THE DANCE OF DEATH AND THE CANTERBURY TALES:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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This paper is a discussion of parallels between Lydgate's *Dance of Death* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The first chapter summarizes facts and theories concerning the origin and development of the death-dance and draws the conclusion that the motif was fully developed before Chaucer's time.

Chapter II compares the structures of the two works. The outstanding element in common is the pilgrimage, but within this structural framework the authors go beyond conventional portraiture to illuminate individual characters.

Another element in common is character types who represent a cross-section of medieval society and exemplify the seven deadly sins.

In the third chapter, *The Canterbury Tales* and the *Dance of Death* are compared thematically, and parallels are drawn between their treatments of the theme of death. Largely due to the effects of the Black Plague on the Middle Ages, the predominant element in both works is the emphasis on the suddenness of death and the consequent fear of dying unshriven. The idea of death as retribution for sin does not play a dominant role. *The Dance of Death* and *The Canterbury Tales* do, however, examine the sins of the characters and stress
the finality of Death, thereby placing final importance on man's condition at death and on his resultant fate. Both works emphasize the value of spiritual life by portraying characters who are suffering spiritual death.

Chapter IV deals with the differences between Lydgate's English translation of the Danse Macabre and the original French version. Parallels are drawn between those characters whom Lydgate added and similar characters in The Canterbury Tales. Lydgate retained much of the satiric tone of his original, the same gently mocking tone which largely pervades The Canterbury Tales. All three works—the Danse Macabre, Lydgate's loose translation of it, and The Canterbury Tales—attempt to show that this world is only a fleeting journey toward death, and, although they closely observe sin, they are tempered with the belief in a heavenly paradise.
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CHAPTER I

The Dance of Death in

France and England

At no time has there been so much emphasis on death as during the late Middle Ages when both the frequent occurrences of plague and the accumulative effect of Christian teaching made men aware of impending doom. The ancients viewed Death as simply a necessary, not particularly unpleasant part of life, the sombre brother of Sleep. ¹ Christianity, on the other hand, taught that death was man's punishment for sin: "For the wages of sin is death . . ." (Romans 6:23). The teachings of the Church do not, however, entirely account for the widespread preoccupation with the theme of death in the Middle Ages. The plague "must have especially affected the imagination and art-expression of those years." ² The repeated visitations of the Black Death to Western Europe and England between 1342 and 1450 reduced the population by as much as one third. ³ By the end of the fourteenth century, the theme of


death had become a common motif in popular literature,\textsuperscript{4} and its tone had altered perceptibly; the horror of death was suddenly revealed. Death, which had been portrayed primarily in relation to the afterlife and man's salvation, now "took a spectral and fantastic shape—the death-dance,"\textsuperscript{5} or Danse Macabre.

The depiction of social classes from the Pope down to the common laborer gave the dance much of the power which made it so popular.\textsuperscript{6} Death was portrayed as the social leveler, before whom all men were equal. Typically the participants in the death-dance were approached by Death and, after replying, were led away on his dance, regardless of their social positions. Thus, the bourgeois spectator or reader could share with Death the satisfaction of making the rich and powerful as helpless as the laborer.\textsuperscript{7}

The Danse Macabre, or Dance of Death, refers to an actual dance, a mural painting, or written verses. It is difficult to trace with complete certainty the sources and development of the dance and to determine the exact point at which it appeared in a fully developed literary form. Similarly,


\textsuperscript{5}Ibid., p. 129.


\textsuperscript{7}English Verse, p. 136.
confusion has arisen concerning the dating and authorship of the Danse Macabre, partly due to varying interpretations of the word macabre. The most widely accepted theory is that Macabre is the name of the author of the original text; John Lydgate called his version The Daunce of Machabree. The first known reference to the word appeared in Jean Le Fevre's 1376 edition, Le Respît de la Môrt, in the line, "Je fis de Macabre la danse."\(^8\) This line has been interpreted to mean that Le Fevre was the original author of the Danse Macabre. Since he spent most of his time translating, it is more likely that he translated Latin verses into the French, if he had any connection with the writing of the danse.\(^9\) Although the line can be translated, "I made of death the dance," the French does not make it clear how the verb "fis" should be translated, and the line could also have the meaning, "I took from Macabre the dance." This interpretation lends support to the theory that Macabre is the name of the author, and the capitalization of the word is further evidence for this point of view. Lydgate introduces "Machabree" as the character who is master of the dance. The word has also been thought to be the name of the first painter, but this is improbable since titles of paintings in the fifteenth century did not include the name of the

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\(^9\)Warren, pp. xvi-xvii.
artist. One suggestion is that *macabre* is a plural (maqabir) for the Arabic word meaning "burial-place" or "tomb" (maqbara); a more "plausible" etymological source, according to Gaston Paris, is the Macchabeus of the Bible. Further discoveries need to be made before the dating and authorship of the *Danse Macabre* can be determined with any certainty. It is apparent, nevertheless, that the *Danse Macabre* existed before Le Fevre's 1376 edition.

Most scholars agree that the earliest form of the motif is the dance, for which there are two main theories of origin. The least probable one is held by James Clark, who theorized that the death-dance motif in dance form may be derived from folklore superstitions concerning the dead rising from their graves and dancing in churchyards or the dance performed by fairies leading mortals to death. There is, however, no concrete evidence to support Clark's theory. The theory more generally accepted is that the death-dance is of ecclesiastic origin. Dancing in churches and churchyards took place very

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early, with disapproval frequently expressed by the Church. In the ninth century a Roman Council under Pope Eugenius commented on the practice: "Ut sacerdotes admoenent viros ac mulieres, qui festis diebus as ecclesiam occurrunt, ne ballando et turpia verba decantando choros teneant, ac ducent, similitudinem paganorum peragendo." Chambers cites similar prohibitions by the following councils: Auxerre (573-603); Chalons (639-54); Rome (826); Toledo (589); Avignon (1209); Bayeaux (1300). The prohibitions were generally ignored, and people continued dancing in the churchyards until they were, apparently, punished by God himself. The Nuremberg Chronicle tells the story of eighteen men and ten women who, ignoring the admonitions of a priest to stop their dancing and caroling in the churchyard because it was disturbing the Christmas Eve mass, were punished by being unable to stop dancing for one year. At the end of the year, they obtained forgiveness, slept for three days and nights, and died soon afterwards. This story of St. Vitus' Dance is, with slight variations, also found in the Manuel des Peches of the twelfth century and in Robert Mannyng's Handleyn Synne, a free translation of Manuel des Peches done about 1300. Unable to suppress the songs and dances, the clergy may have contrived

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16 Douce, pp. 6-8.
the Dance of Death as a more decorous and religious substitute for lewd dances such as St. Vitus' Dance. The Dance of Death at that time was probably of a processional nature. In many churches in France, the ecclesiastics performed a mime in which they appeared as personifications of all ranks of life and danced together, after which they disappeared one by one.\textsuperscript{17}

From the actual dance, whatever its source, evolved dramatizations, verses, and painted murals. In the early dramatizations, only men appeared, and the figure of Death was a decomposing corpse representing the state of man after death.\textsuperscript{18} Later the Dance of Death was performed by both men and women, and Death was a skeleton symbolizing death in the abstract.\textsuperscript{19} In 1449, the Duke of Burgundy had such a Dance of Death masque performed in his mansion at Bruges.\textsuperscript{20}

The Dance of Death theme is expressed in several medieval morality plays, but more distinctly in \textit{Pride of Life}, the oldest extant morality play fragment, and \textit{Everyman}. In \textit{Pride of Life} the King of Life challenges Death, who is victorious in the combat. Here the King of Life is very much like the king in other literary versions of the dance; he is powerless in the

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., pp. 13-14.
\textsuperscript{18}Warren, p. x.
\textsuperscript{20}Huizinga, p. 130.
face of all-conquering Death. In *Everyman*, as in *Pride of Life*, the Dance of Death theme is universalized. Using these plays as examples, Hardin Craig considers the Dance of Death a possible source for the morality play because it has the elements of drama—"dialogue, impersonation and action of a sort." According to Craig, "the theory of the origin of the morality play that carries greatest conviction would regard it as a dramatic treatment of the Dance of Death." Craig suggests that both plays are much older than the accepted dates of the fifteenth century for *Pride of Life* and sixteenth century for *Everyman*. If this is true, the Dance of Death reached its later stages much earlier than is usually supposed.

It is not known whether the poetic or pictorial form of the motif came first. Modern research tends to indicate that the verses inspired the paintings, but there is no positive proof. The problems of dating and origin are as difficult for these forms as for the dance. For the verses, both Latin and French sources are mentioned. Two links in the development of the Dance of Death are the Latin poems "Vado mori" and "Lamentacio." Eleanor Hammond suggests the "Vado mori" as the

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24 Warren, p. ix.
first link in the obscure history of the Dance of Death because it not only presents an ordered list of classes of society but also presents them as they are summoned by death. 25 Representatives of all ranks of society from Pope to pauper utter appropriate couplets, typical of which are the lines of the King:

Vado mori, rex sum: quid honor, quid gloria regum?

Est via mors hominis regia. Vado mori. 26

This poem was perhaps acted out, with an ecclesiastic intoning the verses from his pulpit while the appropriate personage passed before him, led by Death. 27

In such dramatic medieval sermons, G. R. Owst sees the origins of the Danse Macabre. From medieval source-books for sermons such as the favorite Meditations or Sayings of St. Bernard, sometimes called Tractatus de Interiori Homine, Owst says, preachers "derived their conception of Death as a skulking, ghostly tyrant, who flits through all lands from place to place, sparing none, be he rich or poor, high or low, king or emperor, pope or prelate, religious or secular, a dread visitor whose coming is sudden, privy, and unannounced." 28

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27 Ibid., p. 53.

The "Lamentacio et deploracio pro morte et consilium de viuere dec." composed in the twelfth century, is a second link in the development of the danse. In this poem, nineteen characters (seven more than in "Vado mori") beginning with the Pope appear in a processional format and speak to each other a few lines concerning Death and its irrevocable nature. In addition to the similarities between the pageant-like procedures and the personages which appear in the two works, there is a strong resemblance in metric construction of the "Lamentacio" and the Danse Macabre.

Presumably, then, the first step in the development of the textual Dance of Death was the "Vado mori" where a "list" of characters is associated with the theme of death. The "Lamentacio" is the result of the expansion of this list of characters and the inclusion of dialogue; and the Dance of Death came into being when Death took part in the dialogue. The "Vado mori" and "Lamentacio" are important in the germination of the Dance of Death, but there is not enough evidence to settle the important questions of which element was "the fertilizing idea in the

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29 "Latin Texts," p. 400. Walter de Mapes has been credited with authorship of the "Lamentacio," but Miss Hammond warns that this connection is unfounded because it was made solely on the basis that the poem was found in a manuscript containing some of Mapes' work.

30 Douce, p. 24. Both have one stanza of eight lines for each person in which that person bewails death.

Especially since these first versions are in Latin, it is probable that the earliest Dance of Death was written by a clergyman. This would be in accord with the theory of an ecclesiastical transformation of lewd dances into the Dance of Death with its religious and moral connotations. Also, this would account for the marked similarity of the French Danse Macabre, the German Totentanz, and the Spanish Dança General de la Muerte.

There is also the problem of how the Dance of Death is related to another medieval product with which it has much in common, "Les trois mors et les trois vifs." This thirteenth century French poem, which seems to have originated in France, is commonly referred to as the immediate literary source for the verses of the Dance of Death because in it the living are confronted with the dead. Three young noblemen are hunting in the forest when suddenly they encounter three spectral images of Death who lecture them soundly on the vanities of their earthly existence and on the frailty of human grandeur. The idea of the death-dance is evident in the textual and painted representations of this motif. The three young men are warned

\[32\text{Ibid.}\]

\[33\text{Warren, p. xv.}\]


by their dead counterparts of the inevitability of death and its lack of respect for rank and power. This is in essence a statement of the theme of the Danse Macabre.

The significant differences between the two motifs lie in the tone and in the representation of death. In "Les trois mors et les trois vifs," the young men are warned ahead of time—an element of mercy which is no longer present in the Dance of Death, where the personages from the Pope to the Laborer are taken by the hand and led away from this life at the moment of Death's first approach.36 "Les trois mors" are projections of the three young men in their future dead state, while Death himself appears in the Danse Macabre. Émile Mâle, has, however, argued on the basis of the mural paintings that it is not Death who leads away the mortals but the dead counterpart of each living person.37 The repeated appearance of the spectral figure to each character represented on successive panels of the mural need not, however, indicate this interpretation; it could merely be a practical device of the artist to convey the idea of Death approaching each figure.

The motifs of "Les trois mors et les trois vifs" and the Danse Macabre are connected historically as well as thematically. In 1408, Jean de Berry ordered the subject of the three living and the three dead carved on the façade of the Church of the

37 Ibid., p. 365.
Holy Innocents at Paris,\textsuperscript{38} the same church where a famous mural representation of the \textit{Danse Macabre} was done in 1424. The story of "Les trois mors et les trois vifs" also appeared prefixed to the verses of the \textit{danse} accompanying the painting in the churchyard.\textsuperscript{39}

These verses, whether they developed before or after the paintings, served to elucidate the theme of the murals. They are found in texts independent of the paintings, and versions exist in France, England, Spain, Germany, and Italy.\textsuperscript{40} In the French \textit{Danse Macabre}, alternate stanzas by Death and victim waver between monologue and dialogue. Although the \textit{danse} is usually said to be dated in the early fifteenth century, there is evidence, as already mentioned, that a \textit{Danse Macabre} existed much earlier. The French source, from which both the Spanish and German versions are drawn, exists in several fifteenth century manuscripts. The only differences among the manuscripts are minor scribal variants. The Spanish \textit{Dança General de la Muerte}, admittedly a translation of a French text, is mentioned in a collection of Spanish poetry written before 1400,\textsuperscript{41} indicating the existence of a lost French original. In the \textit{Dança General}, Death speaks as a character; he addresses each mortal

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{38} Evans, p. 241.
    \item \textsuperscript{39} Douce, p. 33.
    \item \textsuperscript{40} Schirmer, p. 127.
    \item \textsuperscript{41} Douce, p. 25.
\end{itemize}
twice and is replied to. There is some communication between victims, providing something more than dialogue. It is interesting to note that, for whatever reason, Death changes gender after the eighth stanza and is feminine for the rest of the poem.

The English version is undoubtedly the latest Dance of Death; from the French verses at the Innocents in Paris John Lydgate adapted, about 1430, the first English verses for a Dance of Death painting at St. Paul's Cathedral in London. Lydgate's work is not a strict translation; he says in the epilogue that he bases his version on the French verses "Not worde be worde / but folwyng the substaunce." There are in English twelve extant manuscripts concerning the Dance of Death, all except one dating from the second half of the fifteenth century. The manuscripts can be divided into two main classes, the Lydgateian and the other versions. The Lydgateian version has a prologue indicating its source and an epilogue giving the poet's name, and it closely follows the French Danse Macabre. The other versions, although they do not follow the order of Lydgate's, are derived from it rather than directly from the

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44 Warren, p. xxiv.
46 Warren, p. xxiv.
The wall on which the Danse Macabre was painted was destroyed in 1669, but the Old French verses which were written under the painting are preserved in two manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale which contain a dialogue described as "Les vers de la danse macabre, tels qu'ils sont au cimetière des Innocents." The Danse Macabre poem Lydgate used is also preserved in one extant copy of Guyot Marchand's edition of 1485 which corresponds to the text of the manuscripts of the Bibliothèque Nationale. Lydgate's version will be compared with the French in detail in a later chapter.

A discussion of the various paintings or murals on the theme is helpful to an understanding of the problems concerning the development of the Danse Macabre. It is almost consistently stated that the first painted danse was done in 1312 at Klingenthal, Little Basel. If this is true, the painted version predated any literary expression of the theme in Germany, since the verses in German attached to the Klingenthal painting were composed about 1440. James Clark has indicated, on the

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48 James M. Clark, The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Glasgow: Jackson, 1950), p. 24. Hereafter cited as The Dance of Death. There are two other extant manuscripts, the MS. Lille 139 and Brit. Mus. Add. 38858.

49 According to Douce, pp. 42-43; Warren, p. x; Schirmer, p. 127, and many others.

50 Douce, p. 29.
other hand, that the date of 1312 is an error perpetuated by uncritical scholars.\(^1\) Between 1767 and 1773 a master baker named Büchel copied the Dance of Death at Klingenthal and saw a date on the mural painting which he read as 1312. He subsequently admitted that he had misread the date, that it was 1512 and referred to a renovation rather than to the creation of the original mural. The error was repeated by many scholars because the manuscript which contained Büchel's retraction was not discovered and published until 1876.\(^2\) The question concerning the date of the first Klingenthal painting thus remains unanswered.

Clark is emphatic in his conviction that the Basel painting came later than the famous Danse Macabre painting at the Church of the Holy Innocents in Paris and that France deserves sole credit for having contrived the idea.\(^3\) Male agrees that the painting in the cemetery of the Innocents was the earliest known painting of its kind, thereby crediting Paris with having provided English literature as well as English art with the Danse Macabre theme.\(^4\) These assertions would mean more if conflicting facts did not complicate dating the painting at

\(^1\) Clark, The Dance of Death, p. 11.


\(^3\) The Dance of Death, p. 64.

\(^4\) Religious Art, p. 144.
the Innocents. The accepted date for the execution of this painting is 1424 or 1425, but Noël du Fail, in his Contes et Discours of 1597, refers to the Danse Macabre as existing while Charles V, who died on September 6, 1380, was still alive.\textsuperscript{55} There is no way of knowing whether du Fail is in error, but the possibility remains that the painting and verses at Paris could have been done before 1380.

The Danse Macabre of the Holy Innocents was extremely popular and widely known, and in 1430, due mostly to the efforts of Jankin Carpenter, Town Clerk of London from 1417-38, a Dance of Death painting was created at St. Paul's Cathedral in London, on the walls of the cloister surrounding the Pardon Churchyard. Unfortunately, this painting no longer exists; the wall on which it was painted was pulled down in 1549 by order of Somerset to be used as building material for his new palace.\textsuperscript{56} This is the painting for which John Lydgate wrote the epigraph.

An extended discussion of the complexities regarding its sources and development should lead to a definite statement of the origin and date of the Dance of Death. Many of the theories dealt with in this chapter concerning the origin and development of the dance are plausible, but it is impossible "to sort out the various impulses at work in the Middle Ages and say:

\textsuperscript{55}As noted by Warren, pp. xi-xii.

\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., pp. xxiii-xxiv.
'Here, at this point, arose the Dance of Death.\textsuperscript{57} The evidence indicates, however, that the dance in its later stages existed at least as early as the fourteenth century. Joan Evans states that it can be found in the manuscript of the Lisle Psalter dating from the first quarter of the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{58} The \textit{Danse Macabre}, then, was fully developed probably before Chaucer's time. The next chapter will reveal many interesting parallels between the \textit{Danse Macabre} and \textit{The Canterbury Tales}.

\textsuperscript{57}"Latin Texts," p. 409.

\textsuperscript{58}\textit{The Flowering of the Middle Ages}, p. 241. I am uncertain about this since I have been unable to find a supporting reference.
CHAPTER II

Structural Comparison of the Dance of Death with The Canterbury Tales

Chaucer visited France several times between February 1377 and March 1381, and again in 1387 he journeyed to Calais. If Noël du Fail's dating of the Danse Macabre painting at the Church of the Innocents before 1380 is correct, Chaucer perhaps heard of the painting or saw it on one of his visits to Paris. Even if the painting itself were not completed until after Chaucer's death, the Dance of Death motif was, as evidence suggests, developed before his birth. Since a literary version of the Danse Macabre existed before 1376, Chaucer could have been acquainted with the motif before he wrote The Canterbury Tales. In light of this fact, it is interesting that there are many parallels between the Dance of Death and The Canterbury Tales. This is not to imply that Chaucer consciously drew on the Dance of Death as a source; there is no evidence for such a conclusion. This chapter will, however, reveal parallels between the general structure of the two works.

The outstanding element of the framework of both the Dance of Death and The Canterbury Tales is the processional or pil-

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2 Ibid., pp. 61-62.
grimage, a device familiar to the medieval man who saw life as a pilgrimage on earth, with another world to follow this existence.\textsuperscript{3} In an age when religion pervaded the entire society, thousands traveled to distant shrines.\textsuperscript{4} It was only natural that the pilgrimage motif found its way into medieval literature.

In the \textit{Dance of Death}, the author presents a collection of pilgrims who have journeyed through life and reached an inevitable end in death, an idea well expressed near the close of the poem:

\begin{quote}
Man is nowght elles / platli for to thenke
But as a wynde / whiche is transitorie
Passyng ay forthe / whether he wake or wynke
Towards this daunce. . . .
\end{quote}

(LXXXI.641-44)\textsuperscript{5}

When confronted by Death, the Bailly also expresses the notion that his life has been a pilgrimage to a definite purpose:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}
0 thou lorde god / this is an harde Journe
To whiche a-forme / I toke but litel hede.

(XXXV.273-74)

Chaucer's characters are still engaged on the figurative pilgrimage which the participants in the Dance of Death have completed, and the Parson's Tale is a protracted warning to them that life is only a short journey to the grave and judgment day.

A part of the pilgrimage in the Dance of Death is the processional, of which Death is the leader. Each member is approached by him and led in a dance which, due to the nature of the subject matter, is more like a processional march. The characters file by, one by one, pilgrims who have completed a journey and must now dance with Death. They are to undertake yet another pilgrimage, the destiny of which has been decided by the way in which they have conducted themselves in their earthly pilgrimage. Indeed, the emphasis of the entire poem is on this final journey after death "when men shul hennes pace" (LXXXII.656).

The framework of The Canterbury Tales is a journey from Southwark to the shrine at Canterbury. The pilgrims' actions along the way and especially the descriptions of them in the General Prologue are similar to the processional nature of the Dance of Death. As they continue the pilgrimage, each member takes his turn, coming forth and revealing himself, just as each victim of Death takes his place in the procession, dis-
closing by his own words and attitude, however brief his speech, the nature of his life and character. Although the reader learns many more facts about the Canterbury pilgrims, he becomes equally aware of the general quality of the lives which the characters in the Dance of Death have lived. The Wife of Bath, for instance, goes into great detail about the course of her five marriages, and the Amorous Squire reveals in his short speech that his life has somewhat paralleled hers in "seruyse / of the god cupide" (LVI.445).

Scholars, diligently trying to find a source for Chaucer's use of the pilgrimage device, have suggested two contemporary ones: Boccaccio's Decameron and especially Sercambi's Novelle. Although the Novelle contains many of the same elements as The Canterbury Tales, most scholars would agree with Kittredge that Sercambi's scheme only shows that "it was possible for a writer of far less originality than Chaucer to hit upon the device of a pilgrimage as a convenient frame for a collection of stories." Since Chaucer too was familiar with the pilgrimage in actual life, he had only to draw on the life around him "For his particular device of a group of persons on a pilgrimage to

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6A comprehensive discussion of the possible sources and analogues for the general narrative framework of The Canterbury Tales may be found in W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster, eds., Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), pp. 6-20. Hereafter cited as Sources and Analogues.

7George Lyman Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), pp. 149-50. Hereafter cited as Chaucer and His Poetry.
Furthermore, while writing The Canterbury Tales, Chaucer lived in Kent, probably near the road which led to Canterbury. It has been suggested that the basis for the poem is an actual journey made by Chaucer, but there are no supporting facts for this idea. Whether or not he had a literary source for the pilgrimage as a narrative framework, the important thing is that Chaucer chose this device to suit his purposes and used it so successfully that it is impossible to think of the pilgrimage in literature without thinking of The Canterbury Tales.

Another important aspect of the framework of the Dance of Death and The Canterbury Tales is the use of portraiture, a device with a literary tradition antedating the Dance of Death. As a "formal enumeration of physical characteristics for literary embellishment," portraiture was prevalent in the late Latin poetry of the Roman Empire and was a popular literary device throughout the Middle Ages. Thus, it is not unusual that the author of the Dance of Death and Chaucer used it. Touches of portraiture can be seen in the Dance of Death in the descriptions of the Cardinal in "hatte of rede" and "vesture of grete coste" (XII, 94), the Patriarch wearing his "dowble cros / of golde &
stones clere" (XVI.123), the Bishop with "mitre & crose" (XXVI.201), and the Squire in fresh array with "spere & sheld" (XXVIII.220). These details are not merely literary ornaments; they are symbols of rank and station, and in this way go beyond the conventional literary portrait of Latin poetry. One of the most complete pictures in the Dance of Death is that of the gluttonous Abbot:

Come forthe Sire Abbot / with 3owre brode hatte
\[3e\] th not abasshed / though \[3e\] haue right
Grete is 3owre hed / 3owr beli large & fatte
\[3e\] mote come daunce / thow3 \[3e\] be nothing light.

(XXX.233-36)

As an ecclesiastic, the Abbot should have exercised moderation, if not abstinence at times. Here again the portrait goes further than conventional portraiture; it is created to illuminate the character of the subject. Chaucer's portrait of the Monk closely parallels that of the Abbot. He also is "fat and in good poyst" (Gen. Prol.200).12

Chaucer's descriptions of the pilgrims in the General Prologue are, like those in the Dance of Death, a part of the portraiture tradition.13 The courteous Knight, lately come

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from his voyage, is shown in heavy cotton clothing spotted by his coat of mail, contrasting with the following portrait of his son the Squire in his gay and fashionable dress:

Embrouded was he, as it were a meede
Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and reede.

Short was his gowne, with sleves longe and wyde.

(89-90,93)

The portrait of the Squire's Yeoman perhaps best exemplifies the portraiture tradition. Chaucer describes each detail of the servant's appearance as though he were examining a framed painting:

And he was clad in cote and hood of grene.
A sheef of pecok arwes, bright and kene,
Under his belt he bar ful thriftily,
(Wei koude he dresse his takel yemanly:
His arwes drouped noght with fetheres lowe)
And in his hand he baar a myghty bowe.
A not heed hadde he, with a broun visage.
Of wodecraft wel koude he al the usage.
Upon his arm he baar a gay bracer,
And by his syde a swerd and a bokeler,
And on that oother syde a gay daggere
Harneised wel and sharp as point of spere;
A Christopher on his brast of silver sheene.
An horn he bar, the bawdryk was of grene;
A forster was he, soothe, as I gesse.

(103-17)

Even in this rather conventional portrait, there is a hint of the Yeoman as a person. This is a quality which can be seen fully developed in many of the other portraits such as that of the Prioress, which was drawn with such complexity in the Prologue that scholars are still interpreting and arguing the picture Chaucer drew of her. Chaucer portrays most of the pilgrims so clearly that the reader is left with no doubt as to their characters, and in this way, like the author of the Dance of Death, he goes beyond the conventional use of portraiture for the sake of literary embellishment. Although Chaucer gives the reader a picture of each of the Canterbury pilgrims, he reveals, like the author of the Dance of Death, more about certain characters than others. From a wealth of details, one learns much more about the Summoner or the Pardon-ner than about the Knight or the Shipman.

Even though a long history lies behind the portraiture tradition, there is nothing that could be called a source "for Chaucer's miscellaneous company of vivid and living personalities." French has said of the portraits in the Prologue that "No such series of descriptions is to be found in any work

14 Geoffrey Chaucer, p. 165.
15 Sources and Analogues, p. 5; for a fuller discussion, see pp. 3-5.
of ancient or medieval literature which could have come to
Chaucer's attention."\textsuperscript{16} The portraits in the Dance of Death
and The Canterbury Tales are similarly handled, and Chaucer
could have been acquainted with those in the Dance of Death,
even though his portraits go far beyond those. Seeming to be
aware of the danger of dullness in the characteristic medieval
device of static portraiture, he adds dimension by continuing
the depiction of each pilgrim in the separate tales. His des-
criptions also differ from most medieval portrait summaries in
that they are not static; the characters move and act and are
undoubtedly alive.\textsuperscript{17}

The ordering of the characters is an important factor in
the portrait framework of the Dance of Death and The Canterbury
Tales. Carefully ordered in the Dance of Death according to
rank in medieval society, characters begin with the Pope and
his corresponding secular equal, the Emperor. This arrange-
ment is carefully followed for most of the poem down to the
Clerk and Hermit at the bottom of the social scale. The Poor
Man, who is placed before the Physician, does not follow the
pattern, probably because he is a victim of the Usurer, who im-
mediately precedes him. There is no separate stanza for the
Poor Man. In the General Prologue, Chaucer follows no such

\textsuperscript{16}Robert Dudley French, A Chaucer Handbook, 2nd ed. (New

\textsuperscript{17}W. W. Lawrence, Chaucer and the Canterbury Tales (New
order, as he acknowledges toward the end of the Prologue, where he humorously pretends to desire the customary arrangement followed by the *Dance of Death*:

Also I pray yow to foryeve it me,

Al have I nat set folk in hir degree

Heere in this tale, as that they sholde stonde,

My wit is short, ye may wel understonde.

(743-46)

In his series of portraits, although the Knight comes first as would be expected, the Yeoman precedes the Prioress, and the Clerk is described before the Franklin.

The presentation of characters as representative types in medieval society is found in both the *Dance of Death* and *The Canterbury Tales*. Nearly every class of medieval society is present in the *Dance of Death*: The Pope, Cardinal, Patriarch, Archbishop, and Bishop represent the upper echelon of the Church hierarchy; the Abbot, Canon, Chartreux, and Monk the middle; the Parson, Frere Menour, and Hermit the lower. Upper-class secular society is represented by the Emperor, King, Constable, Knight, and the two Squires. The Bailly, Astronomer, Burgess, Merchant, Sergeant, Physician, and Man of Law are members of the middle class, and the Poor Man, Minstrel, Laborer, and Clerk are lower class. The Child is in a class by himself. There is nothing to indicate that any of the characters is a particular individual; the characterizations are those commonly given in medieval literature.
Much discussion has arisen among scholars concerning whether or not Chaucer's pilgrims are typical representatives of medieval society. Many scholars would agree with Snell's contention that apart from the social extremes of king and beggar, the Canterbury pilgrims who gather at the Tabard Inn represent "wellnigh all England... in the persons of typical representatives."\(^{18}\) According to Snell, this arrangement provided the basis for interaction between the various orders and vocations whose interests were at times so divergent.\(^{19}\) In the order they appear in the Prologue, the *dramatis personae* are as follows: Knight, Squire, Yeoman, Prioress with a Nun and three Priests, Monk, Friar, Merchant, Clerk, Sergeant of Law, Franklin, Haberdasher, Carpenter, Weaver, Dyer, Tapestry Weaver, Cook, Shipman, Physician, Wife of Bath, Parson, Plowman, Miller, Manciple, Reeve, Summoner, Pardoner, and Host. Several of these characters correspond to those in the *Dance of Death*. In sketching the pilgrims, Chaucer not only gives typical traits of temperament, appearance, and manners; he also summarizes the ideals and practices of the Middle Ages, thus representing further the society of the time.\(^{20}\) Manly argues, however, that Chaucer would not have created the pilgrims


\(^{19}\) *Ibid.*

as representatives of all classes of society because his audience was already familiar with fourteenth century life. The fact remains, nevertheless, that literature enumerating the estates or social classes was popular in the Middle Ages, and that the Canterbury pilgrims, like those in the Dance of Death, do represent a significant cross-section of medieval society.

If there were only the Prologue, one could regard the pilgrims simply as types; but taking into account the tales as a whole, the characters become highly individualized. Whether or not they existed historically has been a topic of scholarly debate. Certainly Chaucer's use of names provides an individuality lacking in the Dance of Death. On the one hand, P. Burwell Rogers, in an article concerning the names of the pilgrims, contends that "... Chaucer was not particularly concerned about giving names to the pilgrims. They were ordinary people ... and most of the few that are named are given plain names well suited to the plain people who are primarily representative of their class and who are individuals only secondarily." On the other hand, Manly, as a result of an intense investigation, holds that several of the pilgrims were probably real people, including Harry Bailly, the Reeve, the Miller, the Summoner, the Friar, the Pardoner, The Man of Law, Franklin,

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22 Chaucer and His Poetry, p. 155.

the Shipman, the Merchant, Prioress, Wife of Bath, Canon, and Yeoman. French agrees with Manly at least partly, acknowledging that it is a fact that the Host Harry Bailly was "an actual person, who sat in Parliament, as representative of the borough of Southwark, in 1376 and 1378..."

On the basis of Manly's research, one is easily convinced that at least a few of the Canterbury pilgrims really lived, despite their use as representative social types.

In the Dance of Death, each of the characters tends to exemplify one or more of the seven deadly sins: The Pope, Emperor, Cardinal, King, Constable and Sergeant are prideful, as is the Archbishop, who is so proud he thinks he can refuse to meet Death:

Sire archebissop / whi do 3e 3ow with-drawe
So frowardli / as hit were bi disdeyne.

(XX.153-54)

Finally he is forced to say goodbye to his "pompe & pride al-so" (XXI.166). The Bishop, Bailly, Merchant, Burgess, Man of Law, Canon, Parson, and many of the prideful characters illustrate covetousness or avarice; but the Usurer especially serves this purpose:

Thow vserere loke vp & be-holde
Un to wynnyge / thow settest al thi peyne

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24 New Light On Chaucer, pp. 70-264.
Whose couetise / wexeth never colde

Thi gredi thruste / so sore the dothe constreyne.

(I.393-96)

The Abbot is a manifestation of the sin of gluttony and is warned by Death: "Who that is fasset ... shal sonnest putrefie" (XXX.239-40). Lechery is represented by the Knight whose custom and intention "Was with ladies / to daunce yn the shade" (XXII.174), but this sin is more clearly portrayed by the Amorous Squire:

... so fresshe & amorous

Of 3eres zonge / flowryng in zowre grene age

Lusti fre of herte / and eke desyrous.

(LV.433-35)

The Laborer is ready to meet his judgment, unlike the slothful Squire, whose work is dancing, and the Monk, who has neglected his studies and duties and wasted his life "Liche as a folke / dissolute and nyce" (XLIX.389). The Minstrel too has committed the sin of sloth, devoting himself to pleasure. The sin of envy is exemplified by the Patriarch, who is chastised by Death for having envied the Pope and aspiring to take his place. Finally, anger is represented by the Sergeant, who, although he is warned against rebelliousness, is resentful and indignant that Death has come for him: "How dar' this dethe / sette on me a-reste" (XLVII.369).

As in the Dance of Death, many of Chaucer's characters are types in the sense that they illustrate sins. The Monk, like
the Abbot in the Dance of Death is fat, obviously gluttonous. The Franklin also is "Epicurus owene sone" (Gen. Prol. 336).

Several of the pilgrims are lecherous, notably the Friar, Wife of Bath, Reeve, and Summoner. The Pardoner exemplifies perfectly the deadly sin of avarice, although several others suffer from this sin, including the Friar and Summoner. The Merchant, so finely dressed and "estatly . . . of his governaunce" (Gen. Prol. 2817) is the soul of pride. The choleric Reeve and the stout Miller exhibit another deadly sin, that of anger or irritability. The wanton and merry Friar Huberd, devoting himself to pleasure and gain, exhibits sloth, among other vices. Inexplicably, none of the pilgrims personifies envy.

This chapter has attempted to delineate some structural similarities between the Dance of Death and The Canterbury Tales in the framework and the treatment of characters. In the next chapter, more detailed thematic parallels will be revealed, especially the omnipresent theme of death in the Middle Ages.
By its very nature the theme of death is common to all humanity, but its presence is felt more strongly in a period stricken by plague. As early as the thirteenth century, the mendicant friars with their popular preaching "had made the eternal admonition to remember death swell into a sombre chorus ringing throughout the world." Furthermore, death, in its religious aspect, was the constant theme of the pulpit in the fourteenth century, and its appeal was such that it continued to be so throughout the fifteenth century. Chaucer, living during a time of recurring plague (1348-1450), was keenly aware of death. Death did not fail to capture Chaucer’s attention also in his writings. The theme of death in The Canterbury Tales and its parallels in the Dance of Death is the subject


of this chapter. Largely because of the plague, the dread of its unexpected arrival was added to the natural fear of death. No man knew when, in the midst of his activities, he might be cut down. This idea is expressed both in the *Dance of Death* and in *The Canterbury Tales*. The *Dance of Death* symbolizes, among other things, the concept that the hour of man’s end is unpredictable. The Cardinal bewails the fact that “dethe is come / me sodeynli to assaile” (XIII.99); the Bishop laments the “sodeyne tidinges” (XXVII.210). Complaining about Death’s haste, the Usurer says:

Now me behoueth / sodeynly to dey

Whiche is to me / grete peyne & grete greuaunce.

(LX.401-02)

The Parson also speaks on this subject:

Here yn this worlde / who can comprehend

His sodeyn stroke / & his vnware comynge.

(LXVIII.539-40)

By no one is a more plaintive statement of this idea uttered than by the Child:

References to the *Dance of Death* in this chapter will be taken from John Lydgate’s English translation preserved in the Ellesmere MS, as printed in Florence Warren, ed., *The Dance of Death*, E. E. T. S., 09 181 (London: Oxford University Press, 1931). It would be desirable to use a fourteenth century French version. Unfortunately, the only available printed French versions are of the fifteenth century, as is Lydgate’s. Only the portion of Lydgate’s version which corresponds to the French will be used.
The *Dance of Death*, then, is a strong expression of the fear of Death's unpredictability. Death attacks his victims without warning, taking off the sinner in his sinful state so that no repentance or change is possible; he appears to them one by one, from Pope to Laborer, summarizing their spiritual states, ordering them to surrender worldly possessions and come with him.

In the Miller's, Franklin's, Pardoner's, and Parson's Tales, Chaucer emphasizes the fear of sudden death. After Nicholas, in the Miller's Tale, has stayed in his room for several days, the carpenter expresses this fear to his wife Alison:

I am adrad, by Seint Thomas,
It stondeth nat aright with Nicholas.
God shile that he deyde sodeynly!
This world is now ful tikel, sikerly.
I saugh to-day a cors yborn to chirche
That now, on Monday last, I saugh hym wirche.

\[3425-30\]^5

In the Franklin's Tale, Dorigen fears for the sudden death of her husband Arveragus on the rocks of the coast of Brittany:

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"An hundred thousand bodyes of mankynde / Han rokkes slayn . . ." (877-78). The strongest emphasis on the suddenness of death is found in the Pardoner's Tale. The "rictoures thre" are drinking in a tavern when they see a corpse being carried to his grave, who is, a boy tells them, an old friend of theirs. The boy's comments on the corpse capture the prevailing attitude toward death during the plague years:

And sodeynly he was yslayn to-nyght,
Fordronke, as he sat on his bench upright.
Ther cam a privee theef men olepeth Deeth,
That in this contree al the peple sleeth,
An with his spere he smoot his herte etwo,
And wente his way withouten wordes mo.
He hath a thousand slayn this pestilence.

(673-79)

In his tale, the Parson warns his listeners that death may come at any time: "Certes, a man oghte hastily shewen his synnes for manye causes; as for drede of deeth, that cometh ofte sodeynly, and no corteyn what tyme it shall be, ne in what place . . . (1000). Also, in the Merchant's Tale there is reference to the abruptness and finality of death:

O sodeyn hap! O thou Fortune unstable!
Lyk to the scorpion so deceyvable,
That flaterest with thy hooed when thou wolt stynge;
Thy tayl is death, throug thy envenymynge.

(2057-60)
As everyone knew, within hours a victim might be stricken by plague, and a priest might not be found in time to provide extreme unction. Thus, added to a man's natural fear of death and the dread of its unexpected arrival was the fear that he might die unshriven. Sudden death was the worst fate because "if one did not have the viaticum, devils, which of course hovered about every deathbed, would snatch one's soul off to hell." The idea of sudden death connected with the fear of dying unshriven (only incidental in the Pardoner's Tale) is the underlying theme of the Dance of Death and the Parson's Tale. Death, in the Dance of Death, is unbending; he gives no second chances to the persons he approaches. The poem, nevertheless, contains an element of benevolence. The author describes Death's approach to various victims so that the members of his audience will think of their sins, live a good life, and die shriven. He says at the beginning:

O creatures ye / that ben resorable
The life desiringe / whiche is eternal
Ye mai sene here / doctryne ful notable
Yowre life to lede / whiche that ys mortal.

(VI.41-44)

The message is that man should spend his life on earth working for heavenly bliss in the hereafter. This idea is more clearly stated later in the poem:

... ther' is [no] bette victory

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The thought that man should "fle synne atte lest" is even more important when death so often comes unexpectedly. Because there will be no time to repent after Death has come, man must confess and be forgiven of his sins so that he will be ready when Death comes: "Wise is that synner / that dothe his life a-mende" (LXXI.576). This is essentially the Parson's message in his tale. He warns of remaining "unshewed" when he quotes from the Bible, "And therfore seith Salomon: 'The wikked man dyeth, and whan he is deede, he shal have noon hope to escape fro payne'" (227) and when he says, "... a man oughte hastily shewen his synnes ... ; as for drede of deeth, that cometh ofte sodeynly" (1000). As a reason to confess and be shriven the Parson offers "the drede of the day of doom and of the horrible peynes of helle" (158). Although Hell is not specifically mentioned in the Dance of Death, it is an implicit alternative to "Paradyse" for the sinner who has failed to repent.

Sin and its consequences are dealt with in the Dance of Death and The Canterbury Tales, but the idea of death as retribution for sin does not play a dominant role in either. The Dance of Death stresses the summoning of the estates, the suddenness of the summons, and the grotesque procession in which each victim must dance with Death. All mankind is led away
by Death; thus death is the debt inherited through original sin rather than the punishment for sins. Death appears not as a minister of punishment sent by God, but as an independent agent. His role is to teach a lesson to those who have lived sinfully in pride, covetousness, or with no thought of salvation. His remarks to the Emperor are representative of the admonitions against pride which he delivers to the Pope, Cardinal, King, Patriarch, Constable, Archbishop, Knight, and Sergeant:

3o most forsake / of golde 3owre appil rounde
Sceptre and swerde / & al 3owre hie prouesse
Be-hinde leue / 3owre tresowre & richesse
And with other / to my daunce obeie
Azens my myght / is worth noon hardynesse.

(X.75-79)

Death chastises the Bishop, Abbot, Bailly, Burgess, Canon, Merchant, Monk, Usurer, Man of Law, Parson, and Clerk for covetousness and the love of worldly possessions. His speech to the Bishop reveals the attitude he shows towards the other characters as well:

For al 3owre riches / sotheli I ensure
For al 3owre tresowre / so longe kepte in clos
3owre worldli godes / & godes of nature
and of 3owre shepe / the gostli dredeful cure
With charge comytted / to 3owre prelacie
For to accounte / ze shall be browst to lure
No might is sure / that eymbeath our ay.

(XXVI.202-08)

It should be pointed out that within the ranks of the proud and those who value the things of this world are various clergymen. Death does not attack Church doctrine but rather those within the Church hierarchy. These figures are treated satirically because of a preoccupation with earthly desires which makes them unfit for the next life. Among secular characters, the Squire, Astronomer, Physician, Amorous Squire and Minstrel have lived with no thought of salvation, and Death has come to teach them that they should have had less concern for the pleasures and knowledge of this life. He shows contempt for the Squire "That can of daunces / al the newe gyse" (XXVIII.218), and he is quick to let the Amorous Squire know that his youthful body and pleasant face are worth nothing now:

But al shal turne / in to asshes deie
For al beauhte / is but a Feynte ymage
Whiche steleth a-vai / or folkes can take hede.

(LIV,438-40)

Death sarcastically asks the Astronomer, "What mai a-vaile / al zowre astrologie" (XXXVI,234), and he taunts the Physician:

Ageyne my myght / zowre crafte mai not endure

... ............................

Good leche is he / that can hym self recure.

(LIII,422-24)
Death does show sympathy for the Laborer who has lived his life "yn sorow & payne" and "in ful grete travaile" (LXIX.545-46), for the Cordelier who has taught that "I [Death] am moste gastful for to drede" (LXXI.564), and for the Hermit who has "continued / longe yn abstynence" (LXXVII.610). Death comforts the Child: "Who lengest ieweth / moste shal suffre wo" (LXXIII.584). Although these persons are not sinful, Death takes them just as he does practicing sinners. The fact that they are treated gently does, however, indicate that perhaps they, unlike the others, will "reigne / yn Paradyse with glorie" (LXXXI.647). The Dance of Death, then, does not emphasize Death as punishment for man's sins, but it stresses the finality of Death and examines the sins of the victims, thereby placing final importance on the condition of man at death and on his resultant fate.

In The Canterbury Tales Chaucer shows little awareness of death as retribution for human sins. There are, however, a few such references. The Knight, in his tale, says that Creon "hadde his death ful wel deserved" (964); Palamon says that he and Arcite "have the death diserved" (1716). In the Parson's Tale, there is another allusion to death as punishment for sin: "... as the caytyf body of man is rebel bothe to reason and to sensualitee, therefore it is worthy the death" (271). Death is considered in these instances as the just consequence for the breaking of secular laws and not as an inherited punishment for original sin as in the Dance of Death.

Death is seldom seen as punishment in The Canterbury Tales.
Chaucer is, above all, an artist and not a preacher; he concentrates on this world and keeps the next world in the background. Nevertheless, he makes the reader realize that worldly delights are rarely transitory when compared with permanent ones. He admires and respects the Parson who was "riche . . . of hooly thought and werk" (Gen. Prol.479), and, like Death in the Dance of Death, shows contempt for the other clergymen who seem to be more concerned with worldly pleasures than with the delights of heaven. Tongue-in-cheek, Chaucer reveals the Monk as a man far from religious in thought and work:

What sholde he studie and make hymselfen wood,
Upon a book in cloystre alwey to poure,
Or swynken with his handes, and laboure,
As Austyn bit? How shal the world be served?

(Gen. Prol.184-37)

The Monk's character is further revealed by Chaucer's description of him: his clothes are the finest possible, and he rides an expensive horse. The fact that he is "ful fat and in good paynt" (Gen. Prol.200) is evidence of his preference for earthly food over spiritual nourishment. He spares no cost for worldly pleasures. For example, Chaucer speaks disparagingly of Friar Huberd who knows so much of dalliance, wears clothes comparable to those of a Pope, affects a lisp, and extorts money from the people for "penaunce." These are not the worst of sins for a man who "hadde mad ful many a mariage / Of yonge wommen at his owene cost" (Gen. Prol.212-13), Chaucer
presents the Summoner as more despicable. In the General Pro-
logue, the reader learns that he is not only foul in appearance
to the point that children are afraid of him, but he is also
lecherous and deceitful. He accepts bribes for overlooking
sins and recommends bribery to those who must appear in the
archdeacon's court. The Pardoner, whose profession is an off-
shoot of the ecclesiastic system if not a part of it, also
lives for the treasure of this world. His portrait is one of
the most complex in *The Canterbury Tales*, and it is discussed
in detail later in this chapter. The Nun's Priest, whom Chaucer
calls "This sweete preest, this goodly man sir John" (NPT.4010),
is obedient to the secular call. When the host orders him to
tell a merry tale, he complies, unlike the Parson, who uses his
tale to preach a sermon befitting a man of God who should be
concerned with the salvation of men's souls. The presence of
the good Parson in *The Canterbury Tales* indicates that Chaucer's
criticism—as in the *Dance of Death*—is not anti-Church but only
anti-hypocrisy and anti-worldliness.

The favorable portrayal of the sincere Parson who lives
on earth but directs his thoughts to the permanence of the next
world coupled with the space allowed him for his religious tale
indicate a concern for the same theme expressed in the *Dance
of Death*: man should remember that this life is fleeting and
prepare himself for entrance into heavenly eternity. Chaucer
reinforces this idea at the end of *The Canterbury Tales* where
he retracts all of his writings which have to do with "worldly
vainkiser." Throughout *The Canterbury Tales* he celebrates, for the most part, life; but in the retraction he shows great concern for the next life:

... graunte me grace of verray penitence, confessioun and satisfaccioun to doon in this present lyf, / throug the benigne grace of him that is kyng of kynges and preest over alle preestes, that boghte us with the precious blood of his herte; / so that I may been oon of hem at the day of doom that shulle be saved.

(1088-90)

This does not mean that Chaucer was primarily concerned with the sinful condition or spiritual salvation of man. Writing when didactic literature still predominated, he emphasizes man as a creature of this world, not as a potential spirit of the next. Although he points out failings and is aware of death and man's fate, he does not place first importance on the consequences of human sin.

The concept most similar in *The Canterbury Tales* and the *Dance of Death* is the image of Death as a leveler who takes all persons regardless of age or social status. At the beginning of the *Dance of Death* the author states that "dethe ne spareth / hye ne lowe degre" (VI.48) and "Deth spareth not / pore ne blode royal" (VII.54). Death, as the Leveler, will come unexpectedly to all; this certainty is emphasized throughout the *Dance of Death*, as in the Squire's and the Clerk's speeches:
Thynketh in thowre soules / or that deth manace
For al shal rote / & no man wote what tyme.

(XXIX.231-32)

A better lessoun / ther can no Clerke express
Than til to morowe / is no man sure to a-bide.

(LXXIX.631-32)

Similarly, in the Clerk's Tale:

And deth manaceth every age, and smyt
In ech estaat, for ther escapeth noon;
And al so certein as we knowe echoon
That we shul deye, as uncerteyn we alle
Been of that day whan deeth shal on us falle.

(122-26)

Here the image of Death as the Leveler is connected with the inevitability of death and man's uncertainty expressed in the Dance of Death. Again in the Man of Law's Tale death is viewed as one to whom the inevitable tribute must be paid: "For deth . . . taketh of heigh and logh his rente" (1142).

The suddenness and surprise of death led to the personification of him as a thief who robs his victims of life. In the Pardoner's Tale, Death is a "privee theef" (675); the rioter asks the old man the whereabout of "... thilke traytour Deeth, / That in this contree alle oure freendes sleeth" (753-54). In the Dance of Death, although Death is an unexpected adversary, he is not specifically personified as a thief, but he is a master of deceit and cunning, able to
trick a man out of everything—pride, worldly possessions, youth, happiness, life and salvation. This concept of death appears in Chaucer's description of the Reeve, himself a master of deceit and cunning: "They were adrad of hym as of the deeth" (605). "The deeth" here is a specific reference to the Black Death which was taking men across all of Europe.

Although the personification of death was common in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, writers seldom gave specific outline to the appearance of the figure, but portrayed only his characteristics and actions. In the textual Dance of Death, the figure of Death is not delineated, but in the pictorial representations he is earlier portrayed as a decomposing corpse and later as a "maliciously grinning skeleton." Only once does this image appear in The Canterbury Tales: in the Knight's Tale, where Chaucer sketches a corpse-like figure when he speaks of "the colde deeth, with mouth gapynge upright" (2003).

Although Death is usually unpleasant and threatening, there is another view of him in both the Dance of Death and The Canterbury Tales. This is the conception of Death as the desired end of a burdensome life. The Laborer in the Dance of Death accepts Death's statement that "He is a foole / that

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8 Schirmer, p. 129.
weneth to lyve euers" (IX, 552). Because of the life he has experienced, he welcomes death as the end of a hard existence:

I haue wisshed / after dethe ful ofte

For I mai sey / & telle playnli howe
In this world / here ther is reste noon.

(LXX.553, 559-60)

The Hermit too has lived without worldly pleasures and possessions. He is ready for death not only as an end to an abstentious life but also because he is at peace with himself and God. Reflecting a philosophical acceptance of death and satisfaction with his life, he says:

Life yn deserte / called solitarie
Mai a-3eyne dethe / haue respite noon ne space
Atte vnsette owre / his comyng dothe not tarie
And for my parte / welcome be goddes grace
Thankyng hym / with humble chere & face
Of al his giftes / and grete habundaunce
Fynalli afferyng / yn this place
No man is riche / that lacketh suffisaunce.

(LXXVIII.617-24)

The feeling that death is a welcome end to the troubles of this life is found expressed in the Knight's Tale, the Pardoner's Tale, and the Monk's Tale. After the death of Arcite in the Knight's Tale, Egeus rationalizes in order to accept it:

'This world nys but a thurghfare ful of wo,
The old man in the Pardoner's Tale also longs for death, especially because it is denied him: he cries, "'Alas! when shal my bones been at reste?'" (733). In the Monk's Tale, both the unjustly imprisoned Erl Hugelino and the tyrant Nero welcome death. The Monk ascribes the deaths of both men to Fortune. Before he dies, Hugelino witnesses the death by starvation of his three little children and in the end, "From heigh estaat Fortune anew hym aert" (2457). Nero, Emperor of the Roman Empire, was also thrown down by Fortune after he had killed Seneca. Daun Piers implies that any man--Christian or pagan, decent or indecent--can suffer such blows from Fortune that death is a welcome release.

Although Fortune does not appear in the Dance of Death, chance does. At Death's approach, the Bailly comments: "Mi chaun[c]e is turned . . ."(XXXV.275). From man's finite view, he is a victim of chance, but the Dance of Death stresses that God's will is served through chance:

Who gothe to-forne / or who schal go be-hynde
All dependeth / in goddes ordynaunce
Where-fore eche man / lowely take his chaunce.

(VII.51-53)

Furthermore:

That but of pite / God his honde refreyne
Go perilous stroke / shall make the less al.

(L.399-400)

The Child also states:

I cam but now / and now I go my wai
Of me no more / no tale shall be tolde
The will of god / no man withstande mai
As sone dyeth / a yonge man as an olde.

(LXXIV.589-92)

The Knight's Tale also shows death as being directed by a supreme being. Since the story deals with pre-Christian happenings, fate is influenced by pagan gods rather than the Christian God of the Dance of Death. Jupiter, Theseus notes, is "The First Moevere of the cause above" (2987). Theseus tells Emelye that it is useless to strive against fate; man's death is fated by Jupiter or God, who will have his way:

Thanne may I seyn that al this thyng moot deye.

What maketh this but Juppiter, the kyng,
That is prince and cause of alle thyng,
Convertynge al unto his propre welle
From which it is dirryved, sooth to telle?
And heer-agayns no creature on lyve,
Of no degree, availleth for to stryve.

(3034-40)

From the beginning Arcite shows a realization that fate or Fortune is controlling his life as it will his death. Imprisoned with Palamon, he ascribes their fate to Fortune and the gods:
For Goddes love, taak al in pacience
Cure prisoun, for it may noon nother be.
Fortune hath yeven us this adversitee.

(1084-86)

Arcite, just before dying, realizes that it is his fate, although he can make no sense of it:

Allas, the deeth! allas, myn Emelye!

What is this world? what asketh men to have?
Now with his love, now in his colde grave
Allone, withouten any compaignye.

(2773,2777-79)

Egeus too expresses fatalism:

"Right as ther dyed nevere man," quod he,
"That he ne lyvede in erthe in some degree,
Right so ther lyvede never man," he seyde,
"In al this world, that som tyme he ne deyde."

(2843-46)

Despite his great attention to Arcite's death and the emphasis on Fortune's control, Chaucer, or the Knight as narrator, claims ignorance of the soul's destiny when describing Arcite's death:

His spirit chaunged hous and wente ther,
As I cam nevere, I kan nat tellen wher.

(2809-10)

Another statement about death which appears in both the
Dance of Death and The Canterbury Tales is that it begins at birth. This idea is not new in the Middle Ages; it goes back at least to classical times. In his prologue, the Reeve expresses the concept of death beginning at birth:

For sikerly, when I was borne, anon
Deeth drough the tappe of lyf and leet it gon;
And ever sithe hath so the tappe yronne
Til that almost al empty is the tonne.
The streem of lyf now droppeth on the chymbe.

(3891-95)

This reflects the theme of mutability and more specifically emphasizes the decay of the world theme, a part of which are the motifs of putrefaction and dancing. The Squire in the Dance of Death utters a similar statement when he says, "Of deethes chaunge / eueri dai is pryms" (XXIX.230). Here again death is seen as taking its toll each day, as youth and beauty decay little by little. In the Dance of Death there is the "kynge liggyng dede & eten with wormes." The decaying corpse, reminding his audience of the transitoriness and consequent unimportance of this life, admonishes all men:

Ze folke that loken / vpon this purtrature
Beholdyng here / alle the estates daunce
Seeth what ze ben / & what is jowre nature


Man's existence is fleeting, the author says; each day his youth fades until his body dies and becomes food for worms. This is basically the idea expressed in the statements of the Reeve and the Squire as well as in Death's speech to the Amorous Squire:

\[
\text{But all shall turn / into ashes dead}
\]
\[
\text{For all beauty / is but a fleeting image}
\]
\[
\text{Which steals away / or folk can take heed.}
\]

(IXXX.633-40)

Man, therefore, should place first importance on that part of his life which is of eternal consequence, his spiritual life.

As a way of emphasizing the value of spiritual life, both the author of the Dance of Death and Chaucer in The Canterbury Tales portray characters who are suffering from spiritual death. In the Dance of Death, the Pope, Emperor, Cardinal, King, and Patriarch have allowed pride and covetousness of power to kill their spirits. Seeking "honowre / fame & grete richesses" (XIX.148), the Constable has neglected eternity. The Archbishop's last thought is not for his fate after death but for this world:

\[
\text{A-dewe my tresowr / my pompe & pride al-so}
\]
Mi peynted chambres / my porte & my freshnesse.

(XXI.166-67)

The Baron and the Squire regret leaving the many ladies who have favored them, and the Amorous Squire and Minstrel likewise have lived exclusively for pleasure. The Bishop is "nowether glad ne meri" (XXVII.209) that he will no longer have his feasts, and the Abbot's "bell large & fatte" (XXX.235) is evidence that he also has devoted time to feasting rather than to the nourishment of his spirit. The Burgess and Parson have spent their lives exacting rents and tithes. The Bailly, Canon, Usurer, Man of Law and Clerk have lived off bribes and tributes in order to satisfy their hunger for worldly pleasures. The Merchant too has been "ai frette with couetise" (XLIII.341). The Astronomer and the Physician have quested after knowledge but have failed to seek answers concerning spiritual questions. All these characters are morally dead before physical Death approaches. They have forgotten that "To lyue welle . . . Is moche worthe / when men shul hennes pace" (LXXXII.655-56). Death is all the more fearsome because they realize the poverty of their spiritual condition and know:

Like jowre deserte / shal be jowre guerdoun
And to eche labour / due is the salarie.

(LXVII.535-36)

The death of the spirit is dealt with extensively in The Canterbury Tales. This is especially true of some of the churchmen: The Friar, Summoner, Monk and Pardoner. Friar Huberd
takes advantage of the fact that "unto a povre ordre for to yive / Is signe that a man is wel yshryve" (225-26). Not only has he devoted himself to the acquisition of money and worldly goods; he has taken advantage of women in the town. In telling his tale, the Friar seems far more interested in the deadly sins that mean spiritual death than he is in virtue; he dwells on the lechery of the Summoner before he actually tells the tale. Although the Friar damns the Summoner in his tale for being greedy and deceitful, he himself has the same failings. Chaucer's Summoner suffers from neglected diseases, physical as well as spiritual. The physical ugliness resulting from his disease is a mirror of his dead spirit's ugliness, and his homosexuality is a repudiation of the recreation of life itself. The Monk with his fine clothes and horses is not only lecherous and greedy as the Friar and the Summoner, but is also gluttonous. Because of his lifelong quest after worldly pleasures, he too has allowed his spirit to die.

By far the most extensive treatment of spiritual death is found in Chaucer's portrait of the Pardoner, who is an unnatural man, a eunuch. His inability to experience natural human love is the outward sign of his isolation from divine love. He is, in addition, a liar and swindler; selling pigs' bones as Christian relics, he trades souls for a profit. In the General

Prologue he is, next to the Summoner perhaps, portrayed as the most despicable character. In his own prologue as well, he creates himself as a man in the living death of sin, admitting that he is "a ful vicious man" (459). The theme of every sermon he preaches is Radix malorum est cupiditas, which he uses to great advantage in extracting money from his listeners. Greed or covetousness is, however, the main motivation of his life:

Thus kan I preche agayn that same vice
Whiche that I use, and that is avarice.

I preche nothyng but for coveitise.

(427-28, 433)

He reveals his true nature to the members of the pilgrimage, describing to them the wiles he uses to cheat people:

Of avarice and of swich cursednesse
Is al my preohyng, for to make hem free
To yeven hir pens, and namely unto me.
For myn entente is nat but for to wynne,
And nothyng for correccioun of synne.

(400-404)

Because he is "Sterile in the spiritual multiplication of heavenly treasure, he lays up his treasure on earth."\(^{12}\) He boasts

that he will not wilfully live in poverty but will instead have the luxuries and pleasures of this world: "monie, wolfe, chese, and whete" (448) and "licour of the vyne" (452).

The Pardoner's tale is what one would expect of such a person. Closely paralleling a thirteenth century Italian version of an ancient folktale, the tale further reveals the Pardoner's spiritual death.\(^{13}\) Set against the background of the Black Death, it is a sordid tale of drunkenness, blasphemy, greed, and murder.

Although the idea of spiritual death is revealed in the three sinful young rioters who care nothing for their spiritual condition, it is most evident in the old man who directs them toward Death. Whether or not he is a personification of Death has troubled many critics. They have suggested that he is the Wandering Jew, Old Age, the messenger of Death, or Death himself, and a few see him simply as an old man.\(^{14}\) That he is not

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\(^{14}\)Marie P. Hamilton, in "Death and Old Age in 'The Pardoner's Tale'," Studies in Philology, 36 (Oct. 1939), 572, contends that he is "Old Age as the Harbinger of Death, . . . a perpetual reminder of death." Alfred Coard, in the article mentioned in note 11, says that "the Old Man . . . points the way to death, not just to physical death but to the death of the soul," pp. 40-41. George Kittredge, on the other hand, states that "The aged wayfarer is undoubtedly Death in person," in Chaucer and His Poetry (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), p. 215. In his article "The Old Man in 'The Pardoner's Tale'," Review of English Studies, NS 2 (Jan. 1951), W. J. B. Owen opposes most critics in seeing the old man as "merely an old man" and the Pardoner's Tale as "thoroughly realistic," p. 50.
Death is somewhat supported by his own statement: "Ne Deeth, allas! ne wol not han my lyf / Thus walke I, lyk a restelees kaityf" (727-28). The young men call him Death's spy and "oon of his assent" (758). Owen points out that the old man is seeking Death and that it would be contrary to the logic of allegory for Death or his messenger to seek Death. Nevertheless, the old man tells the three fellows where to find Death, so he does seem to be connected with Death in some way.

It must be remembered that Chaucer created the old man as he shaped the tale to the Pardoner's character. Since the Pardoner so clearly exhibits spiritual death, the old man is an extension of this theme. With this interpretation, the most likely theory is that the old man symbolizes that part of human nature that must die before a sinner can be reborn and corresponds to the natural man whom St. Paul speaks of several times. The old man represents the worldly man who, unable to die and thus to be reborn, is condemned to eternal death. Because he is already dead, he is anxious to die physically. Thus, the old man, whether or not he is Death or the messenger of Death, is symbolic of the spiritual death which the three rioters and the Pardoner have already suffered.

While the Pardoner has in common with the rioters the

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15 Owen, p. 50.
16 Miller, "Chaucer's Pardoner," pp. 188-89.
17 Ibid.
vices of drunkenness, blasphemy, and avarice, he also has much in common with the old man. Like the old man, the Pardoner wanders ceaselessly, sending men on the "croked wey" (761). Both figures are alienated from the rest of the world, alone and frustrated. At the end of his tale, the Pardoner prays for his fellow pilgrims: "Now, goode men, God foryeve yow youre trespas," (904) echoing the old man's prayer of grace for the young men: "'God save yow, that bokhte agayn mankynde, / And yow amende!" (766-67). The Pardoner's preoccupation with death and violence is revealed by the old man's wish to die and the deaths of the three young men. The Pardoner's Tale, then, is concerned with death and sin rather than virtue, and it is only natural that he resumes his sinful ways after he has finished his tale. Like the old man, his spirit cannot be reborn because his old self will never die.

The theme of spiritual death is treated similarly in the Dance of Death and The Canterbury Tales. The characters in the Dance of Death who are spiritually dead are chastised by Death and accept him with fear and some indication of knowledge that their due rewards will be unpleasant. Chaucer's Parson likewise admonishes his listeners that those who continue to live in "deedly synne" will suffer the pains of hell. Since the characters in The Canterbury Tales who are spiritually dead have not yet had to face physical Death, they show no thought for their fate. Chaucer does indicate, however, that at least one of them, the Pardoner, also suffers on this earth,
CHAPTER IV

Lydgate's Daunce of Macabree

In 1426, while living in Paris, John Lydgate became familiar with the most popular tourist attraction, the Danse Macabre painting at the Church of the Holy Innocents.¹ His loose translation of the verses printed beneath the painting reveals significant differences between it and the original French, the most important of which is the addition of several characters. These differences and the parallels between Lydgate's character additions and similar characters in The Canterbury Tales are discussed in this chapter.

The order of characters in the extant French manuscripts is: Pope, Emperor, Cardinal, King, Patriarch, Constable, Archbishop, Knight, Bishop, Squire, Abbot, Bailly, Astronomer, Burgess, Canon, Merchant, Chartreux, Sergeant, Monk, Usurer, Poor man, Physician, Amorous Squire, Man of Law, Minstrel, Parson, Laborer, Cordelie or Friar, Child, Clerk, Hermit, Death, Dead King, and a Master in charge of the dance.² The order of


²Ibid.
characters in Lydgate's version is: Pope, Emperor, Cardinal, King, Patriarch, Constable, Archbishop, Baron or Knight, Lady of great estate, Bishop, Squire, Abbot, Abbess, Bailly, Astronomer, Burgess, Canon, Merchant, Chartreux, Sergeant, Monk, Usurer, Poor man, Physician, Amorous Squire, Gentlewoman Amorous, Man of Law, Juror, Minstrel, Tregetour or Magician, Parson, Laborer, Cordelier or Friar, Child, Clerk, Hermit, King lying dead and eaten with worms, Machabre the Doctor. Lydgate, then, followed the order of his French original but added five characters, three of whom are women: the Lady of great estate, the Abbess, the Gentlewoman Amorous, the Juror, and the Tregetour or Magician.

Although there are no women in the French version Lydgate used, two French versions later than his include them, such as Guyot Marchand's 1486 edition of Martial D'Auvergne's Danse de Femmes. The success of Marchand's earlier publications of the all-male Danse Macabre seems to have inspired him to introduce the female version. It is possible, however, that he knew of Lydgate's Daunce or another English version and was influenced to depict women. A second French Danse Macabre which included women appeared in "Heures a l'usage de Rome" printed by Phillip Rigouchet for Simon Vostre in 1502; in it there is a Queen, a Lady, a Prioress, a Franciscan nun, a Chamber Maid, a Widow, a

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Lying-in-Nurse, a Shepherdess, an Old Woman, and a Witch. This edition was a natural sequel to the Dausse de Femmes. Evidence indicates that both versions were influenced by the English Dance of Death rather than by an earlier lost French original, since there are no female victims in either the Totentanz or the Dança General de la Muerte, although death itself is female in most of the Dança General.

A second important difference between Lydgate's Daunce of Machabree and his French original is the addition or substitution of several lines. In the French version, death replies briefly to the Merchant and the Labourer in the opening lines of his speeches to the Chartereux and Cordelier:

Alez marchant sans plus rester
Ne faites ja cy residence
Vous ny pouez riens conquaster /
Vous aussy hommè dabs tinence
Chartreux prenez en pacience /
De plus viure nayes memoire
faitez vous valoir a la dansce /
Sur tout hommè mort a victoire.

(35,272-30)


(Go, Merchant, without more delay.
Make not now any resistance;
You can acquire nothing now.
You also are a man of abstinence.
Carthusian Friar, accept with patience
Of longer life have no hope.
Make yourself evaluate the dance;
Over all men death has the victory.)

Faittes voye vous avez tort /
Laboureux apres cordeliers
Souvent avez preschie de mort /
Se vous deuez moins marueilier
Ja ne sen fault esmay baillier
Je nest sy fort guiz mort narest
Sy fait bon a morir veillier
A toute heure la mort est preste.

(56,441-48)

(You make one see you are wrong,
Laborers. Next, minor friar,
Often you have preached of death.
Thus you should marvel less.
Now do not hesitate to dance;
Yet is no one so strong whom death does not arrest.)
One does well to die old;
At every hour death is ready.

Death's brief replies to the Merchant and the Laborer in his speeches to the Chartereux and Cordelier are reminiscences of an older fourteenth century French version. Lydgate does not use this device but instead uses a formula containing the word "hand" in each case. Immediately after the Merchant's response, at the same point where Death replies to the Merchant in the French, Lydgate writes:

Gefe me 3owre honde / with chekes dede & pale
Caused of wacche / & longe abstinence
Sire Chartereux / & 3owre selfe a-vale
Vn-to this daunce / with humble pacience
To stryue a3en / mai be no resistence
Lengor to lyve / sette not 3owre memorie
Though I be lothesome / as yn apparence
Above al men / deth hath the victorie.

(XLIV.345-52)

Following the Laborer's reply to death, where Death speaks briefly to the Laborer in the French, Lydgate writes:

Sire Cordelere / to 3ow my hande is rawght
To this daunce / 3ow to conueie ande lede
Which yn 3owre prechynge / hau ful ofte tawght
How [pat]I am / moste gastful for to drede

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6Warren, p. xxix.
Al-be that folke / take ther of none hede
Sitte is ther noon / so stronge ne so hardi
But dethe dar reste / and lette for no mede
For dethe eche owre / is present & redy.

(LXXI.561-68)

The formula with the word "hand" is not found anywhere in the French Danse Macabre and is only found in English in versions later than Lydgate's in the stanzas for the Empress, Canon Regular, Justice, and Artifex, characters not found in Lydgate's Daunce of Machabree. This indicates that Lydgate created the verses using the "hand" formula. Death offering his hand to the Chartereux and Cordelere suggests that Lydgate wished to express respect for these individuals, even though over them, as all men, "deth hath the victorie" (XLIV.352).

There is no evidence that Lydgate was acquainted with any other French version which no longer exists or that he took his additional verses from some other source. There may be, on the other hand, evidence for maintaining that Lydgate's female character additions were not entirely original. A comparison of these with certain characters in The Canterbury Tales reveals striking parallels. Taking them in the order they appear in Lydgate's work, the first character to be considered is the Lady of great estate, to whom Death says:

Come forth a noon / my lady & Princesse
Sce most al-so / go vp-on this daunce
This "Princesse" has much in common with Chaucer's Wife of Bath. Although the Lady of great estate is perhaps higher on the social scale, the Wife of Bath is well-to-do, a "lady of great estate" in the company of pilgrims with which she is traveling. Like the Lady's "riche a-rai," the Wife's dress befits a woman of her station:

- Hir coverchiefs ful fyne weren of ground;
- I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound
- That on a Sonday weren upon hir heed.
- Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed,
- Ful streite yteyd, and shoes ful moyste and newe.

(Gen. Prol. 453-57)\(^8\)

The Wife of Bath and the Lady of great estate are intimately familiar with the art of love. The Wife has had many lovers:

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\(^8\)F. N. Robinson, ed., The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957). Further references made to The Canterbury Tales will be taken from this edition; abbreviations of the tales when necessary and line numbers will be cited in parentheses after the quotation.
Housbonde at chirche done she hadde fyve,
Withouten oother companye in youte.

(460-61)

It is no wonder that "... she koude of that art the olde
daunce" (476). In his invitation to a quite different dance,
Death reminds the Lady of the worthlessness of her "beaute,"
"pleasaunce," and "daliaunce" "That sommetyme cowde / So many
holde on honde / In loue ..." (XXIV.190-91).

Death's description of the Lady of great estate is a sum-
mary characterization, though incomplete, of the Wife of Bath.
The Wife was once beautiful (475) as is the Lady; her "jolitee"
(470) was as winning as the Lady's "grete pleasaunce" and "dali-
aunce." In her prologue, she goes into detail about the life
she has led in the pursuit of love, the same life which is only
generalized in Death's stanza to the Lady of great estate.

The Lady's reply to Death reveals a further parallel be-
tween the characters. After acknowledging the necessity of
giving in to Death, she says:

For ther' [n]is queene / Countesse ne duchesse
Flouryng in beaute / ne yn feirnesse
That she of dethe / mote dethes trace sewe
For to 3owre beaute / & counterfete fresshnesse
Owre rympled age / seithe farewell adiewe.

(XXV.196-200)

The sentiments expressed in these lines concerning age are the
same as those uttered by the Wife of Bath:
But age, alas! that al whele envenyme,
Beth me bireat my rescuee and ry pith.
Lat go, farewell! the devil go therwith!
The flour is goon, ther is namore to telle;
The bren, as I best kan, now moste I selle;
But yet to be right myrie wol I fonde.

(474-79)

In both speeches, age is the destroyer of youth and beauty; yet the tone is different. The Lady is resigned, merely commenting that everyone must grow old and die. The Wife of Bath is much less resigned; she bewails the fact that age has stolen her beauty and strength, but she is not yet ready to think of death as the immediate consequence. She ends her musings on an optimistic note, determined to be merry even though the flourishing time of her life has passed. The difference in tone between her speech and the Lady's is a result of the context. Lydgate's Lady cannot realistically be optimistic. She has no life to look forward to; Death has approached her and she has no choice but to accept his invitation:

Deth hathe yn erthe / no ladi ne maiestresse
And on his daunce / zitte moste I nedes fote.

(XXV.194-95)

Thus, although the similarities between the characters indicate that Lydgate's Lady of great estate and Chaucer's Wife of Bath descend from a common tradition, the theme of the Daunce of Machabree demanded that Lydgate create a character less
obullient, less optimistic, and certainly much more resigned to Death.

A second character whom Lydgate apparently created in the same vein as the Wife of Bath is the Gentlewoman Amorous. The name itself sounds like a description of Chaucer's character. Who could be more "Amorous" than a gentlewoman who had had five husbands and an undisclosed number of lovers in her youth? That the characterizations closely parallel each other may be seen in the last two lines of Death's speech to the Gentlewoman:

Though daunger longe, / yn loue hathe lad 3ow reyne
A-rested is / 3owre chaunce of dowblenesse.

(LVII.455-56)
The key word here is "daunger," which can mean "lordship, power, control; ungraciousness, disdain; hesitation, offishness, the quality of being 'difficile.'" Whatever meaning the word is taken to have, the lines still fit the Wife of Bath. She has had control and power over her loves. She has been ungracious, disdainful, though perhaps not quite hesitating or offish, and above all "difficile" in her relations with her husbands. The second line "A-rested is / 3owre chaunce of dowblenesse," which in The Daunce of Machabree alludes to Death's ending the Gentlewoman's life of duplicity, is reminiscent of what happened when the Wife of Bath married her fifth husband. He would not bend to her control (WBT.633). She had by artifice managed to sub-

9Ibid., p. 943, s.v. daunger.
jugate four previous husbands, and it must have seemed to her that her "chaunge of downlicesse" as well as her "reyns" had been "a-rested," as she spoke of her fifth marriage, "But afterward repented me ful score" (632). Of course, she eventually "persuaded" him to let her "... han the governance of hous and lond / And of his tounge, and of his hond also" (814-15).

The Gentlewoman Amorous is by no means so fortunate; Death cannot be subdued. In the Gentlewoman's reply to Death, two lines are reminiscent of the Wife of Bath:

For yn my jovthe / this was myn entente
To my seruyce / many a man to a lured.

(461-62)

The Wife of Bath states an identical "entente" in her Prologue, an "entente" in which she has obviously succeeded, having lured five husbands into her service:

An housbonde I wol have, I wol not lette,
Which shal be bothe my dettour and my thral,
And have his tribulacion withal
Upon his flessh, whil that I am his wyf.
I have the power durynge al my lyf
Upon his propre body, and noght he.

(154-59)

It is conceivable, considering the similarities in their character and goals and keeping in mind his familiarity with Chaucer's works, that Lydgate could have written the stanzas on the Gentlewoman Amorous while thinking of the Wife of Bath.
The character in The Daunce of Machabree which most closely parallels a Chaucerian character is the Abbess. Death's speech to the Abbess and her reply constitute what could be a shortened paraphrase of the attributes of Chaucer's Prioress. The physical descriptions bear a striking likeness. Death speaks to the Abbess of "jowre veile jowre wimple / passyng of grete richesse" (XXXII.251), reminding one of the Prioress—"Ful semyly hir wympul pynched was" (Gen. Prol.151). Like the Prioress whose cloak was "Ful fetys" (Gen. Prol.157), the Abbess wears "mantels furred large & wide" (XXXII.250). The Abbess' "... Chekes rounde / vernysshed for to shyne" (XXXIII.261) are reminiscent of the Prioress' "... mouth ful smal, and therto softe and reed" (Gen. Prol.153). The Wife of Bath too has a "boold" face "and fair, and reed of hewe" (458).

Singing is mentioned in both characterizations. Of the Prioress, Chaucer notes that "Ful weel she soong the service dyvyne, / Entuned in hir nose ful semely" (Gen. Prol.122-23). Lydgate's Abbess says to Death, after admitting she must go with him:

Though hit so be / ful ofte I haue constreyned
Breste and throte / my notes owte to twyne.

(XXXIII.259-60)

Death's speech to the Abbess exhibits the ambivalent attitude revealed in Chaucer's description of the Prioress in the Prologue. The first line, "And ȝe my ladi / Jentel dame abbesse" (XXXII.249), seems to indicate respect, but the rest
of the stanza, in which Death tells the Abbess she will have to give up her fine clothes and soft bed to come with him, strikes a slightly satiric note. Chaucer, in the same way, shows respect for the Prioress as a religious woman, while at the same time gently satirizing her human failings and traits. After examining these similarities in the physical descriptions, characterizations, and attitudes, it is evident that Lydgate's Abbess and Chaucer's Prioress have much in common. Lydgate, of course, as a translator did not have in the original the wealth of details which Chaucer gives.

There are no characters in The Canterbury Tales who are very similar to Lydgate's male character additions, the Juror and the Tregetour (Magician). Death accuses the Juror of having based his decision on bribery (LXI.485-86) reminding one of the "somnour" in the Friar's Tale who ". . . knew of briberyes no / Than possible is to telle in yeres two" (1367-68). There are not, however further parallels between the two characters. There is no parallel figure to Lydgate's Tregetour, undoubtedly his original creation. He is the one character who is called by name, although he cannot be identified historically:

Maister Jo[n] Rikelle / some tyme tregetoure
Of nobille harry / kynge of Ingelonde.

(LXV.513-14)

The magician who appears in the Franklin's Tale is also called a tregetoure (1141). He is hired by Aurelius to "maken illusioun"
that the rocks have been removed from the coast of Brittany (1264).

These two male characters, along with slight changes in wording, represent the greater part of Lydgate's original contribution to the *Daunce of Machabree*. Lydgate can, however, be credited with having retained much of the original satiric tone. This is true of the manner in which Death addresses the five additional characters. The gently sarcastic tone of the stanzas on the Abbess pervades the other four characterizations as well. Death chides the Lady of great estate, reminding her that none of her lover's tricks will avail her now; he mocks the youth of the Gentlewoman Amorous, pointing out that Penelope and Eleyne were once as beautiful as she and also had to go "on this daunce" (LVII.453). Death's tone to the Juror is more biting; his last words ring with sarcasm:

But now let see / with thi teynte face
To-fore the Juge / howe thow cannest the quyte.

(LXI.487-88)

The tone is again milder in Death's admonition to the Tregetour:

For alle the sleightes / and turnyng of thyn honde
Thow moste come nere / this daunce to vndurstonde.

(IXV.516-17)

For the most part, then, Death gently mocks but does not jeer. This is the same tone which largely pervades the French *Danse Macabre* and *The Canterbury Tales*. All three—the *Danse Macabre*,...
Lydgate's loose translation of it, and The Canterbury Tales—attempt "To scheue this worlde / is but a pilgrimage" (V.37), and although the human sins of this life are closely observed, they are tempered with the belief in a "Paradyse with glorie" (LXXXI.647).
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