et granz, et beaulx et laiz,
Dames a rebrassez colletz
De quelconque condicion
Portans atours et bourreletz
Mort saisit sans exception.*

François Villon, *Grant Testament*¹

Abstract

This paper explores text and imagery in the fifteenth-century Dance of Death painted by Bernt Notke located in the Niguliste Church in Tallinn (Estonia). Besides drawing scholarly attention to this important and little studied work of art, often considered to be no more than a pale, provincial cousin of the closely related Lübeck Dance, the essay raises a number of different issues. Examination of the surviving fragment of the painting reveals the complexity of the viewing process, informed by a written text immediately available to literate viewers and by oral discourses available to all. An exploration of the Reval Dance within the context of late medieval piety also provides insight into a type of visual reading necessarily predicated on movement, one which involves the viewer physically. Finally, the analysis of the Reval painting within its social and religious context provides an index to a locality, namely Estonia, that has not received adequate attention in art historical scholarship.

The Dance of Death (also commonly called the *danse macabre*), a subject that first emerged in western European art and literature in the late medieval era, eloquently communicated the message of the inevitability of death and the futility of human ambition.² In numerous panels and wall paintings dating to the fifteenth century and later, men and women of different classes, young and old alike, make their mournful way to the grave. The dancing and music-making skeletons that symbolize Death—the universal equalizer—join the victims and lead them forth in a mockingly playful fashion. Inscribed below the scene is a series of verses that exhort the living to dance along.³ One fifteenth-century Dance of Death, located in the Niguliste Church in Tallinn (formerly known as Reval),⁴ Estonia, and believed to have been painted by Bernt Notke (*ca.* 1440–1508),⁵ came to the attention of scholars in the 1940s (Fig. 1). One of the very few medieval depictions of the Dance of Death ever painted on canvas, the Estonian work in its current state measures approximately 160 x 750 cm and features thirteen life-size figures—a substantial frac-

tion of the forty-eight or fifty figures originally painted. Its art historical interest has been seen to lie especially in its close relation to a panel painting in Lübeck also attributed to Bernt Notke (Fig. 2), and it has been interpreted from this perspective. But further interpretive work remains to be done, especially in the sphere of reception. The scale of the painting and the minute detail in its rendering enhance the sense of intimacy and immediate rapport that viewers must have felt on seeing its images and, if literate, reading the accompanying verses. Recent investigations into late medieval piety, literacy, and religious instruction allow us to examine the Reval Dance in light of viewer response.

The earliest known mural of the *danse macabre*, painted in a gallery of the Cemetery of the Innocents in Paris in 1425,⁶ is no longer extant, but some fifteenth-century cycles survive to the present.⁷ In terms of form, each was adapted to its local context. The Dance of Death in the church of Kermaria-en-Isquit, in Plouha (France), for instance, wraps around the north, west, and south interior walls high above the nave arcade without break (Fig. 10),⁸ while at Mesley-le-Grenet it stretches across the south and west walls of the church of Sts. Blaise and Orien,⁹ accompanied by Passion narratives and images of the Dead King, the Tale of the Gossiping Women, and the Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead.¹⁰ Variations within the cycles are many. In the monastic church at La Chaise-Dieu, for example, skeletons cavort in a wide variety of exaggerated poses, while in the Marienkirche in Berlin cadavers stand calmly and turn uniformly to their left.¹¹

Although scholarly interest in Dance of Death iconography has increased significantly in the past decade, literature on the Estonian painting remains scarce. The work is mentioned in several thematic surveys but is rarely allocated more than a few cursory lines.¹² A small but invaluable monograph on the Reval Dance by Mai Lumiste, published in 1976 in the Soviet Republic of Estonia, provides a description of the painting as well as basic information on its provenance.¹³ More recently, a

group of German scholars under the direction of Hartmut Freytag offered a thorough-going discussion of the painting in Tallinn and its relationship to Notke's panel in Lübeck.¹⁴ Neither publication, however, fully explores the interrelations between images and text in the context of their reception by a contemporary audience.¹⁵ The Reval painting—like the panel in Lübeck and certain other monumental paintings of the Dance of Death—raises important issues with regard to medieval viewing, particularly as it was predicated on the beholder's literacy.¹⁶ The life-size dimensions of the figures and the complex interplay of verses and images in this Dance of Death invite us to explore the different ways in which lettered as well as unlettered viewers may have experienced the painting. An investigation of contemporary vernacular sermons on related themes, of the sort likely delivered in the Niguliste Church, helps to establish the context in which the moralizing message of the painting was received.

Bernt Notke and the Niguliste Church

A stone's throw from the Town Hall Square, the Niguliste (St. Nicholas) Church was founded in 1230 by and for German merchants who made their way to Reval through Gotland (Fig. 3). Like many Hanseatic churches, the Niguliste Church, *ecclesia mercatorum*, served several functions at once. Intended for the performance of both religious and secular ceremonies, it was also used as a fortress and had storerooms upstairs.¹⁷ The church was continuously enlarged and remodeled, and by the fifteenth century it attained its current form: a nave with two low aisles, a polygonal east end that comprised the choir and the ambulatory, and a number of chapels (Fig. 4). Chapels dedicated to St. Barbara and St. George, built against the northern wall in 1342, were later in the century joined by the "Small Chapel" on the east side; sometime around 1370, St. Matthew's Chapel, later renamed in honor of St. Anthony, was erected against the south wall of the church, next to the tower, and was enlarged between 1486 and 1493.¹⁸ St. Matthew's Chapel apparently served as a funerary chapel: tombstones dating from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century still cover the floor.¹⁹ It was for this chapel that the Lübeck master Bernt Notke was commissioned to paint the Dance of Death.

Reval, the second largest port on the eastern side of the Baltic sea, had close connections with the city of Lübeck, which lay at the heart of the Hanseatic coalition. These ties can be seen in the adoption of the so-called Lübeck Law, which regulated city life, and in the active import of works of art into Reval, especially during the fifteenth century. Between 1478 and 1482, for example, Hermen Rode and his assistants, all hailing from Lübeck, executed a high altar for the Niguliste Church, a part of which showed the life and deeds of St. Nicholas, the patron saint of the church. Bernt Notke, who, as a Lübeck sculptor and painter, had established wide-ranging connections with the Scandinavian and Baltic communities,²⁰

enjoyed a particularly close relationship with the city of Reval, then at the height of its economic and artistic development.²¹ In 1483 he completed an altarpiece commissioned by the Reval town hall for the Pühavaimu Kirik ("Church of the Holy Spirit"),²² and around the same time he executed the painting of the Dance of Death for St. Matthew's (St. Anthony's) Chapel in the Niguliste Church.

It is impossible to discuss the Dance of Death in Reval without considering the Lübeck Dance, the oldest in Germany. Executed by Notke in 1463 for the Beichtkapelle in the north transept of the Marienkirche, the painting had begun to deteriorate by the seventeenth century and was copied on canvas in 1701 by Anton Wortmann (albeit with certain changes).²³ At the same time the fifteenth-century text, all but illegible, was transcribed by the pastor Jacob Melle and subsequently replaced by new verses composed by Nathanael Schlott. The Lübeck Dance was destroyed during an air-raid in 1942: all that remains is a series of pre-war documentary photographs taken by Wilhelm Castelli.²⁴

When commissioned to paint a Dance for the church in Reval, Notke undoubtedly decided to model the new piece on his earlier Lübeck painting. Although no documentation about the Estonian commission exists, it appears probable that the artist (and, likely, his assistants²⁵) executed the painting on easily transportable canvas in Lübeck and then had it sent to Reval. The overall compositions of the two are very much alike: the same thirteen figures begin the Dance (Figs. 1, 2). Notke, however, did not produce an exact replica: in many details of the figures and the landscape, the Reval painting differs from the earlier work (Figs. 5a, b). The Preacher at the head of the Reval painting, for example, is missing in the Lübeck Dance, and the skeletal musician who precedes the procession in Lübeck plays a flute and dances while his counterpart in Reval plays bagpipes and is seated. The facial expressions of other figures vary slightly, and the kings are differently attired.

Alterations in the landscape are even more evident, and more telling. For the Lübeck Dance, Notke provided an accurate view of the local cityscape (Fig. 6), doubtless intended to increase the impact of the message for German viewers. Aware that the same device would not function in Reval, he did not merely transpose the view of Lübeck onto the new painting, nor did he incorporate landmarks of Reval in the work, suggesting that he may not have traveled to the city. Rather he distributed certain Lübeck landmarks (the Mühlentor, the Kaiserturm, and the Marienkirche itself) among the buildings in the background of the Reval piece, possibly striving to create a generic Hanseatic backdrop, broadly familiar to any inhabitant of a Hansa town. As if to compensate for this lack of specificity, Notke sprinkled small genre scenes in the background of the Reval piece (including, for instance, scenes with hunters and conversing peasants) absent from the Lübeck painting. Because of the incomplete state of the Reval Dance, further comparison between the two works is impossible.



FIGURE 1. Bernt Notke, *The Dance of Death, Reval (Tallinn)* (photo: Art Museum of Estonia).



FIGURE 2. Bernt Notke, *The Dance of Death, Lübeck, destroyed*, photo by Wilhelm Castelli (photo: Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte der Hansestadt Lübeck).

The Dance of Death in Reval: Imagery and Text

The precise date of the creation of the Reval Dance is unknown. It was certainly painted later than the Lübeck Dance, dated 1463, which it copies, but before 1493, when the *Nuremberg Chronicle* was published: newly built elements of the Lübeck cityscape that do not appear in the background of this panel are present both in the Reval Dance and in the scene of Lübeck in the *Chronicle* (Fig. 7).²⁶ These include the medium-sized building with tongs-shaped ornament seen in the Reval painting between the Mühlentor and a round rampart tower. Written sources that might help us situate the painting and its accompanying poem historically are regrettably scarce. The earliest mention of the Reval Dance appears in a document of 1603 prepared by Jost Dunte, pastor of the church, recording payment owed to the master Toomas for work done on the painting between 1587 and 1603.²⁷ The presence of the Dance in St. Anthony's Chapel is briefly recorded in a note that can be dated 1651–57 by Gert Reck, a later pastor.²⁸ No other references to the painting are known.

The extant portion of the Reval Dance of Death, painted in oil and tempera, shows a series of life-size figures arranged in a single line against a verdant landscape (Fig. 1). At the left of the composition the Preacher stands in a pulpit, addressing

the poor and the rich, the young and the old, and warns them about the inevitability of death (Fig. 8). Leaning against the pulpit is a turbaned skeleton playing bagpipes; to the right of him, another dances, carrying a coffin. Next to them, the Pope frowns at the skies, his right hand raised in a dismissive gesture, the left clutching a crosier. A grinning skeleton follows, and after him comes the Holy Roman Emperor, with orb and sword. Death, covered in a torn shroud, grabs his shoulder as well as the elbow of the Empress, who raises her left arm toward the sky in an exaggerated gesture of sorrow. Then follows another skeleton, who leads a Cardinal dressed in red, his hand reaching to his heart. The panel continues with Death, who turns toward the King with his scepter, followed in turn by the last remaining skeleton. The skeletal figures are highly emotional, twisting and turning in a never-ending jig, their mouths gaping, while the mortals stand solemnly, only their gestures betraying anguish.

The rest of the canvas is lost, and we must turn to the imagery of the Lübeck Dance, despite its differences, to reconstruct the missing parts. The King in the Estonian work was likely followed by a Bishop, a Duke,²⁹ an Abbot, and a Knight. Next would have come a Carthusian, a Burgomaster, a Canon, a Nobleman, a Physician, a Usurer, a Chaplain, a Merchant, a Sacristan, a Craftsman, a Hermit, and a Peasant, each



FIGURE 3. *Niguliste Church, Tallinn* (photo: Marina Gladkova).

accompanied by a skeletal dancer. The sequence would have ended with a Youth, a Maiden, and a Child in a cradle. In the surviving section of the Reval painting, men and women stand in an idyllic landscape with a rich urban panorama unfolding behind them; as noted above, certain buildings are recognizable as belonging to the Lübeck cityscape.³⁰ We can only venture a guess that the panorama, just as was the case in the Lübeck Dance (Fig. 9), would have included a view of the harbor, filled with ships.

Below the elegant figures run the verses of a poem in Low German written in Gothic minuscule.³¹ Taking the form of a dialogue between Death and mankind, it is transcribed in blocks of verses: each block, spoken by a different character, is inscribed beneath the relevant figure. The broad message of the visual imagery of the Dance—that all are equal in the eyes of death—is in fact only a part of the work's didactic lesson, which is fully fleshed out in the verses that stretch below the pictures. The text is a call for immediate repentance, a warning against the gravest sin, that of *superbia*—pride. Death mocks the living, reminding men and women of all estates that they are nothing but guests in this world and urging them to atone for their sins, since all their wealth and power

will be rendered worthless at death in one unexpected moment. Sometimes Death is fairly amicable—for instance, the Pope is acknowledged to have held God's honor and glory in his hands, and the Empress is recognized as one who has been great.³² At other times, however, the living are scorned—the Emperor is accused of being blinded by the court life, while the Cardinal is blamed for his haughtiness.³³

The Reval Viewer: The Question of Literacy

Before further embarking on the question of the contemporary reception of the Reval Dance of Death, it is important to inquire into the make-up of the audience that would have had access to Notke's painting. While the Niguliste Church was commissioned primarily by and for German merchants, the building of Hanseatic churches regularly involved both clerical and secular boards. Moreover, the wealthy and the poor alike participated in the churches' construction—the former by way of donations, the latter by offering manual labor.³⁴ The position of the church at the heart of this very small, albeit thriving city (a two-minute walk from the town hall and at the juncture of the lower and upper towns) also suggests that the audience was diverse. The tombstones embedded in the walls and the floor of St. Anthony's Chapel—dedicated to Aleksander von Essen and his wife, Antonius von dem Busch, and Dr. Johan Ballivi, among others—provide a clear indication that the church catered to the upper classes.³⁵ On the other hand, the church neighbored on the city's artisanal quarter, which sprawled in the area bounded by the church, Rataskaevu and Voorimehe streets, and the Town Hall Square;³⁶ its parishioners may thus have included metalworkers, coin-makers, and armor-makers. Finally, it is well-known that Hanseatic churches were not only intended for prayer but also for a variety of civic events: Schildhauer counts among them "council meetings, burgher assemblies, . . . public reading of decrees and laws," and the reception of important visitors.³⁷ In other words, quite an assortment of the city's inhabitants would have had opportunity to see the Dance of Death, and the painting was commissioned with this diverse audience in mind.

The question of literacy is especially pressing since the images in Reval (unlike, for instance, those at La Ferté-Loupière or La Chaise-Dieu) were accompanied by text.³⁸ While no information that would provide exact statistics about the educational level of the Reval population is currently available, some facts recorded in the archives of other Hansa towns are revealing. By the middle of the fourteenth century, the *dudesche scryffschule* (German writing schools) were functioning alongside Latin schools. These were adapted to the particular practical needs of their bourgeois pupils, who needed to learn not Latin and the Psalms but rather German and arithmetic.³⁹ By 1500, Hamburg had four German schools, while Lübeck had six.⁴⁰ We may assume that Reval, considerably smaller than either Lübeck or Hamburg, did not have as many schools open to the general public. Moreover,

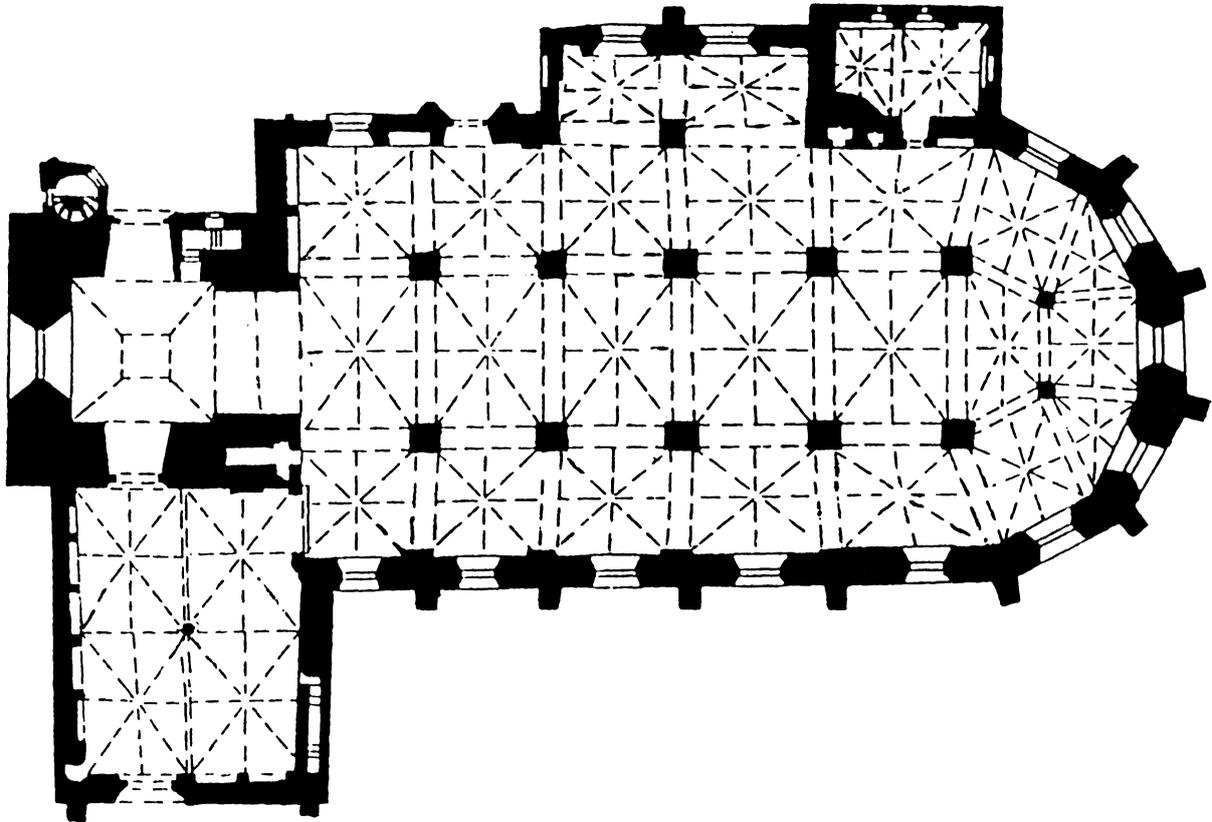


FIGURE 4. Plan of the Niguliste Church (photo: Art Museum of Estonia).

while the sons of those who owned property could afford to go to school, those who were born into less wealthy families (especially those who did not own land) would seldom have attended classes; those who received a university education would have been even less numerous.⁴¹

First Mode of Viewing: Seeing and Reading

The lettered viewer of the Reval Dance was invited to savor the interplay between text and image so masterfully achieved by Bernt Notke. The verses inflect the viewing process, for, at first sight, the Reval painting (like the Lübeck Dance) seems to emphasize the equalizing force of death but to give no hints of its role as a call for atonement. In other Dances, the religious implications were made more explicit: the sequence of figures in Berlin is interrupted at the center by the Crucifixion, and the mural at Mesley-le-Grenet is flanked by scenes of the Passion. The Reval cycle is accompanied by no such imagery, but the pictures, examined in conjunction with the verses, effectively demand pious self-examination on the part of the viewer. The painting is physically experienced in such a way that the movement of the text seems to run counter to the flow of the imagery, ostensibly subverting, but ultimately reinforcing, its message.

The text in the Reval painting is closely related to the three earliest and most complete Dance of Death poems—the verses inscribed in 1425 in the Cemetery of the Innocents in Paris,⁴² those found on the Lübeck Dance, and a Spanish version, the *Danza general de la muerte*.⁴³ Since all of these possess shared elements, it has been argued that they draw from a common Latin or French source, now lost.⁴⁴ Yet the Reval verses present us with significant departures from the earlier poems. Here the Preacher begins the sequence (Fig. 8). He addresses what he calls “created beings,” poor and rich, young and old, and urges them to look at the Dance as if it were a mirror, which will show them the inevitability of death: “If we do good deeds / we can be together with God. / We will get the reward we justly deserve.”⁴⁵ A dialogue with the viewer is thus immediately established; the image is transformed from a mere spectacle of others’ suffering into a mirrored surface on which the beholder is reflected. The Preacher’s words are markedly different from the opening lines of the Parisian Dance: “It is pitiful to think of this / Everything is made from the same matter.” Rather than playing on pity and reinforcing the message of the imagery by stressing the equality of all human beings in the face of death, the Reval poem emphasizes the worth of humanity and all but promises salvation.⁴⁶ These words are intended not to



FIGURE 5. Bernt Notke, *The Dance of Death*: a) *The Lübeck Empress*; b) *The Reval Empress* (photos: Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte der Hansestadt Lübeck; Art Museum of Estonia).

frighten but to reassure, not to repulse but to invite. Instead of the impersonal *tu* (“you”), the Reval poem employs *wi* (“we”); the Preacher identifies with *us*, the viewers, as if promising to accompany us and oversee our final journey. Visual imagery strengthens this textual message. The Preacher, while addressing the beholder, does not engage the beholder’s gaze, but rather looks toward the painted figures.⁴⁷ This interplay between the Preacher, the images of the living, and the viewer erases the border between the painted image and actuality, drawing the spectator into the morbid dance.

A dialogue between Death and mankind follows. Turbaned Death, playing bagpipes, stares out toward the viewers, transfixing them with its empty eye sockets. Again, Death’s words are a far cry from the menacing message that accompanied the lost Parisian mural. Instead of focusing on the putrid and fetid nature of corpses, the Reval skeleton, although still luring men and women into their last dance, hints at the expiation of sins through good deeds.⁴⁸ Not unlike the Preacher, Death itself seems to find a possibility of inherent goodness in these men and women.

After the Preacher, immobile in his pulpit, and the music-making skeleton, a more choreographed movement begins, starting with a prancing Death carrying a coffin and grabbing the Pope’s red robes. The skeleton seems to be pulling the Pope and the rest of the procession toward the Preacher’s kindly presence on the left. At the same time, the viewer takes a step to the right to explore the rest of the painting, also engaging in a physical movement. This is the beginning of a complementary dance: while the skeletons drag men and women to the left, toward the Preacher’s pulpit, viewers following the narrative of the text move from left to right. The Preacher implores mankind to avoid the sin of pride and to repent; the text forcibly leads the viewer away from the pulpit where the message of atonement and salvation is proclaimed.

Moving alongside the painting, the viewer would inevitably have come to his or her own double—a life-sized figure of a Nobleman or a Merchant, a Craftsman or a Burgomaster, placed (presumably) at eye-level. What had seemed remote and improbable—dancing skeletons clutching onto a distant Pope or equally distant Emperor—would suddenly have be-



FIGURE 6. Bernt Notke, *The Dance of Death, Lübeck*, detail (photo: Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte der Hansestadt Lübeck).

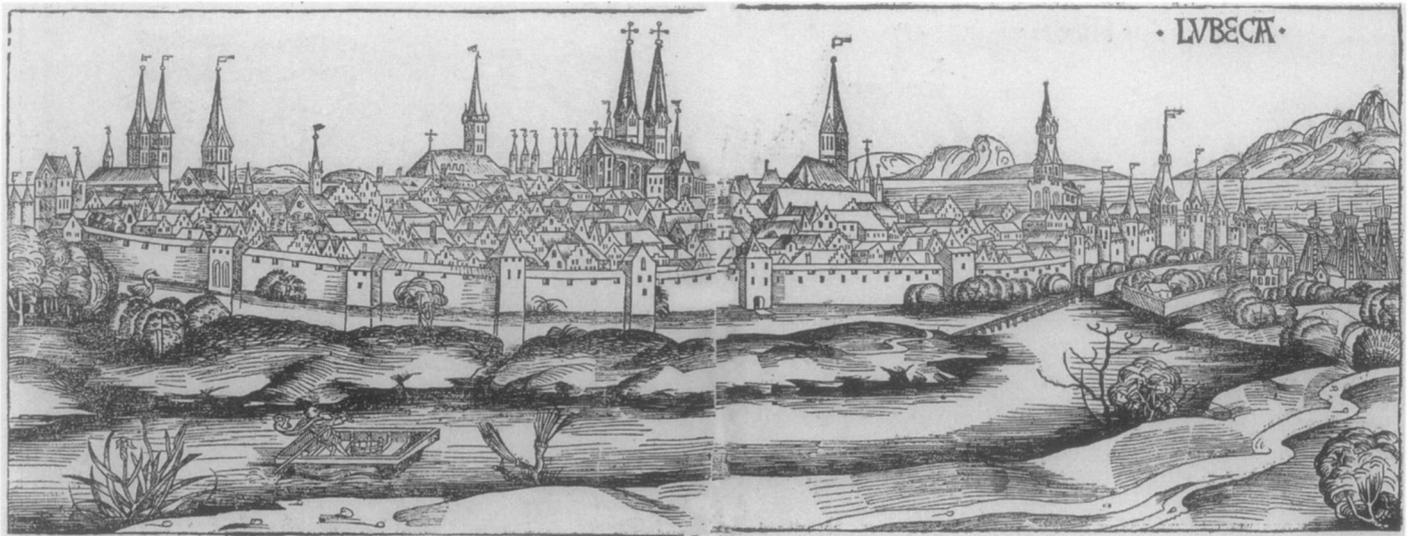


FIGURE 7. Hartmann Schedel, *Nuremberg Chronicle*, view of Lübeck (photo: courtesy of Jewish National & University Library, Hebrew University, Jerusalem).

come very real. The crisply rendered panorama of a Hansa town, with its towers, ramparts, churches, and burgher houses with gabled roofs, would have reinforced this sense of actuality.⁴⁹ It is likely that, as in the Lübeck Dance, a harbor filled with ships was painted behind the figures of the Craftsman and the Merchant (Fig. 9).

The impression of reality would have been enhanced by the way that the viewer's double (or recognizable surrogate) looks out searchingly at the beholder: the prancing skeleton grabs its victim, but the victim looks at the viewer. The viewer in turn, reading the verses, is directly addressed: the text provides a candid commentary on his or her profession and life



FIGURE 8. *Dance of Death, Reval (Tallinn), detail: Preacher* (photo: Art Museum of Estonia).

in words spoken by Death. The circle is thus completed; the viewer engages with his or her painted double and is pulled back by Death toward the message of repentance and salvation. The text works in concert with the image, increasing the didactic power of its message.

Unlike the murals at Kermaria or La Ferté-Loupière (Figs. 10, 11), raised high above the ground, the Reval canvas, with its life-size figures able to be positioned roughly at eye level, invites close scrutiny and encourages the viewer to engage fully with the text of the poem.⁵⁰ Both induce the beholder to participate in a particular practice of viewing, one which involves moving along the painting and experiencing its contents over time. The impetus to do so is provided by the dancing itself: the movement of the painted figures is echoed in the movement of the viewer who must advance to take in the entire piece. The progress of the viewer from left to right is largely predicated on the text that leads away from the Preacher and against the general direction of movement of the dancing figures. However, the viewer is invited to stop, read, and reflect upon the text; once so engaged, he or she is affected by image and text working together. Complete comprehension of the painting's multiple meanings, then, presupposes a certain level of literacy, or at any rate an ability to be receptive to the written word.

Second Mode of Viewing: Seeing and Listening

What emerges from this reading of the Reval Dance of Death is the implied necessity or, at least, the desirability of textual understanding. Jane Taylor has convincingly argued that a collaboration existed between poet and artist when the paintings of the *danse macabre* first came into being,⁵¹ and later artists generally respected the connection between poem

and pictures. Unless the verses in the Reval Dance were read aloud to an illiterate or semi-literate spectator in Reval, that viewer was robbed of the experience of grasping the sophisticated interplay between text and image that Notke offered. But medieval culture, as has been well established, revolved around oral transmission and aural reception.⁵² Oral forms of communication, too, could have prepared the viewer to engage with the themes of the painting. Experience of other *danse macabre* paintings would have had an effect, especially if the Reval viewer had seen cycles accompanied by Passion scenes, like those in Berlin and Mesley-le-Grenet. But visual signals present within the painting would have guided even illiterate viewers to the desired interpretation. Spurred on by the efforts of mendicant preachers, the Christian preoccupation with death reached a peak in the fifteenth century.⁵³ Even without access to the moralizing verses below the figures, the Reval spectator would have been primed to respond viscerally to Dance of Death imagery, prepared by sermons and hymns to react to the figure of the Preacher at the head of the Dance and to the portrayal of dancing itself.

The Preacher in the Reval Dance, ostensibly a mendicant friar, is clearly delivering a homily concerned with death. This is not unusual: other Dance of Death cycles incorporate mendicant friars, usually given a prominent position and favorable treatment in both the imagery and the verses (other ecclesiastics did not fare quite as well).⁵⁴ For instance, in the Dance formerly represented in Old St. Paul's Cathedral in London (modeled on the Parisian mural), a Minor Brother was exhorted to remember the many times he taught about death,⁵⁵ while in the *Danza de la muerte*, one of the figures of Death refers to the Preacher: "If you do not see the friar who preaches this / Mark what he says of his great wisdom."⁵⁶ Although by the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries secular preachers were also pictured in Dance of Death cycles, the latter were usually found either in, or next to, Dominican and Franciscan convents;⁵⁷ the Niguliste Church itself was a short walk from Püha Katariina Dominican Cloister. Finally, mendicant friars were known to preach in front of the Dance, referring to its images in their sermons. We know, for instance, that the Franciscan preacher Friar Richard used a scaffolding constructed at the Cemetery of the Innocents in Paris as a pulpit and preached for days next to the mural of the *Danse macabre*.⁵⁸

The fact that the verses accompanying the Niguliste Dance were written in Low German—the language most widely spoken in Reval in the fifteenth century—leads us to search for parallels in contemporary vernacular sermons. But preserved sermons in Low German are very scant and have not been sufficiently studied;⁵⁹ it is likely, but not certain, that Middle German sermon compendia were used in Low German-speaking regions.⁶⁰ Still, views of death presented more generally in fifteenth-century sermons across Europe can be used to throw light on the diffusion and reception of Dance of Death imagery. Sermons on death and dying, spread especially from France and Italy, had been gaining popularity since the thirteenth century and were often included in

ad status series.⁶¹ The violent waves of plague that swept through Europe in the 1400s, not unlike the one that had devastated it in the fourteenth century, played a part in this development. French *ad omne hominum genus* sermons, as their name indicates, were preached to all manner of men. One anonymous sermon addressed soldiers, judges, nobles, clerics, priests, the married, the widowed, and the young.⁶² Clerics were treated as critically as laymen in these sermons, equal in the eyes of God. In England, Myrc, a prior of the Austin Canons, pointed out in his *Festiall* that death “sleithe us alle,” regardless of our rank,⁶³ while Bromyard took special delight in pointing his listeners’ attention to the vileness of the remains of the dead, inviting them to imagine mouths and eyes, which used to be so fine, now filled with vermin.⁶⁴ In the Netherlands—closer to Reval—preachers such as Friar Dietrich Coelde were known to pull out a skull at the end of their sermons on death.⁶⁵

Such sermons were, without a doubt, heard in Reval at the close of the fifteenth century, when plague struck with renewed force. Viewers could not have missed a connection between the Preacher in the Dance of Death and the homilies they heard delivered. The canvas with its sequence of dancing figures would have presented itself as a sort of visual sermon. In absorbing the lesson of the Dance, spectators would further have brought to bear contemporary attitudes toward dancing itself.

The fifteenth-century stance on dancing was ambiguous at best.⁶⁶ On one hand, preachers warned of its dangers; on the other hand, dancing was associated with the singing of blissful carols in heaven. The first position, cultivated since Early Christian times, was conditioned by the fact that dancing was seen to be a pagan practice, and one that potentially led to immorality.⁶⁷ The medieval German view of dancing seems to have been especially negative; it was condemned in writings by Hugo van Trimberg, Johannes Herolt, and Meister Ingold;⁶⁸ Berthold von Regensburg linked it to deceit and stealing.⁶⁹ This tradition is epitomized in a fifteenth-century sermon called “Was Schaden tanzen bringt,” which, told with vivacity and interspersed with blood-freezing stories about dancing sinners and their ultimate castigation, abounded in observations about the harmful nature of dance.⁷⁰ Such an attitude was unquestionably reinforced by idiomatic expressions that gave the term “dance” negative connotations. Taylor tells us that as early as the thirteenth century the expression “vieille danse” signified fornication and diabolical temptations, and a century later “la mortelle danse” was a metaphor for war.⁷¹

Just as current was the notion of blessed dance performed by saints and angels in heaven. Biblical texts could be introduced to support the positive nature of dancing,⁷² which was glorified by the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century mystics Johannes Tauler, Henry Suso, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and



FIGURE 9. Bernt Notke, *The Dance of Death*, Lübeck, detail (photo: Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte der Hansestadt Lübeck).

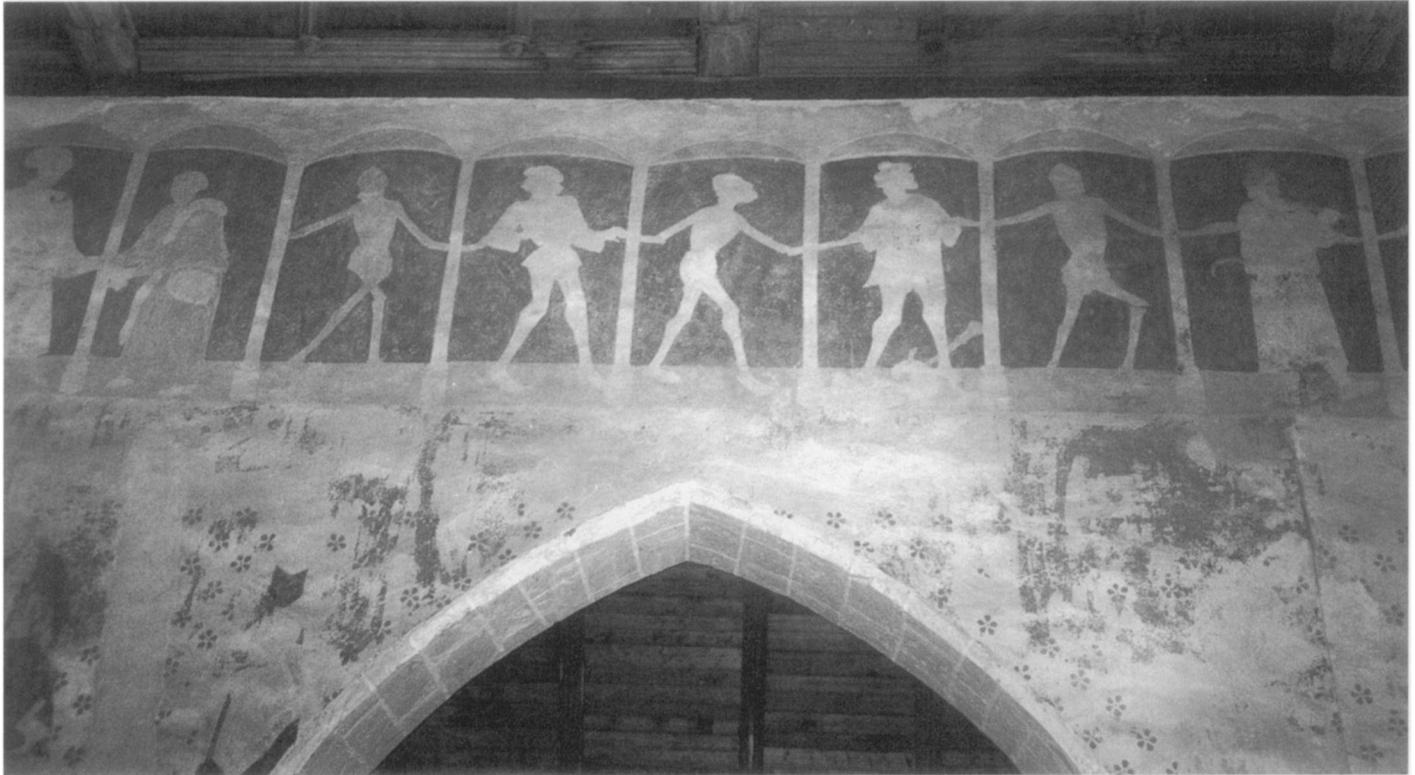


FIGURE 10. *Dance of Death, Kermaria-en-Isquit (photo: author).*

Bruder Phillip.⁷³ By the fifteenth century, the image of Christ leading the blessed in a heavenly dance appears in hymns and treatises on mystical love,⁷⁴ and dancing angels and maidens populate paintings and manuscript illuminations, including Botticelli's *Mystical Nativity* and Simon Marmion's *Blessed Virgins Entering Paradise*.⁷⁵

The attitude toward dancing in vernacular sermons and spiritual love songs, while not directly related to the theme of the Dance of Death, cannot but have helped shape the public's understanding of the Dance in the Niguliste Church. The message they received was mixed: dance was sometimes devilish, sometimes blessed. The figure of the Preacher, no longer mute, would seem now to speak. Pointing at the long procession, he not only reminds the beholder about the inevitability of indiscriminating death, but also, perhaps, reveals the diabolical nature of this dance. The appearance of jesting skeletons, the embodiment of all that is grotesque, would have suggested to the audience that the dance is performed by sinners, and that the devil himself works through those with too much worldly ambition. While these skeletons cavort, the Preacher speaks with the utmost *gravitas*, as befits someone of his stature. The following instructions were given to those who preached by the fourteenth-century Dominican friar Thomas Waley in his *De modo componendi sermones*:

... let the preacher be very careful not to throw his body about with unrestrained movement—now suddenly lift-

ing up his head high, now suddenly jerking it down, now turning to the right, and now with strange rapidity to the left, now stretching out both hands as if embracing east and west, now suddenly knitting hands together, now extending his hands immoderately, now suddenly pulling them back.⁷⁶

The behavior of Reval skeletons, then, wholly violates the rules prescribed for preachers. Their movement is unrestrained, their arms and legs flail, their emaciated hands contort, their heads jerk in this or that direction. The contrast with the composed preacher is obvious and purposeful: his aloof countenance directly offsets the unseemly behavior of Death. By underscoring the differences between the kindly friar—the man of God who pronounces the sermon—and unsympathetic Death, his complete and therefore devilish opposite, this gestural contrast further endows the Dance with negative connotations. The painting, then, would stand as an immediate call for repentance, since, educated or not, the viewer would inevitably recognize his painted double, led away in this evidently wicked dance.

At the same time, the viewer would have seen that the procession of figures, waltzing away beyond the threshold of death, was taking place in idyllic, almost paradisiacal, surroundings. Perhaps Notke's choice of such a setting was dictated by his desire not only to inject a sense of immediate actuality into his painting, but also to allude to a Cockaigne-



FIGURE 11. *Dance of Death, La Ferté-Loupière (photo: author).*

like place, where the pasture is always green, the sky always blue, and the hunt always successful. The paintings in Reval and Lübeck were the only Dances to provide such a detailed and empyrean background to the procession. This may have called to mind the heavenly dance and thus conceivably could have stood for the promise of salvation. Ultimately, those who experienced the imagery of the Dance by looking, having listened to the spoken word, would receive a message similar to that absorbed by viewers who looked at and simultaneously read the written word: all are equal in the eyes of death, and salvation is possible only through repentance. Literate viewers would have received specific knowledge about the status of the dancers and their hopelessness and helplessness, but all would have felt the urgency of the painting's message and its immediate relevance to their particular personal condition.

Epilogue

Although the blossoming of Dance of Death imagery occurred in the fifteenth century, life-size paintings continued to be painted for centuries throughout Europe, mainly in the provinces. Migrating away from graveyards and church walls, they appear in unexpected places, such as the ceiling of a cemetery chapel in Wondreb or of the covered bridge in Lucerne. The Dance of Death, a product of the late Middle Ages, underwent a metamorphosis when it was translated into woodcuts

and was reconciled to the format of the printed books in the early modern era. While a few editions of prints on the theme had appeared in the late fifteenth century, it was the publication of Hans Holbein the Younger's woodcut version of the Dance of Death entitled *Simulachres & historiees faces de la mort*, first printed in 1538 in Lyons, that led to the popularity of the Dance of Death in the codex format. The relation with the viewer seems to have changed profoundly with the change in medium and scale: rather than life-size, life-like figures in a continuous dance, now separate vignettes appeared, each centered on a page and accompanied by a witty quatrain. These would hardly have exerted the same power over the reader as did the solemn procession of the dead in late medieval paintings. Instead of moving beside the image, dancing along with the Dance of Death, so to speak, the viewer only turned pages: the personal involvement and identification of the viewer with figures in the Dance cannot have been as strong. Even the figure of Death became, in such prints, a far less intimidating figure, skipping from page to page, poking fun at his victims. Thus, paradoxically, the public display of the Dance of Death, as in the Niguliste Church in Reval, facilitated personal participation and immediate response, while the more private process of looking at the printed page seems to have made the world of the Dance a good deal more remote and far less threatening to Renaissance audiences.

APPENDIX
Text and Translation of the Reval Dance of Death

The text is transcribed exactly as it appears on the panel. Punctuation and spelling have not been corrected.

Preacher to All:

Och redelike creatuer sy arm ofte ryke
Seet hyr dat spiegel junck vñ olden
Vnde dencket hyr aen ok elkerlike
Dat sik hyr nemant kan ontholden
Waneer de doet kumpt als gy hyr seen
Hebbe wi den vele gudes ghedaen
So moghe wi wesen myt gode een
Wy moten van allen loen vntfaen
Vñ lieven kynder ik wil ju raden
Dat gi juwe scapeken verleide nicht
Men gude exempel en op laden
Eer ju de doet sus snelle bi licht

Death to All:

To dussem dantse rope ik al gemene Pawes keiser vñ alle creatu[. . .]
Arm ryke groet vñ kleine Tredet vort went iu en helpt nen truren
Men dencket wol in aller tyd Dat gy gude werke myt iu bringen
Vñ iuwer sunden werden quyd Went gy moten na myner pypen springen

Death to the Pope:

Her pawes du byst hogest nu Dantse wy voer ik vñ du
Al heuestu in godes stede staen Een erdesch vader ere vñ werdicheit vntfaen
Van alder werlt du most my Volghen vñ werden als ik sy
Dyn losent vñ bindent dat was vast Der hoecheit werstu nu een gast

Pope:

Och here got wat is min bate al was ik hoch geresen in state
Vnde ik altohant moet werden gelijk als du een slim der erden
Mi mach hocheit noch rickheit baten wente al dink mot ik nalaten
Nemet hir excempel de na mi sit pawes al[s]e ik was mine tit

Death to Pope, then to the Emperor:

[. . .]
her keiser wi mote d[. . .]

Emperor:

O dot du letlike figure vor andert my alle myne nature
Ik was mechtich vñ rike hogest van machte sunder gelike
Koninge vorsten vñ heren mosten my nigen vnde eren
Nu kumstu vreselike forme van mi to maken spise der worme.

Death to the Emperor, then to the Empress:

Du werst gekoren wil dat vreden to beschermen vnde to behoden
De hilgen kerken de kerstenheit myt deme swerde der rechticheit

Preacher to All:

O, reasonable creature, whether poor or rich!
Look here into this mirror, young and old,
and remember all
that no one can stay here
when death comes as you see here.
If we do good deeds
we can be together with God.
We will get the reward we justly deserve.
My dear children, I want to advise you
not to lead your sheep astray,
but to be to them a good model
Before death suddenly appears at your side.

Death to All:

I call all and everyone to this dance:
pope, emperor, and all creatures
poor, rich, big, or small.
Step forward, mourning won't help now!
Remember though at all times
to bring good deeds with you
and to repent your sins
for you must dance to my pipe.

Death to the Pope:

Pope, now you are the highest,
let us lead the dance, me and you!
Even though you may have been God's representative,
a father on earth, received honor and glory
from all men in this world, you must
follow me and become what I am.
What you loosed was loosed, what you bound was bound,⁷⁷
but now you lose your great esteem.

Pope:

O Lord God, of what use is it to me—
even though I reached a high position
I must here and now
become a handful of earth just like you.
Neither esteem nor wealth can be of any use to me
for I have to leave it all behind.
Let this be an example to you, you who will be pope
after me as I was in my time.

Death to Pope, then to the Emperor:

[. . .]
Emperor, we have to dance!

Emperor:

O death, you ugly figure,
you completely change my nature.
I was rich and powerful,
the most powerful one without compare.
Kings, dukes and noblemen
had to bow before me and honor me.
Now you come, horrible apparition,
to make worm feed of me.

Death to the Emperor, then to the Empress:

You were chosen—ponder it well!—
to protect and guard

Men houardie heft di vor blent du hef[t] di suluen nicht gekent
Mine [. . .]kumste was nicht in dinem sinne [. . .]ju [. . .]er [. . .]h[. . .] [f]row
[k]eiser[inne?]

Empress:

Ich wet my ment de doet was [. . .] ny vor vert so grot
Ik mende he si nicht al bi sinne bin ik doch junck vñ ok ein keiserinn[e]
Ik mende ik hedde vele macht vp em hebbe ik ny gedacht
Ofte dat jement dede [t]egen mi och lat mi noch leuen des bidde ik di

Death to the Empress, then to the Cardinal:

Keiserinne hoch vor meten my duncket du hest myner vor gheten
Tred hyr an it is nu de tyt du mendest ik solde di schelden [qui]t
Nen al werstu noch so vele du most myt to dessem spele
Vnde gi anderen alto male holt an volge my her kerdenale

Cardinal:

Ontfarme myner here salt schen ik kan deme gensins entflen
Se ik vore efte achter my ik vole den dot my al tyt by
Wat mach de hoge saet my baten den ik besat ik mot en laten
Vñ werden vnwerdiger ter stunt wen en vnreine stinckende hunt

Death to the Cardinal, then to the King:

Du werest van state gelike en apostel godes vp ertry[k]e
Vmme den kersten louen to sterken myt worden vñ anderen dogentsammen
werk[en]
Men du hest mit groter houardichit vp dinen hogen perden reden
Des mostu sorgen nu de mere nu tret [. . .] vort her konnink here.

King:

O dot dyn sprake heft my vo[r]uert Dussen dans en hebbe ik niht gelert
Hertogen rydder vñ knechte D[r]agen vor my durbar gerichte
Vñ jwelick hodde sick de worde To sprekende de ik node horde
Nu koms[t] vnuorsenlik Vñ berouest my al myn ryk

Death to the King, then to the Bishop:

Al dynne danken heftu geleyt Na werliker herlicheyt
Wat bate[t] du most in den slik Werden geschapen my gelik
Recht gewent vñ vorkeren Heftu vnder dy laten reigeren
Den armen [. . .] egene bedwank Her bischop nu holt an de hant

the holy church of Christendom
with the sword of justice.
But haughtiness has blinded you,
you didn't know yourself.
My coming you did not expect.
Turn you to me now, empress!

Empress:

I know it's me death means.
I've never been so terrified before.
I thought he was not in his right mind,
for I am so young and an empress, too!
I believed I had great power,
but of death I never thought
or that someone else would hurt me.
Oh, let me live a little longer, I pray you!

Death to the Empress, then to the Cardinal:

Utterly insolent empress,
it seems to me that you have forgotten me.
Come here! It's time now.
You believed I would spare you?
Not at all, however great you may be,
you have to follow me to this roundelay
and all you others as well!
Stop, follow me, cardinal!

Cardinal:

Have mercy on me Lord, now that it has to happen!
There is no way for me to escape from you.
Whether I look before or behind
I always sense death close to me.
Of what use can the high rank be to me
which I attained? I have to leave it behind
and instantly become les worthy
than a foul stinking dog.

Death to the Cardinal, then to the King:

You were esteemed
like an apostle of God on earth,
that you may support the Christian faith
with words and other virtuous deeds.
But in your great haughtiness
you sat on your high horse.
Therefore now you have to worry even more!
Step forward now, noble king!

King:

Oh death, your words have scared me!
This dance I haven't learned.
Dukes, knights, and squires
serve me precious dishes
and everyone took heed
not to speak the words I disliked to hear.
Now you come unexpectedly
and rob me of my entire kingdom!

Death to the King, then to the Bishop:

All your thoughts were about
worldly splendor.
How does that help you now? You have to sink into the earth
and become like me.
You let bent and perverted laws
prevail during your kingship,
you wrought violence on the poor as if they were slaves.
Bishop, give me your hand!

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1. François Villon, *Le Testament Villon; Le lais Villon et les poèmes variés*, trans. G. Kinnell (New York, 1965), 64–65.
 2. See esp. part III of the chapter “Art and Human Destiny” in E. Mâle, *Religious Art in France: The Late Middle Ages* (Paris, 1949; rpt. Princeton, 1986), 328–48. In Chapter 5 (“The Vision of Death”) of *The Autumn of the Middle Ages* (London, 1924; rpt. Chicago, 1996), J. Huizinga demonstrated that the Dance of Death imagery mirrors cultural shifts and changes in attitudes toward death that took place in the 1400s. On this subject, see also T. S. R. Boase, *Death in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1972), esp. 104–9; M. Camille, *Master of Death: The Lifeless Art of Pierre Remiet, Illuminator* (New Haven, 1996); and P. Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London, 1996), esp. 153–59.
 3. Interest in Dance of Death imagery has been sporadic. G. Kastner’s *Les Dances des morts*, published in Paris in 1852, pioneered the systematic analysis of Dance of Death imagery, treating the accompanying texts as well: Kastner focused mainly on French examples at the expense of works in the rest of Europe. Kastner’s work is inevitably filled with errors and undocumented facts, some of which derive ultimately from F. Douce’s *The Dance of Death Exhibited in Elegant Engravings on Wood* (London, 1833). After a hundred-year hiatus, interest in the Dance of Death revived, and a number of wide-ranging studies, exhibition catalogues, and monographs appeared. J. M. Clark’s *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Glasgow, 1950) was published two years after W. Stammer’s *Der Totentanz: Entstehung und Deutung* (München, 1948); these were followed by H. Rosenfeld’s comprehensive *Der mittelalterliche Totentanz: Entstehung, Entwicklung, Bedeutung* (Münster, 1954). In the last decade a number of monographs have appeared; these include P. Walther, *Der Berliner Totentanz zu St. Marien* (Berlin, 1997); F. Egger, *Basler Totentanz* (Basel, 1990); and V. Terraroli, *Il ciclo dei temi macabri a Clusone* (Arte Lombarda, 1989). Noteworthy recent articles on the reading and reception of the Dance of Death include: J. H. M. Taylor, “Que signifiait danse au quinzième siècle? Danse la Danse macabre,” *Fifteenth Century Studies* 18 (1991), 259–77; and her “Danse macabré and Bande dessinée: A Question of Reading,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 25 (1989), 356–69; *The Danse macabre of Women: ms. fr. 995 of the Bibliothèque nationale*, ed. A. T. Harrison with a chapter by S. L. Hindman on the imagery (Kent, 1994); and C. Kiening, “Le double décomposé: Rencontre avec des vivants et des morts à la fin du moyen âge,” *Annales* 50 (1995), 1157–90. An often useful resource on new scholarship is a series of proceedings of the Europäische Totentanz-Vereinigung, entitled *L’art macabre* and published yearly since 2000. Their monthly bulletin “Totentanz Aktuell” also provides a guide to recent publications on the Dance of Death.
 4. The city’s name was changed from Kaleveni to Lindanise by 1219, but from the thirteenth through the nineteenth century it was usually called Reval. The name “Tallinn,” although first applied in the seventeenth century, became official only in the twentieth. See S. Mäevali, *Istoriko-arhitekturnie pamyatniki Tallinna* (Tallinn, 1981), 4–5.
 5. No documents establish definitively who commissioned and executed the painting, but it is generally accepted, on the basis of style, that it was painted by Bernd Notke.
 6. *Journal d’un bourgeois de Paris 1405–1449* (Geneva, 1975), 203: “Item, l’an mil quatre cents vingt-cinq, fut faite la Danse Macabré aux Innocents, et fut commencée environ le mois d’aoust et achevée en caresme ensuivant.” On the Parisian Dance, see E. Chaney, *La Danse macabré des charniers des Saintes Innocents à Paris* (Manchester, 1945).
 7. See H. and B. Utzinger’s *Itinéraires des Danses macabres* (Chartres, 1996) for one of the most comprehensive lists of fifteenth-century Dances.
 8. Literature on the Kermaria Dance of Death includes the following brief monographs: J. Cocaign and M. Mesnard, *Itron-Varia-an-Iskuut* (Lyons, 1995), and, earlier, L. Bégule, *La chapelle de Kermaria* (Paris, 1909).
 9. See A. Corvisier, *Mesley-le-Grenet, La danse macabre* (Chartres, 1975).
 10. Closely related to the Dance of Death, this image draws upon the *Le dit des trois morts et trois vivants*. The narrative told of an encounter between three living men and three corpses in various stages of decay. The corpses warned the men about the inevitability of death: “What you are, we once were; you will be what we are now.” For a recent study on the Legend’s imagery, see *Vifs nous sommes, morts nous serons: La rencontre des trois morts et des trois vifs dans la peinture murale en France*, published by the Groupe de recherches sur les peintures murales (Vendôme, 2001).
 11. Sometimes skeletons, sometimes cadavers are seen in the paintings. The debate over whether these are the dead doubles of the living dancers or repeated manifestations of the personified Death has never been settled. Again, interpretation must vary from case to case. The skeletons in the Reval Dance of Death look completely alike and should probably be seen as personifications of Death.
 12. Among these see esp. Clark, *Dance of Death*, 80; H. Rosenfeld, *Der mittelalterliche Totentanz*; and H. and B. Utzinger, *Itinéraires*, 127.
 13. M. Lumiste, *Tallinna Surmatants* (Tallinn, 1976).
 14. *Der Totentanz der Marienkirche zu Lübeck und der Nikolaikirche in Reval*, ed. H. Freytag et al. (Cologne, 1993).
 15. The complexities of reconstructing viewer response to a particular work of art and the context of its reception were summarized by M. Baxandall in his seminal *Painting and Experience in Early Renaissance Italy* (Oxford, 1972). Recreating the reception of the fifteenth-century Dance in Reval is especially challenging since few written sources survive that help us to place the painting and its accompanying poem in a historical framework.
 16. The importance of distinguishing between the lettered and non-lettered viewers of medieval public art is summarized in H. Kessler, “Diction in the ‘Bibles of the Illiterate,’” in *World Art: Themes of Unity and Diversity*, ed. I. Lavin, 3 vols. (University Park, 1989), II, 297–308.
 17. On the varying functions of Hanseatic churches, see J. Schildhauer, *The Hansa: History and Culture* (Leipzig, 1985), 174. For Niguliste, Mäevali, *Istoriko-arhitekturnie pamyatniki*, 5; and R. Kangropool, *Niguliste Kirik* (Tallinn, 1993).

18. *Art Museum of Estonia / St. Nicholas Church / Museum Concert Hall* (Kultuurkapital, 2000[?]).
19. Originally embedded in the walls, the stones were later moved to the floor; only one is still set in the wall.
20. Recent monographs on Notke and his connections with the Scandinavian and Baltic world include G. Eimer, *Bernt Notke* (Köln, 1985); and K. Petermann, *Bernt Notke* (Berlin, 2000).
21. S. Karling, *Bernt Notke och gravstenkonsten* (Stockholm, 1950), 146, 155.
22. Lumiste, *Tallinna Surmatants*, 66.
23. Wortmann, for instance, replaced the fifteenth-century ships with their contemporary seventeenth-century counterparts.
24. H. Vögeler, "Zum Gemälde des Lübecker und des Revaler Totentanzes," in *Der Totentanz* (as n. 14), 73.
25. J. Roosval, "Bernd Notke peintre," *GBA* 17 (1937), 14.
26. *Ibid.*, 66–67. 1463, it should be remembered, was the date of the creation of the Lübeck Dance.
27. Tallinna Linna Riiklik Arhiiv, f. 31, nim.1, s.-ü. 5: *Rechnungsbuch der St. Nikolai Kirche 1603–1687*, 3a.
28. Tallinna Linna Riiklik Arhiiv, f. 31, nim.1, s.-ü. 3: *Denkeklbuch der St. Nikolai Kirche 1603–1759*, 89.
29. Missing since 1799.
30. Vögeler, "Zum Gemälde," 94.
31. The text differs considerably from that found in the Lübeck painting: the language of the Reval Totentanz is pure Low German, whereas the poem in Lübeck has some Netherlandish overtones. On the precise differences, see W. Seelman, "Die Totentanze des Mittelalters," *Jahrbuch des Vereins für niederdeutsche Sprachforschung* 17 (1891), 1. Coincidentally, the fragment of the text that survives in Tallinn corresponds almost precisely to the one lost in Lübeck. Very few lines in common have survived, but the difference in dialect (and spelling) is clearly marked. Compare, for example, the Lübeck text, "To dessen dansse rope ik alghemene / Pawest, keiser unde alle creaturen," to the Reval verse: "To dusse dantse rope ik al gemene / Pawes keiser vn alle creatuer." Because of this strange coincidence, however, C. G. Heise argued in 1937 that the Reval fragment is not an independent work but a missing piece of the Lübeck Dance. See his *Der Lübecker Totentanz von 1463* (Berlin, 1937), 191. This theory has since been successfully refuted.
32. *Death to the Pope*: "Al heusestu in godes stede staen / Een erdesch vader ere vn werdicheit vntfaen" ("Even though you may have been God's representative / A father on earth, received honor and glory"); *Death to the Empress*: "Nen al werstu noch so vele" ("... however great you may be").
33. *Death to the Emperor*: "Men houardie heft di vor blent" ("But haughtiness has blinded you"); *Death to the Cardinal*: "Men du hest mit groter houardichit / Vp dinen hogen perden reden" ("But in your great haughtiness you sat on your high horse").
34. Schildhauer, *The Hansa*, 173. On the concept of the Hanseatic church as "die formprägende Kraft des namenlosen Volkes," see N. Zaska, *Die gotischen Kirchen Stralsunds und ihre Kunstwerke: Kirchliche Kunstgeschichte von 1250 bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1964), 18.
35. Unfortunately, many early tombstones do not survive; the ones I cite date between 1520 and 1633.
36. Mäevali, *Istoriko-ArHITEKTURNE Pamyatniki*, 40.
37. Schildhauer, *The Hansa*, 174.
38. The artist at the monastery of St. Robert at La Chaise-Dieu left an empty register below the figures, undoubtedly intending to fill it with text, but the fresco was never finished; this may be an interesting testament to the importance of imagery over text, even in a learned community. On the other hand, it seems that the painting at La Ferté-Loupière was meant to appear without poetry from the beginning: it lacks even an outline of the register that could accommodate the verses. On the fresco at La Chaise-Dieu, see C. and P. Boisse, *La Danse macabre de la Chaise-Dieu* (Brioude, [n.d.]). On the painting at La Ferté-Loupière, see P. Mégnien, *La Danse macabre de La Ferté-Loupière* (Auxerre, 1991).
39. G. Hellfeldt, "Zur Entstehung und Entwicklung des bürgerlichen Schulwesens," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universität Rostock, Gesellschafts- und Sprachwiss. Reihe* 5/3 (1955–56), 388.
40. G. Hellfeldt, "Die Wirkung der städtischen Schulen für die intellektuelle Bildung der Bevölkerung in den Seestädten der wendischen Hanse," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universität Rostock, Gesellschafts- und Sprachwiss. Reihe* 9/1 (1959–60), 112.
41. Schildhauer, *The Hansa*, 178.
42. See n. 6 above. When John Lydgate visited Paris between 1426 and 1431, he saw the Dance and translated the verses into English. In the Ellesmere MS we find the following lines "Like the exawmple / whiche that at Parise / I fownde depicte / ones on a walle / Ful notably. . . . I toke on me / to translaten al / Owte of the frenshe / Macabrees daunce." See Chaney, *La Danse macabré des charniers des Saintes Innocents*, 2. The mural in Paris (and its poem) is known only through the woodcuts of Guyot Marchant of 1485.
43. On the Spanish poem, see F. A. De Icaza and J. Amador de los Rios, *La Danza de la muerte: Textos de El Escorial (siglo XV) y de Sevilla (Juan Varela de Salamanca, 1520)* (Madrid, 1981). Pictorial representations of the Dance in Spain appear to be non-existent.
44. Clark, *Dance of Death*, 92, seems to believe that the source was French, while Huizinga, *Autumn of the Middle Ages*, 165, believes the original poem to have been composed in Latin.
45. The full text of the Reval fragment and its translation is provided in the Appendix.
46. Paris: "C'est piteuse chose y panser / Tout est forgie d'une matière"; Reval: "Hebbe vi den vele gudes ghedaen / So moghe wi wesen myt gode een / Wy moten van allen loen vntfaen."
47. On questions of the gaze, see, among others, N. Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven, 1983).
48. Paris: "Mors, pourris, puans, descouvers / Comme sommes, telx seres vous" ("Dead, rotten, putrid, and uncovered / What we are, you will be"); Reval: "... gude werke myt iu bringen / Vñ iuwer sunden werden quyd" ("To bring good deeds with you / And to repent your sins").
49. On Hanseatic architecture, see P. Dollinger, *Die Hanse* (Stuttgart, 1981), 350–51; H. Büttner and G. Meissner, *Town Houses of Europe* (London, 1982); K. H. Clasen, *Die Baukunst an der Ostseeküste zwischen Elbe und Oder* (Dresden, 1955), 36–37; N. Zaska, "Zum Problem der Hansekultur und Hansekunst," *Hansische Studien*, 3 (Weimar, 1975), 272–79.
50. While at La Chaise-Dieu the fresco is raised some 2 meters 30 cm above the ground, in Kermaria and La Ferté-Loupière the Dance is painted high above the nave arcades. Neither the image at La Chaise-Dieu nor the one at La Ferté-Loupière are accompanied by text, although the artist did intend to place verses under the Chaise-Dieu fresco (see n. 38); the surviving fragment in Kermaria is too high above the ground to be legible.
51. Taylor, "Danse macabré and Bande dessinée," 358–59.

52. M. Camille, "Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy," *Art History* 8 (1985), 26.
53. Mâle, *Religious Art in France*, 318. See also Huizinga's assertion, *Autumn of the Middle Ages*, 156, that "[n]o other age has so forcefully and continually impressed the idea of death on the whole population as did the fifteenth century."
54. D. Largajolli, "Una danza dei morti del secolo 16. nell'alto trentino," *Rivista di studi sull'età moderna e contemporanea* 5 (1886), 37.
55. Cited in F. Warren, *The Dance of Death* (London, 1931), 68: "Sire Cordelere / to dow my hande is rawght / To this daunce / dow to conueie ande lede / Whiche yn dowre prechyng / hau ful ofte tawght / How [pat] I am / moste gastful for to drede / Al-be that folke/ take ther of none hede." Trans. Clark, *The Dance of Death*, 95, as follows: "Sir cordeler, to you my hand is stretched, / to lead and convey you to this dance, / who in your teaching have full oft taught / how that I am most fearful for to dread, / albe that folk take thereof no heed." For differences between the Parisian text and Lydgate's translation, see J. H. M. Taylor, "Translation as Reception: *La Danse macabre*," in *Shifts and Transpositions in Medieval Narrative*, ed. K. Pratt (Cambridge, 1994), 181–92.
56. For full text, see De Icaza and Amador de los Rios (as above n. 43).
57. Clark, *Dance of Death*, 103.
58. We read in the *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris* (as n. 6) under the date 1429 (234): "Et estoit monté quant il preschoit sur ung hault eschauffaut . . . le dos tourné vers les Charniers encontre la Charronnerie, à l'endroit de la Dance Macabre." ("And, while preaching, he climbed on a high scaffolding . . . his back turned towards the charnel house opposite the Charronnerie [a segment of the rue de la Ferronnerie that extended along the charnel house], in the place of the Dance of Death.")
59. Recent literature includes R. D. Schiewer, "Die Entdeckung der mittelniederdeutschen Predigt: Überlieferung, Form, Inhalte," *Oxford German Studies* 26 (1997), 24–72.
60. H.-J. Schiewer, "German Sermons in the Middle Ages," in *The Sermon*, ed. B. M. Kienzle, Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental, 81–83 (Turnhout, 2000), 893.
61. For sermons on death by Bertrand de la Tour, Johannes a S. Geminiano, Johannes de Neapel, and Fredericus de Franconibus, see Schneyer's *Repertorium* and Kaepelli's *Scriptores*, as quoted in D. L. D'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars* (Oxford, 1985), 80.
62. Cited after BNF, MS lat. 16514, in A. Lecoy de la Marche, *La chaire française* (Paris, 1868), 254.
63. Incorporated in the fifteenth-century English version of the *Gesta Romanorum* (EETS, ed. ext., 33, 135), as cited in G. R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the Period, c. 1350–1450* (Cambridge, 1926), 268.
64. Cited after BL, MS Add. 37049, fol. 33, in Owst, *Preaching*, 344.
65. Clark, *Dance of Death*, 94.
66. This question has been addressed by, among others, E. M. Manasse, "The Dance Motive of the Latin Dance of Death," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 4 (1946), 83–103; and S. Cosacchi, *Makabertanz: Der Totentanz in Kunst, Poesie und Brauchtum des Mittelalters* (Meisenheim-am-Glam, 1965), 285–357. The latest synthesis has been produced by Taylor in "Que signifiait," 259–70.
67. A. Harding, *An Investigation into Use and Meaning of Medieval German Dancing Terms* (Göppingen, 1973), 53. Admonishing young women who dared to dance in holy places, the fourth-century bishop of Caesaria, Basileios, wrote in his *Sermon on Drunkenness*: "Casting aside the yoke of service under Christ and the veil of virtue from their heads, despising God and the angel . . . they dance with lustful eyes and loud laughter." See PG 31, cols. 446, 459.
68. L. Behrendt, *The Ethical Teaching of Hugo von Trimberg* (Washington, 1926), 51; *Sermones discipuli*, 37, Bodleian MS Auct. Q. Supra I 24, in Harding, *Investigation*, 70; Meister Ingold, *Das Goldene Spiel* (Strasbourg, 1882), 69–74.
69. See Harding, *Investigation*, 54.
70. Vienna, ÖNB, cod. 3009, fols. 73–85v, ed. M. Haupt and H. Hoffmann, *Alteutsche Blätter* (Leipzig, 1836–40), 52–63. It is explained in the sermon that dancing entices those who are forbidden to dance by law, leads to unchaste thoughts, makes the sick die, encourages promiscuity, leads people to forget God, and allows for sensual movement and extravagant display of trimmings. Here, in stating "die sengerin am tamtz sint priesterin des tufels" ("Dancing women are priestesses of the devil"), "Was Schaden tanzen bringt" takes up themes similar to those that had appeared in *Mireour du monde* a century earlier: "Les processions au deable sont caroles; et ceus et celes qui les mainent sont moines et nonnains au deable" ("The diabolical processions are carols; and those men and women who participate in them are monks and nuns of the devil"). Brought about by the dancers' articles of luxury are lasciviousness, deceit, stealing, and, most significantly, pride. Likening the sin of *superbia* to dancing is reminiscent of the Preacher's call in the Dance of Death to cast away pride and repent. The sermon then tells the story of a Brabantine girl who was punished by death for her dancing and recounts a popular *exemplum* in which a dancing woman becomes the devil's intermediary (the latter was also recounted by Thomas of Cantimpré in the thirteenth century and Johannes Herolt in the fifteenth). Next it is told how a girl died while dancing with her lover, and the sermon goes on to provide other gruesome moralistic stories. The Old Testament story of the Israelites dancing around the Golden Calf is recounted to exemplify the sin of dancing: "da atten die Juden ein kalp gegossen uss golde . . . und tanzten umme des kalp" ("And then the Jews made a calf out of gold . . . and they danced around this calf"). The sermon concludes with the statement that dancing is a sin for monks, nuns, and priests as well as laymen.
71. Taylor, "Que signifiait," 262. For "vieille danse," see Gautier de Coincy, *Sermon en vers de chasteté as nonnais*, ed. T. Nurmela (Helsinki, 1937), 146–47; for "la mortelle danse," Guillaume Guiart, *Branche des royaux lignages*, ed. J. A. Buchon (Paris, 1828), II, lines 11703–708).
72. Rooted in Luke 7:32 ("we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced"), this concept was further explored in the Acts of Saint John: "Grace danceth. . . Whoso danceth not, knoweth not what cometh to pass. . . Now answer thou unto my dancing." See M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1955), 95, 96, 253. The dancing and leaping David of 1 Chronicles 15 ("And David danced before the Lord with all his might") often appeared on the pages of illuminated manuscripts.
73. Mechthild of Magdeburg, for instance, in her *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, sees Christ as a Youth who invites her to dance: "Junkfrowe, alsust fromeklich solt ir nachtanzten / als uch mine userwelten vorgetantz hant" ("Maiden! thou shalt dance merrily / Even as mine elect!"). Her soul then answers: "Ich mag nit tanzten, herre, du enleitest mich" ("I cannot dance O Lord, unless Thou lead me"). See *Offenbarungen der Schwester Mechthild von Magdeburg oder Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*, ed. G. Morel (Regensburg, 1869), 20; trans. E. A. Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (New York, 1986), 219. Bruder Phillip in his *Marienleben* speaks of the heavenly dance led by Christ the Bridegroom: "Min bruietgom vüert den reigen da, / die heiligen tanzent alle na / er macht den megden ouch den tanz." ("My bridegroom leads the round (a dance) / all the saints are dancing nearby / He

- dances for the maidens too.”). See his *Marienleben* (Quedlinburg–Leipzig, 1853), 27; trans. courtesy of Charles Nelson.
74. Examples include: “Da füert Jesus den tanze / mit aller megede schar.” (There Jesus leads the dance / with all the maidens.”). Ed. A. H. Hoffmann von Fallersleben, *Die Geschichte des Kirchenlieds* (Hannover 1861), 111; trans. courtesy of Almut Breitenbach. “O alme deus sabaoth / du bist al der werlde got; / bring us an den osterdanz.” (“Oh almighty God Sabaoth / you are the god of all the world, lead us in the Easter dance.”). Ed. K. Bartsch, “Mittelniederdeutsche Osterlieder,” *Jarbuch des Vereins für nd. Sprachforschung* 5 (1879), 46–52, at 52. “Jesus der tanzer maister ist, / zu swanzet hat er hohen list. / Er wendeth sich him, er wendeth sich her, / Si tanzent alle nach siner lere.” See *Geistliche Minne*, in *Altdeutsche Blätter*, II, 359–73, cited in Harding, *Investigation*, 64; trans. J. Hamburger, *The Rothschild Canticles* (New Haven, 1990), 58: “Jesus is the master of the dance, / Wisdom teaches him to prance, / First to the left then to the right he sways, / All dance, his teaching they obey.”
75. J. J. G. Alexander, “Dancing in the Streets,” *Essays in Honor of Lilian M. C. Randall* = *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 54 (1996), 156.
76. “Valde tamen caveat ne motibus inordinatis jactet corpus suum, nunc subito extollendo caput in altum, nunc subito deprimendo, nunc vertendo se ad dextrum, nunc subito cum mirabili celeritate se vertendo ad sinistrum, nunc ambas manus sic extendendo simul quasi posset simul orientem occidentemque complecti, nunc vero subito eas in unum conjungendo, nunc extendendo brachia ultra modum, nunc subito extrahendo. se jactabant quod videbantur cum aliquo duellum inisse, seu potius insanisse.” Thomas Waleys, “De modo componendi sermons.” Ed. T.-M. Charland, *Artes praedicandi* (Paris, 1936), 332; trans. Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 64.
77. In reference to Matthew 16:19: “And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven.”