

MACABRE PARALLELS

DIALOGUE AND VIOLENCE IN MEDIEVAL ILLUMINATIONS OF THE THREE LIVING AND THE THREE DEAD

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The Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead, a medieval moralising story, tells of three young men on their return from a hunting trip who come across three dead. In some versions of the tale, the animated dead tell the living: 'As you are, so we once were; as we are now, so shall you be'. The story is likely to have first emerged in the secular context of the court in late-thirteenth-century France, from which it spread across Europe and was told and recorded in various forms over the course of the late Middle Ages.¹ The Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead is linked to the *Danse Macabre* with respect to the interaction that occurs between living and dead, and the themes were not infrequently depicted together. However, the notion that the Three Living and the Three Dead served as the source for the later tradition of the *Danse Macabre* has long

¹ Key studies for the story of the Three Living and the Three Dead include Karl Künstle, *Die Legende der drei Lebenden und der drei Toten und der Totentanz* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herdersche Verlagshandlung, 1908); Willy Storck, *Die Legende von den drei Lebenden und von den drei Toten* (Tübingen: Druck von H. Laupp Jr., 1910); Stefan Glixelli, *Les cinq Poèmes des Trois Morts et des Trois Vifs* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1914); E.C. Williams, 'Mural Paintings of the Three Living and the Three Dead in England', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 7 (1942), 31-40; Willy Rotzler, *Die Begegnung der drei Lebenden und der drei Toten: Ein Beitrag zur Forschung über die mittelalterlichen Vergänglichkeitsdarstellungen* (Winterthur: Verlag P.G. Keller, 1961); Pavel Chihaiia, *Immortalité et décomposition dans l'art du Moyen Age* (Madrid: Fondation culturelle Roumaine, 1988), 43-70; Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 134-40. For a recent in-depth study of the French wall paintings of the story, see Groupe de Recherches sur les Peintures Murales (eds), *Vifs nous sommes... morts nous serons: La Rencontre des trois morts et des trois vifs dans la peinture murale en France* (Vendôme: Éditions du Cherche-Lune, 2001).

been rejected, although it is recognised that both participated in the tradition of the so-called 'Macabre'.²

Numerous poetic versions of the story of the Three Living and the Three Dead survive in the vernacular, including Old French, Anglo-Norman, Early New High German and Italian as well as in two versions in Latin, each of which reflects a rich and diverse tradition of storytelling. Most of the poems that have come down to us are accompanied by illustrations that also represent an interesting variety. Early investigations of the pictorial record of the story by scholars such as Willy Rotzler were primarily concerned with establishing a chronology and identifying iconographic types. Art-historical investigations have generally moved beyond such iconographical and typological studies in recent decades and have focussed more on function, reception, contextualisation, and the relationship between text and image – issues that inform my own work. Yet what the initial investigations clearly demonstrate is that early on in the tradition of illustrating the story of the Three Living and the Three Dead, emphasis was placed upon the dialogue and communication that occurs either directly between the living and the dead in many French and English texts and images, or through a mediator in the person of a hermit in the case of many Italian examples.³

The emphasis on verbal interaction is ubiquitous in illuminations of the tale in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, not only in images that accompany poetic texts of the story but also in images that appear independent of the poetic text. This suggests that the tale was becoming so well known by the mid fourteenth century that an image of the story could function on its own without an extended textual exposition or explanation.⁴

² The texts and images of the Three Living and the Three Dead generally restrict the action to young male aristocrats and offer the living a chance to improve their lives before it is too late, while the *Danse Macabre* displays individuals of different social strata and sometimes both genders being dragged away by death without hope of reprieve.

³ The tradition of illustration in which three young men converse with three dead has come to be described as the French type, while images in which three young men on horseback observe the corpses lying in three open coffins, while a hermit serves as mediator between the living and the dead, has come to be known as the Italian type. See Storck (1910), 27-43; Rotzler (1961), 10, 73-167. Rotzler used these labels of the French type and the Italian type in order to organise his discussion, even grouping some images together according to how they combined aspects of the French and Italian types. See Rotzler (1961), 167-83.

⁴ For example, the early-fourteenth-century English legal manuscript known as the Smithfield Decretals (London, British Library, MS Royal 10 E. IV) includes an extended narrative pictorial cycle that runs along the bas-de-page between fols

By the early fifteenth century, the imagery of the Three Living and the Three Dead had become a mainstay as the miniature accompanying the liturgical prayers of the Office of the Dead in books of hours, the prayerbook of choice for the laity in this period.⁵ Interestingly, when serving as the main miniature introducing the prayers for the hour of Vespers in the Office of the Dead, representations of the dead in images of the story started to exhibit aggressive qualities. In some examples, the dead – animated and existing in the same physical space as the living – seem to stalk the living, while in others the encounter has become downright frightening (see Figs 4-6 below). The dead close in on the living, laughing and mocking them, while the horses of the living rear and the young men have looks of terror on their faces. In such examples, conversation has given way to violence.

251r-268r accompanying the decretals in Book Five having to do with crime. For more on this manuscript, see Lucy Freeman Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts 1285-1385*, vol. 1, *Text and Illustrations* (New York: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1986), 111-12; Andrew Taylor, *Textual Situations: Three Medieval Manuscripts and their Readers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 137-96; Alixe Bovey, *The Smithfield Decretals: Tales from the Margins of a Fourteenth-Century Law Book* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming). The image of the confrontation between the Three Living and the Three Dead itself occurs across the opening of fols 258v-259r. In another example, the image of the Three Living and the Three Dead accompanies a lauda in a Florentine laudario, likely produced for the Compagnia delle laude di Santo Spirito, a small laudesi company that met at the Florentine church of Santo Spirito. This manuscript is now in the Biblioteca nazionale centrale in Florence (Banco Rari 18, formerly Magliabecchiana II.I.122, fol. 134r). For a catalogue entry on the manuscript, see G. Mazzatinti, *Inventari dei Manoscritti delle Biblioteche d'Italia*, vol. 8, *Firenze, Biblioteca nazionale centrale* (Florence, 1898), 46-49. For a reproduction of fol. 134r, see Fernando Liuzzi, *La Lauda e i Primordi della Melodia Italiana*, vol. 1 (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1935), colour plate following p. 73. For a transcription and translation of the lauda, see Blake Wilson (music) and Nello Barbieri (text) (eds), *The Florence Laudario. An Edition of Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Banco Rari 18* (Madison: A-R Editions, 1995), c.

⁵ For the illustration of the Office of the Dead, see Millard Meiss, 'La mort et l'office des morts a l'epoque du Maitre Boucicaut et des Limbours', *Revue de l'Art*, 1 (1968), 17-25; Gabrielle Bartz and Eberhard König, 'Die Illustration des Toten-offiziums in Stundenbüchern', in Hansjakob Becker *et al.* (eds), *Im Angesicht des Todes: ein interdisziplinäres Kompendium I* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1987), 487-528; Roger Wieck, 'The Office of the Dead', in *Time Sanctified: the Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life* (New York: George Braziller, 1988, repr. 2001), 124-48. See also the essay by Caroline Zöhl in this volume.

How can we account for the shift from dialogue to fear-inspiring aggression in these images? Much has been written about the emergence of the imagery of death – often termed ‘the Macabre’ – in the medieval period and the place of the Three Living and the Three Dead in that tradition of description and illustration.⁶ However, very little attention has been paid to the shift in the appearance of the iconography of the story itself over the course of the late Middle Ages. This paper will argue that the function served by the image within the context of the manuscript and in the devotional life of the viewer offers keys to understanding why the dead are very frequently depicted as aggressive and violent in fifteenth-century representations.

Before turning to a close examination of several images that exemplify the aggressive encounter between living and dead, and then assessing how such images would have functioned, it will be necessary to examine earlier texts and images of the story to set the stage for tracking the shifts that occurred between the late thirteenth and late fifteenth centuries in the pictorial rendering of the story. Several French and English examples will first be examined, for these are representative of the tradition known north of the Alps in the early history of the dissemination of the tale.

Conversing with the dead

The earliest representations of the Three Living and the Three Dead tend to be relatively benign in appearance. The late-thirteenth-century MS 3142 now in the Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal in Paris, which was probably produced for Marie de Brabant around 1285, is a compilation of courtly tales and stories, and contains the 162-line-long version of the poem attributed to Baudouin de Condé. The poem is accompanied by a representation of two groups of three figures that are seemingly engaged in conversation (Pl. 4).⁷ This Baudouin version, which is one of the earliest

⁶ See Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 156-72; Emile Mâle, *Religious Art in France: the Late Middle Ages. A Study of Medieval Iconography and its Sources*, ed. Harry Bober, trans. M. Mathews (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949, repr. 1986), esp. 324-28; T.S.R. Boase, *Death in the Middle Ages: Mortality, Judgment and Remembrance* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1972); Binski (1996).

⁷ For a discussion of the Baudouin version of the Three Living and the Three Dead that appears in Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal MS 3142, see Glixelli (1914), 6-8, 14-15 53-63 and 113-115, and Rotzler (1961), 22-26. For the miniature, see Rotzler

known renditions of the story, was popular in aristocratic circles and survives in at least five other manuscripts from the period.⁸ The appearance of the story alongside other texts by Baudouin and additional courtly tales that were brought together in the Arsenal compendium suggests that the story of the Three Living and the Three Dead was rather well known in aristocratic circles by the final quarter of the thirteenth century.⁹

The Baudouin poem begins with an introduction that tells how the Three Living, when they were out one day as a group hunting, came to encounter the Three Dead. Each of the young men then speaks in turn, the first living youth describing what he sees to his companions, while the second claims that what they see is a mirror sent to them by God to cause them to reflect on their mortal state and to free them of their pride. The third young man describes in great detail the gruesome appearance of the dead figures before them. This is followed by the responses of the Three Dead. The first addresses the living, saying 'As you are, so we once were; as we are now, so shall you be!' He claims that he and his companions once looked just as the young men now do, and that Death took everything away from them. He confirms the suspicion of the second young man that the dead were sent to the living as a mirror from God to encourage them to improve their ways, and states that death levels all in the end. The third reminds the young men that they must be ready for death at all times, and asks the living to pray to God for them.¹⁰

The text appears in several columns across fols 311v and 312r, and the representation of the Three Living and the Three Dead occupies the top of fol. 311v, taking up the width of two columns. This is unusual, as images elsewhere in the manuscript only take up the width of a single column on their respective pages, and it suggests that the encounter of the Three Living and the Three Dead was given special significance visually,

(1961), 73-77. Both scholars treated the text and the image as separate entities, even though they appear together in the manuscript.

⁸ For the surviving manuscripts that contain the Baudouin version of the poem, see Glixelli (1914), 4-8.

⁹ See *Catalogue des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque de L'Arsenal* III (Paris, 1887), 256-64, for a discussion of the contents of the manuscript; also Susan Ward, 'Fables for the Court: Illustrations of Marie de France's Fables in Paris, BN, MS Arsenal 3142', in Jane Taylor and Lesley Smith (eds), *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence* (London: British Library and Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 190-203.

¹⁰ For a full transcription of the Baudouin version of the poem, see Glixelli (1914), 53-63.

perhaps because of the popularity of the story in its day.¹¹ The image presents three elegant young men on the left, dressed almost identically and apparently of a comparable age. The living youth furthest to the right, who clasps the hand of the figure behind him, stands holding a hawk which evokes the hunting trip from which the young men were understood to be returning when they encountered the dead, but also symbolises the pleasures of life against which the dead warn the young men. The dead appear in similar stages of advanced decay, while it is their shrouds – either intact, ragged or entirely absent – which seem to communicate gradations of difference between the three corpses.

The illumination accompanying Baudouin's poem suggests that two groups of three figures appear before each other, and we understand that the figures communicate verbally with each other although the figures are not depicted performing gestures associated with speaking. No direct conversation takes place, however, since the text of the poem indicates that while the dead speak directly to the living, the living only speak amongst themselves. No physical barrier has been depicted on the page, suggesting a momentary rupture between two separate worlds that has allowed living and deceased to interact with each other while the separation between the living and the dead is maintained through the distance at which the groups are kept from each other and through the lack of a two-way conversation. This image, and Baudouin's telling of the story as it was recorded in Marie's manuscript, seem to reflect the popular belief that it was possible for the dead to visit the world of the living as revenants and to seek prayers from the living for the benefit of those souls languishing in Purgatory.¹² We might also understand that the dead are depicted as caught between worlds since, according to another popular belief, the body could not truly die until it had fully decayed.¹³

¹¹ The imagery of the Three Living and the Three Dead appears to have been given special emphasis in other manuscripts in which it is found as well. For example, the lauda 'Chi vuol lo mondo disprezare' contained in a mid-fourteenth-century Florentine laudario (Florence, BNC Banco Rari, 18) is accompanied at the top of fol. 134r by a framed miniature of the Three Living and the Three Dead. The miniature takes up the width of the text block and is the only image in the manuscript to do so. All other images in the manuscript are inhabited initials. See Rotzler (1961), 136-39. See also note 3 above.

¹² Nancy Caciola, 'Wraiths, Revenants, and Ritual in Medieval Culture', *Past and Present*, 152 (1996), 3-45, esp. 28. See also the essay by Kenneth Rooney in this volume.

¹³ Caciola (1996), 31-37.

While no physical separation divides the two groups in the illumination in Arsenal MS 3142, similar compositions elsewhere make a point of dividing the space into two halves and distinguishing between the separate realms, as is the case with the illumination found in the Psalter of Robert de Lisle.¹⁴ The version of the story found in the De Lisle Psalter is an abbreviated version of the so-called Anonymous IV text.¹⁵ It appears on fol. 127r in two columns in Anglo-Norman French, with headings in Latin and a line in Middle English expressing the thoughts of the living and the dead running along the top of the framed illumination at the top of the folio (Pl. 5).¹⁶ The verses of the poem uttered by the Three Living are arranged in the left hand column below the figures of the Three Living and the words of the dead in the right hand column, inscribed directly below the depictions of the dead. While in most textual renditions of the Anonymous IV poem the Three Living speak first followed by the Three Dead, here the verses have been arrayed on the page in such a way as to provoke a performative engagement with the text. The arrangement of verses allows the reader to alternate between the words of the living and those of the dead, as if to participate in the conversation.¹⁷

¹⁴ London, BL, MS Arundel 83 II, c.1310. This English manuscript contains a number of devotional and moralising texts and images in addition to the story of the Three Living and the Three Dead that might have been studied and consulted with the guidance of a Franciscan confessor. For the manuscript, see Lucy Freeman Sandler, *The Psalter of Robert de Lisle in the British Library* (London: Harvey Miller, 1983, repr. 1999), esp. 44-45; Susanna Greer Fein, 'Life and Death, Reader and Page: Mirrors of Mortality in English Manuscripts', *Mosaic*, 351 (2002), 69-94.

¹⁵ The Anonymous IV text, with the incipit 'Conpains, vois tu ce que je voi?', is one version of the story that was fairly popular in England in the late thirteenth century. The verses found in the Psalter of Robert de Lisle are excerpts, translated into Anglo-Norman, of parts of the French Anonymous IV poem. For the Anonymous IV version, see Glixelli (1914), 9-10; Rotzler (1961), 37-38. For a translation, see Binski (1996), 136.

¹⁶ The unusual intermingling of three different languages on the page suggests a hierarchy of languages that associated them with different functions. The poem itself has been recorded in Anglo-Norman French, the language of the aristocracy and of courtly literature, with Latin labels introducing each verse. Middle English, associated with the spoken word and performance, records the initial unfettered sentiments of the living and dead, even as they ironically lose that status as they are inscribed on the page. See Richard Emmerson, 'Visualizing the Vernacular: Middle English in Early Fourteenth Century Bilingual and Trilingual Manuscript Illustrations', in Kathryn A. Smith (ed.), *Tributes to Lucy Freeman Sandler: Studies in Illuminated Manuscripts* (London: Harvey Miller, 2007), 187-204.

¹⁷ Glixelli (1914), 83-91; Fein (2002), 69-94.



Fig. 45. The Three Living and the Three Dead, miniature in the De Lisle Hours (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS G.50, fol 6v), c.1320-25. © The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

The abridged Anonymous IV text of the poem is similar to the Baudouin version in terms of how the interaction between living and dead is described, but it omits the prologue and jumps straight into the words uttered by the protagonists.¹⁸ The versions also differ in the nature of the message that the dead bear the living. While the Baudouin text found in the Arsenal manuscript describes the dead seeking prayers from the living, in the abridged Anonymous IV text the dead emphasise the importance of preparing the soul for death that is necessary to avoid suffering the torments of hell, suggesting that the dead already reside there and attempt to prevent the same fate from befalling the living.

The image at the top of fol. 127r of the De Lisle Psalter shows an arrangement of the Three Living and Three Dead in postures very similar to those found on fol. 311v of the Arsenal manuscript, with the exception of the living figure shown furthest to the left who seems to have turned his body to face the viewer and yet has his head cocked to one side as he eyes the dead warily. The living, who might be interpreted as kings or aristocrats, are distinguished by their robes of different colours and trims. Two of the three hold attributes: the first a hawk, which symbolises the hunt, and the last a sceptre. All wear crowns.¹⁹

The living and the dead both speak and the dead address their comments directly to the living, but the living do not answer them; they speak only amongst themselves. A metaphorical wall exists between the two groups that prevents them from interacting directly with each other, and this is visualised in the illumination by a frame that not only surrounds the composition as a whole but also divides the groups from each other. This has the added effect of giving the illumination the appearance of a devotional diptych, linking it to other representations of the story that existed in other English devotional manuscripts, such as in the book of hours that was made for Margaret de Beauchamp, the wife of Robert de Lisle, which will be discussed below (Fig. 45), as well as painted diptychs, such as that which we know was purchased in London by Count Amadeus

¹⁸ As is also the case with Anonymous III and V, the poems are so called due to a paucity of information about the original authors, audiences or contexts of production. For an analysis of the French poems, see Glixelli (1914).

¹⁹ The Latin rubrics that introduce each of the verses of the text describe the figures as kings, and yet the living seem to be dressed as fashionable young noblemen, with each wearing a crown and one holding a scepter. While it is possible that the figures were intended to be understood as kings, the labels may also refer to an earlier tradition of describing the kings that no longer corresponds to the figures as they were intended to be viewed in this manuscript commissioned by a nobleman.

of Savoy around 1303.²⁰ The monochrome foil set behind the living is in marked contrast to the green background studded with thistles – symbolising remembrance – against which the dead are depicted. This pictorial device further enhances the notion that the living and the dead are to be understood as existing in different spheres. Despite the division between the two groups emphasised by the framing elements in the image, the viewer senses that a rupture has occurred. Indeed, the tail of the hawk held by the first living breaks through the frame into the space of the dead. This seems to offer the dead the symbolic point of entry into the world of the living, for the living could not enter the world of the dead.

Robert de Lisle commissioned a book of hours for his wife Margaret de Beauchamp only a few short years after he commissioned his own psalter.²¹ The De Lisle Hours contains a prefatory cycle of images that includes a fragmentary representation of the Three Living and the Three Dead, which is preceded by a depiction of St Christopher and followed by a representation of St Nicholas. That each of the De Lisle manuscripts contains representations of the Three Living and the Three Dead reflects a strong interest in the story on the part of the couple, although they were produced by different artists, as a stylistic analysis of the images reveals. The incomplete representation of the Three Living and the Three Dead appearing on fol. 6v of the De Lisle Hours (Pl. 4) is set against a diapered foil and is punctuated in the four corners of the frame by heraldic shields of several ruling houses.²² The lost facing folio would presumably have shown the Three Dead enframed in a similar way.²³ That the scene of the Three Living and the Three Dead appears independent of poetic text shows that the image was likely intended to stand alone; it is also an early

²⁰ Binski (1996), 135.

²¹ New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS G.50, c.1320-25. See John Plummer, *The Glazier Collection of Illuminated Manuscripts* (New York: Morgan Library, 1968), 29-30, no. 37; Lucy Freeman Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts 1285-1385. A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles*, vol. 2, Catalogue (New York: Harvey Miller, 1986), 83-84; Kathryn A. Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion in Fourteenth Century England: Three Women and their Books of Hours* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), esp. 152-58 and 297-301.

²² The heraldic shields likely served a commemorative function in this context, encouraging the viewer to be mindful of praying for members of the families represented on the page by means of their heraldry. See Michael Michael, 'The Privilege of "Proximity": Towards a Re-definition of the Function of Armorial,' *Journal of Medieval History* 23:1 (1997), 55-74.

²³ A stub for a missing leaf appears next to fol. 6v on which the Three Living are depicted, showing that there was once a facing page which most likely presented a representation of the Three Dead. See Sandler (1986), 83.

indication of how the Three Living and the Three Dead would come to serve a devotional function rather than a strictly moralising one in books of hours in later years. In the context of this prayerbook, the image would have encouraged Margaret to contemplate her own mortality and to pray for loved ones, both living and deceased. The now-missing image of the dead might have been intended to stand for deceased loved ones for whom Margaret should pray.²⁴ The firm division existing between living and dead enforced by the organisation of the image across the gutter of the manuscript suggests a perpetuation of the approach to illustration found in Robert's manuscript, in which the dead are understood to reside in Hell, according to the Anonymous IV version of the text. And yet, as a devotional image in a book of hours, it might have been used by Margaret as she prayed for the souls of the deceased residing in Purgatory. It may be that the representation of the story in this manuscript could reflect aspects of more than one textual tradition due to the absence of a particular accompanying text that would otherwise have restricted the artist's choices with respect to how to illustrate the story.

The violent dead

Thus far, this paper has explored several illustrations of a well-known tale that appeared in different textual contexts. The courtly compendium produced for Marie de Brabant included an illustrated text of the Three Living and the Three Dead, while the psalter made for Robert de Lisle included a shortened version of a different version of the same story, also accompanied by an illustration. Finally, an illustration of the story, independent of the poetic text, was included in a prefatory cycle of images in a book of hours intended for daily prayer and the remembrance of the dead. Illustrated poems of the tale did continue to appear in England and on the Continent as accessory texts in prayerbooks such as the mid-fourteenth-century Psalter of Bonne de Luxembourg²⁵ and the late-fourteenth-century Petites Heures of Jean de Berry.²⁶ However, by the

²⁴ Ashby Kinch, 'Image, Ideology and Form: the Middle English Three Dead Kings in its iconographic context', *Chaucer Review*, 43:1 (2008), 48-81, esp. 70.

²⁵ New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art-The Cloisters, MS 69.86. The illustration is found on fols 321v-322r, while the text begins on fol. 321v and continues over the succeeding folios. This manuscript is dated to before 1349. See Florens Deuchler, 'Looking at Bonne of Luxembourg's Prayerbook', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* (February 1971), 267-78.

²⁶ Paris, BnF, ms. lat. 18014, fol. 282r. François Avril has argued that the Petites Heures was commissioned by Jean de Berry in the early 1370s and was completed

early fifteenth century the imagery of the story was consistently appearing independent of the text of the story and accompanying instead prayers for the dead in books of hours. Along with the changing context came a change in the character of the pictorial tradition, as the nature of the interaction between living and dead had undergone a decided transformation. By the mid fifteenth century, the appearance of Death as a personification appeared more ominous and insidious, and the interaction between living and dead started to appear more sinister.

The encounter depicted in the Hours of Anne de Beaujeu, attributed to the Master of the Munich Boccaccio and dated to c.1470 (Paris, BnF, nouv. acq. ms. lat. 3187, fol. 139v), represents a departure in the tradition of illustrating the story (Fig. 46).²⁷ Not only are the living and the dead depicted inhabiting the same physical space, but the interaction has become more ominous. The scene is set in a clearing just outside a city wall and on the edge of a wood. Three walking and sneering corpses enter the picture plane from beyond the left border of the framed image. They move forward toward the young riders who are returning to the city after their hunting trip, which had presumably taken place in the woods depicted to the right. In response to the appearance of the dead, the first horseman raises his right hand as if in acknowledgement, while the other two riders seem to respond more dramatically. The second rider has completely turned his horse around, while the third rider has thrown both his hands up in surprise and his horse has reared.

in the late 1380s, contesting earlier views that the manuscript was commissioned by Charles V and only later completed for Jean de Berry. Avril's analysis of the illuminations has identified Jean le Noir, Jacquemart de Hesdin and the Pseudo-Jacquemart as the artists responsible for the illuminations in the manuscript. See François Avril, 'Beschreibung der Miniaturen', in François Avril *et al.* (eds), *Les Petites Heures du Duc de Berry. Kommentar zu MS lat. 18014 der Bibliothèque nationale*, Paris (Luzern: Faksimile Verlag, 1989), 225-387, esp. 381-83. The Baudouin version of story of the Three Living and the Three Dead was illuminated in the Petites Heures by the Pseudo-Jacquemart in the late 1380s, while the same text in his mother Bonne's Psalter was illuminated by Jean de Noir. The similarities in textual and pictorial inclusions that exist between the two manuscripts must have at least in part to do with familial tradition, allowing devotional practices to be passed from one generation to the next. See Margaret Manion, 'Art and Devotion: The Prayerbooks of Jean de Berry', in Margaret M. Manion and Bernard J. Muir (eds), *Medieval Texts and Images: Studies of Manuscripts from the Middle Ages* (Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991), 177-200.

²⁷ François Avril (ed.), *Jean Fouquet. Peintre et enlumineur du XVe siècle* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2003), 328-33.

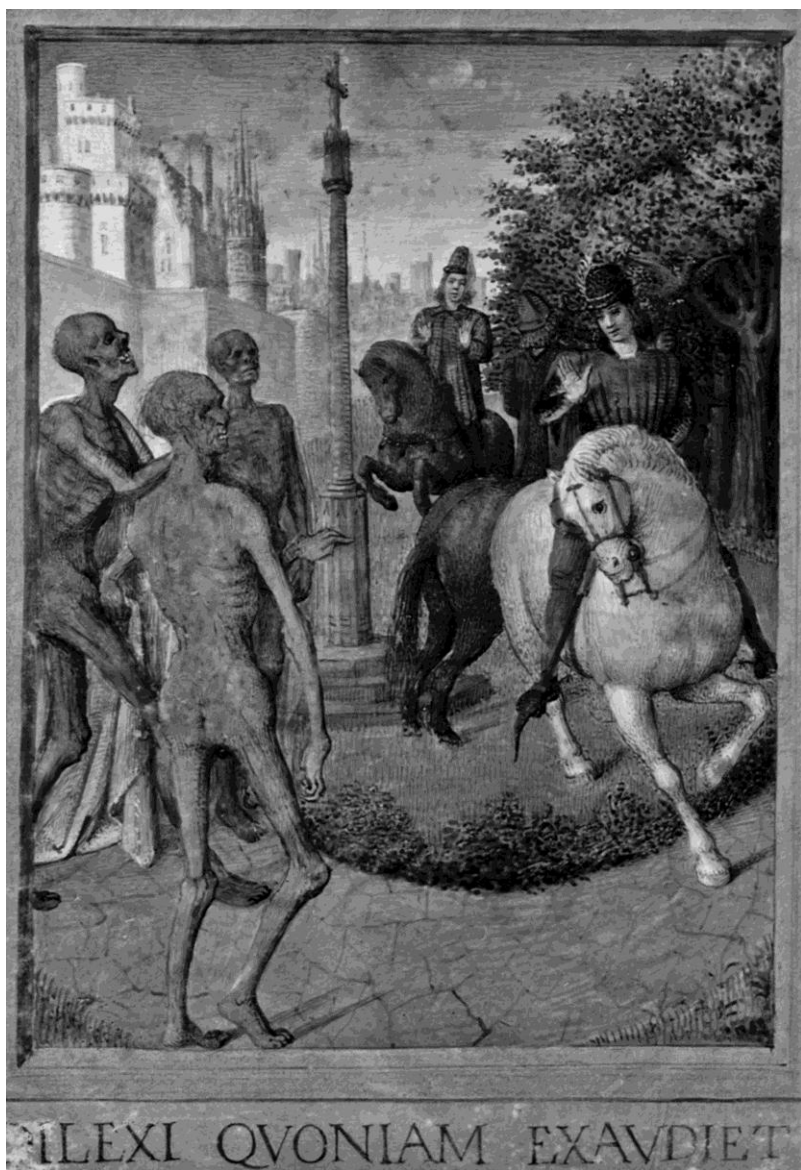


Fig. 46. Master of the Munich Boccaccio, *The Three Living and the Three Dead*, miniature in the *Hours of Anne de Beaujeu* (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAL 3187, fol. 139v), c.1470. © Bibliothèque nationale de France.



Fig. 47a. The Ghent Associates, The Three Living and the Three Dead, miniature in the Berlin Hours of Mary of Burgundy and Maximilian I (Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett-SMPK, 78 B 12, fol. 220v), c.1480. Photo: Joerg P. Anders. © Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.



Fig. 47b. The Ghent Associates, Corpse with a spear and a coffin, miniature in the Berlin Hours of Mary of Burgundy and Maximilian I (Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett-SMPK, 78 B 12, fol. 221r), c.1480. Photo: Joerg P. Anders. © Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.

The young men on horseback appear to be of similar age and social standing, and each of the three is beautifully dressed. There are slight differences in their attire, including the distinctive hats that they wear, but the different colours of the horses are probably the most striking feature distinguishing the young men from each other. The dead also seem to be depicted rather uniformly and all appear to be in the same state of decay, but the employment of the shroud in different ways distinguishes the dead.

Just behind the curving footpath on which each of the dead and the first of the living have stepped is a monumental cross that serves several functions in this image. It creates a visual boundary between the living and the dead who encroach upon them, and yet it does not physically separate the two groups, as the hand of the first dead and the hind legs of the horse that has been turned around by his master pass in front of the cross. The shadows cast by the bodies of the dead on the ground express in pictorial terms their physicality and suggest their real presence in the world of the living. This seems to give visual form to popular beliefs in ghosts and the idea that the dead could be caught between worlds.

Why might such a dramatic transformation have occurred in the nature of the relationship depicted between living and dead? In order to answer this question, the function that such an image served in its new context must be addressed, necessitating an examination of the text that the images accompanied. The Office of the Dead first emerged in the ninth century in a Benedictine context as a central text of the Divine Office.²⁸ The Office was made up of prayers to be said at the three canonical hours of Vespers, Matins and Lauds in the evening and morning before the performance of the Requiem mass over the body of the deceased, after which would follow the funeral service. In later centuries, the prayers of the Office of the Dead were introduced into lay devotional manuals, most notably the book of hours. As the Office found its way into a book intended for lay devotional use, its function changed slightly. While it was still prayed the night and morning preceding a funeral, it was also recommended that the Office of the Dead be said regularly, on a daily basis if possible, for the preparation of the reader's soul for death, but also for the sake of deceased loved ones. The establishment of the Doctrine of Purgatory at the Second Council of Lyons in 1274 asserted that the prayers of the living could assist the dead, and this doctrine was reasserted at the Council of Florence

²⁸ See Edmund Bishop, 'On the Origins of the Prymer', in Edmund Bishop, *Liturgica Historica: Papers on the Liturgy and Religious Life of the Western Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1918, repr. 1962), 211-37.

in 1439-45.²⁹ This granted the laity agency in assisting their deceased loved ones and encouraged them to say their prayers, and especially those of the Office of the Dead, more frequently.

From the late thirteenth century, the first hour of the Office was usually accompanied by depictions of real-life moments that preceded and followed the death of an individual.³⁰ Quite typical selections were images of the recitation of the Office of the Dead, the performance of the Requiem Mass, and the burial in the graveyard. There were other categories of images as well, such as depictions of certain biblical figures including Job, appropriate since the Book of Job provided many of the passages of text that formed the prayers of the Office of the Dead. Job was also a model of faith, hope and patience, important virtues in the preparation for death and qualities that were promoted in the *Ars Moriendi*.³¹ The figure of Lazarus, whose resurrection by Christ prefigured the resurrection of all at the end of time, was also a common inclusion (Pl. 8). Arguably most striking were the allegorical images of death, including Death personified and the Three Living and the Three Dead. An embodiment of the idea of death, which paradoxically gives tangibility to the ephemeral, emphasised the ever-present threat of death's advent. Such images were visually persuasive and would have encouraged a more ardent contemplation of the prayers accompanying them. This was especially true when the images were personalised with heraldry, insignia or portraiture. While we have seen an example of the use of coats of arms in the four corners of the frame surrounding the representation of the Three Living and the Three Dead in the De Lisle Hours, in later representations the personalisation of the image became much more emphatic and arguably even more effective.

With the function of the Office of the Dead in mind, let us turn to look at another illustration of the Three Living and the Three Dead that accompanied that text in a book of hours made for a young duchess. The representation of the tale found in the Berlin Hours of Mary of Burgundy and Maximilian I is one of the most dynamic and striking of all (Fig. 47a).³² The scene is set in a naturalistically rendered landscape, situated in

²⁹ Jacques LeGoff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 237.

³⁰ Wieck (2001), 124-36.

³¹ Wieck (2001), 132. For the *Ars Moriendi* tradition, see Hiram Kümper, *Tod und Sterben: lateinische und deutsche Sterbeliteratur des Spätmittelalters* (Duisburg: Wiku Verlag, 2007).

³² The identification of the illuminator of this image has been the subject of much debate. In the early scholarship on this manuscript, the illuminator of the image of the Three Living and the Three Dead was believed to be the same as that of the

the Low Countries. The presence of ravens and the dark clouds overhead create a foreboding atmosphere. The only woman in the group, riding her horse at the centre of the image, has been identified as the original owner of the manuscript, Mary of Burgundy, duchess of Burgundy and wife of the future Habsburg emperor Maximilian I.

A young woman dressed in a very similar fashion appears on fol. 355r of the same manuscript, accompanying a suffrage incipit reading ‘Angele qui meus es custos’ (*Oh angel, who is my guardian*).³³ This woman, who kneels at a *prie-dieu* with a visualisation of an angel before her, must be the same as the female rider depicted earlier in the same manuscript. The repeated appearance of the initial M on the harness of the horse on fol. 220v suggests that the female rider should indeed be identified as Mary of Burgundy. Of the three living protagonists, the two male riders have turned away from the road and seem intent on riding into the woods to escape the menacing corpses. One of the men, who might be identified as Mary’s husband Maximilian, beckons her to follow him.³⁴ She takes no notice, however. She has turned her head and seems to direct her gaze in the direction of the spear-wielding corpse chasing after her.³⁵

Otto Pächt in his discussion of the image from the Berlin Hours suggested that the picture of Mary of Burgundy chased down by a corpse was probably painted after her untimely death in 1482 following a riding accident. Pächt argued that the image was most likely commemorative

famous window pages of the Vienna Hours of Mary of Burgundy. See Friedrich Winkler, *Die flämische Buchmalerei des XV. und XVI. Jahrhunderts. Künstler und Werke von den Brüdern van Eyck bis zu Simon Bening* (Leipzig: E.A. Seemann, 1925, repr. Amsterdam: B.M. Israël, 1978), 103-05. More recently, Bodo Brinkmann assigned the artist with the title the Master of the Berlin Hours of Mary of Burgundy, to distinguish the painter from the better-known Master of Mary of Burgundy. See Eberhard König, Fedja Anzelewsky, Bodo Brinkmann, and Frauke Steenbock, *Das Berliner Stundenbuch der Maria von Burgund und Kaiser Maximilians*, exhibition catalogue (Berlin: Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz, 1998), esp. 147-53. Anne van Buren has attributed the image of the Three Living and Three Dead to the Ghent Associates, an attribution that I maintain here. See Anne Van Buren, ‘The Master of Mary of Burgundy and his Colleagues: the State of Research and Questions of Method’, *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 38 (1975), 286-308.

³³ For this image, see König *et al.* (1998), 108-09.

³⁴ König *et al.* (1998), 36.

³⁵ It is interesting that by the late fifteenth century representations of the Three Living and the Three Dead often showed the dead sporting spears and arrows, which had apparently become their attributes, reinforcing their dangerous and horrifying nature.

since the subject was rare in Flemish illumination; that representations of the story did not include female participants; and, of course, that she had died while horse-riding.³⁶ However, an examination of an image from another Flemish manuscript of comparable date undermines Pächt's assertion that the image of the encounter of the Three Living and the Three Dead in Mary's manuscript must be interpreted as a commemorative image. Attributed to the Master of the Dresden Prayerbook, the representation of the story found in this other book of hours in Berlin (MS 78 B 14) presents a group of riders, including three men and one woman, who are stalked by three dead (Fig. 48).³⁷ The young people respond in different ways; while one turns away and tries to flee, another has stopped and has placed his hands over his face in a gesture of terror. This image successfully conveys the notion that death is inescapable and inevitable, and the only recourse is to be ever ready for death through prayer, symbolised by the cross that stands in the lower right corner of the picture field and to which the young man and woman on horseback have turned.

Anne van Buren followed Pächt in suggesting that the image of the Three Living and the Three Dead in the Berlin Hours of Mary of Burgundy and Maximilian I was most likely executed after Mary's death, due to a greater degree of personalisation on the folio displaying the Three Living and the Three Dead than elsewhere in the manuscript.³⁸ Insignia, mottos and heraldic imagery were often employed in devotional images including portraits of donors, however, even if this was more common in France than in the Netherlands.³⁹ The decision to include the duchess's initials within the composition of the image could also alternately be read as a reflection of the desire to personalise the image and to heighten its power as a devotional tool.

Eberhard König interpreted the representation of Mary of Burgundy as fearless in the face of death and that her participation in the action strengthened the image's status as both a *memento mori* and a devotional image.⁴⁰ The duchess was an avid rider, in fact, and was depicted on

³⁶ Otto Pächt, *The Master of Mary of Burgundy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 50.

³⁷ The Master of the Dresden Prayerbook, 'The Three Living and the Three Dead', from a Flemish Book of Hours, Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett-SMPK, 78 B 14, fol. 277v, c.1480. See Bodo Brinkmann, *Die Flämische Buchmalerei am Ende des Burgunderreichs. Der Meister des Dresdener Gebetbuchs und die Miniaturisten seiner Zeit* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 301-05, 383.

³⁸ Van Buren (1975), 308.

³⁹ König *et al.* (1998), 31.

⁴⁰ König *et al.* (1998), 36.

horseback for hunting or hawking on a number of occasions during her lifetime.⁴¹ I contend that the representation of Mary was integrated into the composition as one of the aristocratic riders in order to personalise her devotion and make the image a stronger *memento mori* for her own use.



Fig. 48. The Master of the Dresden Prayerbook, The Three Living and the Three Dead, miniature in a Flemish book of hours (Berlin, KK-SMPK, 78 B 14, fol. 277v), c.1480. © Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.

⁴¹ An example of an image of the duchess as a hawker may be found in a manuscript copy of the *Chronijke van Vlaenderen*. 'Mary of Burgundy as a Hawker', Bruges, Openbare Bibliotheek, MS 437, fol. 372v, c.1481. See Eberhard Freiherr Schenk zu Schweinsberg, *Die Illustrationen der Chronik von Flandern – Handschrift Nr. 437 – der Stadtbibliothek zu Brügge und ihr Verhältnis zu Hans Memling* (Strasbourg: Verlag von J.H.Ed. Heitz, 1922), 19.

The power of the image would have been enhanced by its juxtaposition with the miniature on the opposite recto, however (Fig. 47b). The full-length corpse depicted on fol. 221r of the Berlin Hours of Mary of Burgundy and Maximilian I is shown draped with a shroud, holding a coffin in its left hand and a dart in its right, apparently preparing to strike. The figure seems to be moving forward, in the direction of the scene of the Three Living and the Three Dead represented on the verso, and yet it has turned its gaze out to the viewer that was originally Mary of Burgundy herself. Unlike the naturalistic Netherlandish landscape depicted as the backdrop for the image on the verso, the corpse rendered on the recto is set against a monochrome foil. The orange background is evocative of the purgatorial fires in which the souls of the deceased languished while the living laboured through their prayers to gain respite for them. The corpse shown here is unlikely to represent a soul, which is normally given the form of a small naked figure, but seems rather to reflect the idea of death coming for the individual who is unprepared, thus necessitating a stay in Purgatory. This image encapsulates the need to prepare for death as well as the importance of remembering and praying for those who have passed on.

What sets the representation of the Three Living and the Three Dead in this manuscript apart is how it works together with the image of the animated corpse on the facing recto.⁴² The representation of Mary of Burgundy in the image of the Three Living and the Three Dead depicts the duchess about to encounter her own death. Unlike the corpse that the painted Mary encountered on the page, the corpse on the recto looked out from the confines of the picture plane to confront the viewer, Mary of Burgundy, in the flesh. The interchange between the depiction of Mary of Burgundy and the corpse chasing after her on the verso paralleled the encounter that the flesh-and-blood duchess was intended to experience with the corpse depicted on the recto. As she prayed the Office of the

⁴² A codicological analysis of the Berlin Hours has shown that fol. 220v is on a single leaf that has been tipped into the manuscript. See König *et al.* (1998), 167-72, esp. 170. It is therefore possible that the bifolio on which the image of the Three Living and the Three Dead was painted was altered in some way before the page was sewn into the manuscript, or that it was a later addition to the book. There is no reason to believe that the image was not conceived of as part of the original program, however. An examination of the manuscript's programme of illustrations shows that major textual divisions of the manuscript were all introduced with two facing illuminations, and thus the pairing of the images on fols 220v and 221r fits in nicely with the layout of the manuscript in its entirety. König *et al.* (1998), 31.

Dead and contemplated that very complex pictorial composition, she would be encouraged to experience a spiritual vision of death in her mind, intensifying her devotional experience and encouraging her to prepare herself as fully as possible for death and the life after death.

Conclusion

Between the late thirteenth and late fifteenth centuries, the imagery of the story of the Three Living and the Three Dead underwent a striking transformation. From initially accompanying the text of the story and depicting a dialogue between two parties, one living and one dead, the tradition of illustration took a turn. The imagery, now divorced from its original textual context, regularly began to accompany the prayers for the Office of the Dead in books of hours, and in this new context the imagery displayed a more sinister, aggressive temper. The dead started to be shown creeping up upon, or even openly attacking, the living.

While popular beliefs in revenants and the heightened fear of death brought about by the experience of famine and plague might all have played some part in this development, it seems probable that a systematic shift was at play. It would appear that in the context of prayers that were said for the good of the soul of the reader as well as for those of the deceased, an accompanying image was more successful the more striking and persuasive it was. A representation of an attack on the living by the dead was likely to move the reader-viewer to recognise the urgency of fervent prayer and preparation for death more effectively than a representation of simple dialogue.

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