

### Assignment feedback

*Student Name:* Rosie Nye

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*Module code:* HPHI6002

*Student ID  
number:*  
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*Educational  
support needs:*

Yes

*Module title:* Death, Dying and the Macabre in  
the Late Middle Ages

*Assignment title:* Death, Dying and the Macabre – Portfolio 3: Full view and close up  
of the tomb of John FitzAlan, the 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Arundel (d.1435) in the FitzAlan Chapel,  
West Sussex

*Assignment due date:* 1/12/17

*Assignment Number:* 3

*(i.e. 1,2,3)*

*Marker's signature:*

*Date:*

*Provisional.*

**NB.** All marks are provisional until confirmed by the final examination board.

## **SELF-REFLECTION SHEET.**

### **PLEASE COMPLETE BEFORE SUBMISSION AND ATTACH TO YOUR WORK**

Date: 13/11/2017

Module: HPHI6002

Name: Rosie Nye

**Guidance:** You might consider the following elements:

- Argument: does it have one/ is it backed by sufficient evidence/ how lucid is it?
- Structure: how clear is it / is my essay easy to follow/ does it help my argument?
- Analysis: is more/less analytical than narrative/ does it address the question?
- Reading: was this sufficiently broad/ have I referenced properly?
- How might I improve my performance in future?

#### Strengths

Examined sources and compared both modern and contemporary in the commentary

Look at the reasons behind the use of a transi tomb

Examined and analysed possible ideas behind medieval attitudes towards death by examining both transi and cadaver tombs

#### Weaknesses:

I struggled to find relevant sources on transi tombs and about the history of John FitzAlan which may have impacted my work.

#### General Comments:

There were interesting views which I could have explored further if I had enough words. It would have been easier to write if I was able to find information about John FitzAlan himself.

***Please give a mark for your work: 2/2***

(for eg: 1<sup>st</sup> = 70+: 2/1 = 69-60: 2/2 = 59-50: 3<sup>rd</sup> = 45-49: pass = 40-44: fail = 39- )

Death, Dying and the Macabre – Portfolio 3

Full view and close up of the tomb of John FitzAlan, the 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Arundel (d.1435) in the FitzAlan Chapel, West Sussex



Most medieval pictorializations of human mortality imaged Death in an earthly environment (Green 2016: 251). Medieval tombs stood for the dead and marked their resting place while presenting the dead with a voice through the more macabre imagery (Binski 2001: 71). Medieval tombs are not just considered memorials but are materializations of their medieval beliefs about the relationship between the living and the dead; the mutual obligation between them (Binski 2001: 71). Chief within the regalia of the Medieval macabre style is that of transi tombs. This commentary will be examining the transi tomb of John FitzAlan, the 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Arundel who died in 1435.

Huizinga (1924) states that during the Later Middle Ages, religious thought had a marked tendency to embody itself in images, symbolism and allegory. One clear example of this is the transi tomb. The fashion for transi tombs is often seen as one aspect of the vogue for the macabre (Badham 1996: 454). It is a striking manifestation of physical decay; displaying the deceased in the guise of a decomposing corpse juxtaposing the image of the living with an image of the dead (Park 1995: 123). The cadavers are usually interpreted simply as representations of the dead (Badham 1996: 456). According to Badham, through the use of a transi tomb, the individual commemorated was seen to be purposely rejecting the over-emphasis on worldly stasis in preference for an attractively humble and pious attitude (1996: 459).

The transi tomb of John FitzAlan is one example of a transi tomb which does not necessarily reflect the majority of modern academic views on the transi tomb. Cohen (1973) notes that the lower body is not a mere "corpse" but instead is an explication of a spiritually meaningful interaction between the body and the physical world. However, there could be a much simpler explanation behind the tomb of John FitzAlan. It must be recognized that the 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Arundel died in battle with the French and the body was not returned until nearly 20 years after his death (Sawday 2008). According to Aries (1981), the macabre image represents the deceased and therefore allows the deceased to exist through the tomb. In addition, Park (1995) states that the use of the cadaver in FitzAlan's transi tomb, specifically displaying the crucial liminal period of decomposition when the corpse was the most sensitive and vital, was to show that the deceased individual was still in the corpse. It is therefore a portrait and an immediate image of the deceased. Therefore, the use of the transi tomb as a monument to John FitzAlan and the role of the cadaver sculpture could have been simply to replace the missing body.

The tradition of the transi tombs to render the physical body in a dual manner, the body as a person and the body as a human template of flesh and bone (Barlian 2005: 195) suggests that the transi tomb of John FitzAlan has a more complicated genesis than the above. The main consensus of modern academics surrounding the concept of transi tombs is that they are forcing individuals to confront their own existence and the inevitability of death (Prats, Alfonso 2007: 117). The tomb of FitzAlan, most likely viewed by the family and a small portion of the public, would have been a constant reminder of the idea that death affects everyone (Sawday 2008: 528). This is further emphasized due to the representation of the deceased as a nude corpse in a stage of decomposition (Prats, Alfonso 2007: 112). Park (1995) also argues that the function of a transi tomb was to show the deceased as dead; underscored by the cadaver's nakedness. Therefore, through the funerary monument of the transi tomb, FitzAlan is proven to be dead regardless of the lack of his remains.

FitzAlan's transi tomb also reflects the Medieval notion of a "good death". Although not outwardly displaying the idea of a "good death" through the very apparent decaying corpse, Badham (1996) states that in choosing to be depicted as a cadaver within the transi tomb, the individual commemorated was purposely rejecting the over-emphasis on worldly status in favor of an attractively humble and pious attitude. This can also be seen in the cadaver tomb of Presbyter Bruno from 1194, the earliest evidence of any cadaver or transi tomb (Fig. 1). The repeated symbolism of the cadaver in both tombs again reflects the notion of a "good death" (Aries 1981: 114). Barlian (2005: 195) further supports this view of the significance of John FitzAlan's tomb by stating that the body of the person in the tomb is an allegory whilst being material through and through.



Fig 1. Tomb of Presbyter Bruno 1194, Hildesheim Cathedral, Germany. In Badham 1996: 457.

The use of a transi tomb to commemorate John FitzAlan allows modern academics to gain an understanding of how Medieval ideas of death and the macabre influenced how funery monuments were presented. The idea "double-decker" monuments and their many varieties, from relatively fresh corpse in their shrouds to near skeletal remains (Oosterwijk 2004: 64), references the idea of a "good death" through the decomposing corpse. It is forcing individuals to face the inevitability of death whilst also possibly replacing the lack of physical body with an image of both the individual at the point of death and during the decaying processes (Nuttall 2016: 50). FitzAlan's transi tomb also reflects the fashion for funeral

monuments during the Medieval period and therefore allows academics to understand the significance of such monuments.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

*The tomb of John FitzAlan, the 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Arundel* (d.1435) in the FitzAlan Chapel, West Sussex. As provided in the portfolio source document.

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