

## LATIN TEXTS OF THE DANCE OF DEATH

In the year 1833 Francis Douce, writing upon the subject of the Dance of Death, spoke of "a Latin poem that seems to have been composed in the twelfth century by our celebrated countryman Walter de Mapes, as it is found among other pieces that carry with them strong marks of his authorship. It is entitled 'Lamentacio et deploracio pro Morte et consilium de vivente Deo.' In its construction there is a striking resemblance to the common metrical stanzas that accompany the Macaber Dance." Douce then cites from two manuscripts of the poem, giving their names in a footnote; he indicates no difference between the two texts in structure, although such exists in marked degree.

Eight years later the French scholar Achille Jubinal, in his description of the "Danse des Morts" of La Chaise-Dieu in Auvergne, repeated part of Douce's remark, saying that Walter Map was author of a Lamentatio resembling the Dances of Death; and Dufour, discussing that general subject in 1874, referred to the same passage. No examination of the texts described by Douce seems, however, to have been made; the article on French literature in Gröber's *Grundriss*, II, 841, again refers to Douce and his two manuscripts, but in passing only; and Künstle, in his valuable study of the Dances of Death and their source, alludes to the second of these poems as by Walter Map and as still unprinted.

The two Latin texts mentioned by Douce are printed below.<sup>1</sup> The first and briefer of these, which I shall for convenience term the *Vado mori*, is from the manuscript Lansdowne 397 of the British Museum; it is a transcript of the first half of the fifteenth century, made by John Wessington, prior of Durham, owner of the volume; the copy gives no clue as to authorship. In this poem a prologue of six lines, written in interlacing rime, is followed by twelve distichs, each beginning and ending with the words "Vado mori," and spoken by twelve different personages of graduated rank, from Pope

<sup>1</sup> I make my print from photographs; the manuscripts I have not examined. In *Studi Medievali* III, 514 (April, 1910), is a note preliminary to this print.

to pauper. Of this poem another text exists, in the Amplonian library at Erfurt; it is printed from the manuscript by Schum, in his catalogue of the library, p. 41, and was briefly commented upon by Carlo Pascal in the *Studi Medievali*, II, 559. It is again printed, more correctly, by W. Fehse in the *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, XLII, 277 (October, 1910). Another copy also, in the Bibliothèque Mazarin at Paris, No. 980, is mentioned but not printed by E. Male, *Revue des deux mondes*, XXXII, 658.

The longer text is found in MS Brit. Mus. Royal 8 B vi, a miscellaneous volume containing among other a copy of Petrarch's version of the Griselda-story and several Latin debate-poems. The hand of the scribe may be as late as the seventeenth century. Another hand, certainly of that period, has written above the text the title "Incipit Lamentacio et deploracio pro morte et consilium de viuere deo." This version we may accordingly call the *Lamentatio*; no author is mentioned. Its text, while obviously based on the *Vado mori*, which it incorporates, has been expanded. Not only is the exordium now of sixteen lines, and the number of personages increased from twelve to nineteen, but a distich of response by some person unnamed, beginning and ending each time with the words "Vive deo," has been inserted after each "Vado mori" distich. The scribe has written below the last couplet his "Explicit," so that the allusion of Künstle to Map's concluding description of a vision in which three lords are confronted by three dead men can bear no reference to this text; and as yet no other copy of this *Lamentatio* has been made known. Künstle's note asserts the existence of the poem in English manuscripts of the fourteenth century, without further particulars. The point would be of great interest in the literary development of the Death-motive.

The connection of Map's name with either poem is of the most shadowy and unfounded nature; the surmise of Douce, based as he plainly says only upon the presence in the manuscript of other work apparently by Map, was but a surmise.

#### THE VADO MORI

Dum mortem meditor crescit michi causa doloris  
 Nam cunctis horis mors venit ecce eitor

Pauperis et regis communis lex moriendi Dat causam flendi si bene scripta legis Gustato pomo nullus transit sine morte Heu missera sorte labitur omnis homo	4
Vado mori papa qui iussu regna subegi Mors michi regna tulit eccine vado mori	8
Vado mori rex sum quid honor quid gloria regum Est via mors hominis regia vado mori	
Vado mori presul cleri populique lucerna Qui fueram validus languo vado mori	12
Vado mori miles victor certamine belli Mortem non didici vincere vado mori	
Vado mori monachus mundi moriturus amor Vt moriatur amor hic michi vado mori	16
Vado mori legista fui defensor egenis Causidicus causas descio vado mori	
Vado mori logicus aliis concludere noui Conclisit breuiter mors michi vado mori	20
Vado mori medicus medicamine non redimendus Quicquid agat medici pocio vado mori	
Vado mori sapiens michi nil sapiencia prodest Me reddit fatuum / mors fera vado mori	24
Vado mori diues vt quid michi copia rerum Dum mortem nequeat pellere vado mori	
Vado mori cultor collegi farris aceruos Quos ego pro vili computo vado mori	28
Vado mori pauper quem pauper Christus amauit Hunc sequar euitans omnia vado mori	

Variants of the Erfurt text, as printed by Fehse, *op. cit.*, are: L. 1 reads *cogito* instead of *meditor*. L. 2 opens with *Iam*, closes with *cito*. L. 9 ends *regni* instead of *regum*. L. 18 reads *resero* instead of the *descio* here written. In l. 19 the speaker is termed *laycus* instead of *logicus*. L. 25 reads *ad quid* instead of *vt quid*.

Four couplets of this poem, those of Rex, Miles, Medicus, and Logicus, are prefixed to a copy of "Earth upon Earth" in the manuscript Balliol College Oxford 354, printed by Flügel in *Anglia* 26, 217-19; and in that same poem, copied about 1500, there is an allusion to Lydgate's "Dance of Death"<sup>1</sup> as painted in Pardon Churchyard, St. Paul's. The poet says—

Yf ye list of the trewth to se a playn figure  
Go to seynt powlis & se ther the portrawtour.

There is also a French poem of sixty six-line stanzas, "Le Mirouer de Monde,"<sup>2</sup> in which a series of personages speak their farewells to life; each stanza begins and closes "Je vois (vais?) mourir," just as these Latin couplets begin and close "Vado mori."

The interdependence of most of the existing Death-dances and their nearly allied forms cannot, indeed, be doubted; and this adds to the complexity of the problem which they present. We have upon the one hand some half-score of poems, French, German, and Spanish, dating mainly within the first half of the fifteenth century; in all of these the processional and dialogue-character is similar, and most of them were accompanied by paintings in which one or many skeletons urged on their unwilling victims. The Paris text of 1424 and its frescoes, on the walls of SS. Innocents, struck the eye of Lydgate, and his translation, with a series of pictures, was painted in St. Paul's cloister at the expense of John Carpenter, town clerk of London and sometime friend of Whittington. The same French verses, expanded and more elaborately illustrated, were frequently printed in France from 1485 on, and the line of painters of Death continues until Dürer and Holbein.

On the other hand we have, earlier than the fifteenth century, scattered representations of Warnings or Triumphs of Death, in which there is no processional character and no attempt at representing all classes of humanity. Frequently the painting shows a group of dead confronting a group of the living, as in the widely

<sup>1</sup> This text, with introduction, will soon appear.

<sup>2</sup> Printed in the appendix to Méon, *Vers sur la Mort*, Paris, 1835; some stanzas are printed by Varnhagen, *Zeitschrift für roman. Philologie*, I, 548, from a fourteenth-century manuscript. I have a copy of Brit. Mus. Add. 29986, a fourteenth-century text.

popular idea of the "Three Living and Three Dead," which was common in France earlier than the first Death-procession of which record has survived, perhaps earlier than any Death-procession. In this representation the latest investigator of the Death-dances<sup>1</sup> would find their source.

The texts here printed have, however, not yet been considered as links in the history of the Death-motive in mediaeval literature. The *Vado mori*, of which the Erfurt text is dated in the fourteenth century, is suggestive because of its processional character; and the *Lamentatio*, in which the *Vado mori* text is developed to dialogue, is yet more closely allied, as Douce said, with the typical Dance of Death verses. And it is of a character which may awaken again the desire to treat the Dances of Death as a mimetic genus, to ally them with drama as well as with art.

#### THE LAMENTATIO

Dum mortem recolo: crescit <i>mihî</i> causa doloris	
Nam cunctis horis: mors venit ecce cito	
Mors genus omne terit. <sup>2</sup> sequitur sed vita futura	
Celica futura; nunc sibi finis erit	4
Equa lege capit: mors magnos atque pusillos	
Nunc hos nunc illos precipitando rapit	
Contendunt vario: sibi mors et vita duello	
Illa suo bello. <sup>2</sup> separat; ista pio suo	8
Pauperis et regis: communis lex moriendi	
Dat eam flendi. <sup>2</sup> si bene scripta legis	
Mors vitam resecat sternit pro tempore fortem	
Sed tandem mortem, vita probata necat	12
Gustato pomo. <sup>2</sup> nullus transit sine morte	
Heu misera sorte. <sup>2</sup> labitur omnis homo	
Ad certamen eo. <sup>2</sup> litis lis certat amori	
Dicis vado mori, consulo viue deo	16
Vado mori papa qui iussu regna subegi	
Mors <i>mihî</i> regna tulit: hecine vado mori	
Viue deo papa: nunc mamona sit dea pape	
Desine papa dee: viuere: viue deo	20

<sup>1</sup> Karl Künstle, *Die Legende der drei Lebenden und der drei Toten und der Totentanz*, Freiburg, 1908.

- Vado mori rex sum: *qui(d) honor quid gloria regni*  
 Est via mors hominis: regia vado mori  
 Viue deo *per quem*: rex es . re *nunc* adorna  
 Rex rege, rex deus est . rex ho(*mo*): viue deo 24
- Vado mori *presul*: cleri *populique* lucerna  
 Qui fueram validus: *languet* vado mori  
 Viue deo *presul*; cuius vice stas *in honore*  
 forma gregi *datus* est: sta: *bene*, viue deo 28
- Vado mori miles: belli *certamine* victor  
 Mortem non didici: *vincere* vado mori  
 Viue deo miles: *pacem patriamque* tuere  
 forcior in fidei: robore . viue deo 32
- Vado mori *monachus*: mundi moriturus amoris  
 Vt moriatur amor: dic *mihi*: vado mori  
 Viue deo *monache*: *quodque aueris* ipse memento  
 Christo commoriens: *in cruce* viue deo 36
- Vado mori: legista fui, defensor egenis  
 Causidicus causas: desero vado mori  
 Viue deo: legista dei; *lex vera* probatur  
 Ne te lex *perdat*: *perdita* . viue deo 40
- Vado mori rethor: *placitans* florente relatu  
 Muneribus letor: *languet* vado mori  
 Viue deo rethor: *iustas sustolle* querelas  
 Munera que *cecant*: respue, viue deo 44
- Vado mori *populo*: *verbum vite* reserare  
 Qui solitus fueram: *languet* vado mori  
 Viue deo doctor: qui *virtutes* docuisti  
 Cuncta que *peccata*: *spernere*: viue deo 48
- Vado mori *logicus*: aliis *concludere* noui  
 Conclisit breuiter: mors vado mori  
 Viue deo *logice*: *premissas* fac tibi vite  
 Ne conclusa *tibi*: sit via: viue deo 52
- Vado mori *medicus*: *medicamine non redimendus*  
 Quicquid agant *medici*: reppuo vado mori  
 Viue deo *medice*: *fallax est ars* medicine  
 Est *medicina* deus: *optima* viue deo 56

- Vado mori cantor:<sup>o</sup> *frangens notulas modulando*  
 In lacrimas muto; cantica: vado mori  
 Viue deo Cantor:<sup>o</sup> *sit vox bene consona laudi*  
 Et mens concordet:<sup>o</sup> *sit bene viue deo* 60
- Vado mori sapiens:<sup>o</sup> *mihi nil sapientia prodest*  
 Me reddit fatuum:<sup>o</sup> *mors fera, vado mori*  
 Viue deo sapiens:<sup>o</sup> *qui sursum sunt sapiendo*  
 Desipit hic mundus : tu sape . viue deo 64
- Vado mori diues:<sup>o</sup> *ad quid mihi copia rerum*  
 Cum mortem nequeant: pelleri vado mori  
 Viue deo diues:<sup>o</sup> *opibus simul et pietate*  
 Pauper eget: fer opem . da tua . viue deo 68
- Vado mori Cultor: *collegi ferris aceruos*  
 Quos ego pro vili:<sup>o</sup> *deputo . vado mori*  
 Viue deo Cultor: *manus vtiliter colat agrum*  
 Religione dei:<sup>o</sup> *mens pia . viue deo* 72
- Vado mori . *burgensis eram . sensum cumulau*  
 Omnia mors adimit: *impia . vado mori*  
 Viue deo: *seu burgensis: seu Ciuis in vrbe*  
 Vt sis viua dei:<sup>o</sup> *mansio . viue deo* 76
- Vado mori nauta: *fluctus fulcans remigando*  
 Mors proram perimit:<sup>o</sup> *naufraga, vado mori*  
 Viue deo nauta:<sup>o</sup> *que multos obruit vnda*  
 fforsan erit subita:<sup>o</sup> *mors tua: viue deo* 80
- Vado mori . *pincerna fui . potum michi fellis*  
 Hora proponandi . vltima vado mori  
 Viue deo pincerna . *dei sunt pocula vina*  
 ffons viuus deus est:<sup>o</sup> *hunc bibe . viue deo* 84
- Vado mori pauper:<sup>o</sup> *pro Christo: cuncta relinuens*  
 Hunc sequar . *euitans omnia . vado mori*  
 Viue deo pauper: *tam re quam mente beata*  
 Nil vt heus . *et heus omnia . viue deo* 88
- Vado mori . *pietate potens benefactor egenis*  
 Hanc mors non resecat:<sup>o</sup> *hac duce . vado mori*  
 Viue deo carus: *rapiaris in eius amorem*  
 Tota fer in donum:<sup>o</sup> *viscera . viue deo* 92

Nulli mors partis:<sup>2</sup> concludens singula fine  
 Omnia transibu(n)t:<sup>2</sup> preter amare deum  
 Viue deo . bene viuis ei; si viuis amori  
 Non potes ante deum:<sup>2</sup> viuere preter eum

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*Explicit*

This poem is written in double columns, on folio 30, *a* and *b*, of the manuscript; the two lines of each couplet are connected at their inner ends by a brace, and the "Viue deo" is in each case written in the right-hand column parallel to its corresponding "Vado mori"; between them the scribe has written the name of the personage. He marks the last two distichs "Conclusio" and the two just preceding with an abbreviated word which is apparently "Elemosynarius." It should be added that many of these markings are in the hand which prefixed to the poem its title. At the foot of the last left-hand column are appended two "Vado mori" distichs, marked as possible substitutes for those of Rethor and Nauta; they are:

Vado mori placitor: hundredis et comitatu  
 Tmria<sup>1</sup> et fortitudo nunc deficiu(n)t: languo vado mori

Vado mori nauta fluctus qui fulco marinos  
 Naufragor . aufertur . anchora vado mori. 100

An analysis of either the meter or the Latinity of this composition would take the student far afield. On the second point the crudities of the author are often painful; but it is noticeable that wherever the two poems agree, wherever the *Lamentatio* reproduces the earlier *Vado mori*, it moves more safely than in its added portions. The worst puzzles of the text<sup>2</sup> are in the "Viue deo" couplets, and in these couplets also the attempt at amplifying the *Vado mori*'s play with word-stems and with alliteration has occasionally resulted in barbarism. Comparing the *Vado mori* text, in its two copies Erfurt and Lansdowne, with that text as imbedded in the *Lamentatio*, we find the *Lamentatio* resembling Lansdowne in its reading of l. 49, Erfurt in its reading of l. 65, perhaps of l. 38. Much more numerous are its own variants: in l. 1 *recolo* spoils the rime-scheme; in l. 10 *eam* is miswritten for *causam*; in l. 21 *qui* appears instead of *quid*; in l. 21 *regni* instead of *regum*; in l. 34 *dic* instead of *hic*;

<sup>1</sup> This word reads thus in the manuscript, with no mark of contraction; it was perhaps intended for *Temperancia*.

<sup>2</sup> I have to thank my friend Dr. Edith Rickert for help upon these texts.

in l. 54 *agant* and *reppuo* (for *respuo*?) instead of *agat* and *pocio*; in l. 66 *cum* instead of *dum*; in l. 69 *ferris* instead of *farris*; in l. 70 *deputo* instead of *computo*. L. 85 is materially changed, and the word-order of l. 29 is altered. Twice the sign for an omitted nasal has been forgotten (94, 98), and twice the stroke above a letter is dragged into a misleading curve.

These slips, however, do not present so much difficulty as do a few passages in the text. In ll. 24 and 92 I have expanded the contractions *ho* and *do<sup>m</sup>* to *homo* and *donum*; in l. 28 the scribe has written *sta* with line over *a*, and I have made no expansion to *sancta*, as the text is evidently corrupt in this line. The same is probably true of ll. 63 and 64; and in l. 82 *proponandi* should evidently read *propinandi*. In l. 35 one might desire to read either *muneris Christi* or *vulneris Christi*, but the manuscript shows an apparent running-together of *a* and *v*—*avneris*.

Whatever the shortcomings of scribe or poet, however, the value of the two works in the history of literature is not thereby affected. Were it possible to date the *Lamentatio*, to discover how far anterior to the seventeenth century its production lies, to place it earlier than the Death-dances of 1400–50, its text would become of the utmost importance to students of the subject. For in this poem, as compared with the *Vado mori*, the dialogue-form appears. It is noticeable that in the dialogue here the human actor speaks first each time; and the voice which replies is not necessarily that of Death, but perhaps of some ecclesiastic looking from his pulpit upon the passing figures. We are reminded, indeed, that this, according to Male,<sup>1</sup> was the earliest form of the Dances of Death—an “illustrated” sermon, such as that pseudo-Augustinian sermon from which derived the *Processus Prophetarum* of the miracle-plays. But we must note the formal difference between such a dialogue, composed of farewell speeches followed by anonymous comment, and a dialogue composed of the repeated summons of Death followed by farewell speeches.

Künstle, emphasizing the derivation of the Dances of Death from the legend of the Three Living and Three Dead, bases his argument

<sup>1</sup> *Revue des deux mondes* (1906), XXXII, 647–79. Compare Bolte in *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*, XVII, 41.

on the assumption that one of the two, Dance or Legend, must be derived from the other. He points out that the Legend is much earlier than all known Dances, and is found in the same countries and under the same conditions. He then asserts that it is not correct to see in the Dance-representations Death leading the living; rather have we the dead as monitors. For the processional treatment of the motive he would suggest an explanation from architectural conditions; in a wall-painting the two groups of three, the Living and the Dead, were necessarily broken up into three pairs, and this sequence of couples was then continued to fill the remaining wall-spaces. Thus grew up the procession of the Dead leading all classes of the living, erroneously termed the Dance of Death.

But if we were to deny the theoretic foundation of all this, the necessity of deriving either motive, Dance or Legend, from the other; if we preferred to regard the two as allied but independent expressions of the mediaeval Death-fascination, we should not be without evidence. A full demonstration is impossible until the dialogues between Man and Death have been gathered, until the history of tapestry-poems has been written, until the procession-motive of the Middle Ages, which Künstle minimizes, has been discussed. As example of the first, take the poem preserved in the manuscript Harley 7333, of the fifteenth century. Here Man addresses Death in 36 rimed lines beginning:

Quis es tu quem video / hic / stare in figura  
 In horribili visu turpissima statura  
 In tuo toto corpore est macies obscura  
 Me tua dispositio perterrint in pura. . . .

And Death replies in 36 lines beginning:

Ego sum quem metuit omnis creatura  
 Timent me preterita / presencia et futura. . . .

Were we possessed of the entire mass of death-dialogues written in the latter Middle Ages, we might argue more conclusively the question whether in the Dances it is Death himself or the dead counterpart of each victim who addresses the reluctant mortals.

The existing Dance-texts give us no certain evidence, and the pictures, with their frequent repetition of the skeleton as escort to the human figure, further confuse the discussion. In the Legend of the Three Living and Three Dead the case is clear; but the attempt to bring this clearness into the Dances of Death by the simple process of asserting their derivation from the Legend is not possible in view of the *Vado mori*. The *Vado mori* lies back of what is after all the distinguishing character of the Dances—their processional form; and it admits of no analogy with the Legend.

The text of the *Lamentatio* has no figure of Death, and that of the *Vado mori* is still simpler. The latter could be, so far as its form is concerned, the text of either a tapestry or of a dumbshow with a single "recitator," between which two types the external difference was very slight. Its brief couplets adapt its text especially to tapestry, although in later tapestry-poems, such as those of Lydgate,<sup>1</sup> the seven- or eight-line stanza is freely used; his *Life of Saint George* and his *Bycorne and Chichevache* are almost as wordy as his didactic productions. Even between the developed drama and tapestry a relation could exist; the French *Condamnacion de Banquet*,<sup>2</sup> supposedly of about the year 1500, contains the same characters and story as are found in the tapestry of Nancy, once the property of Charles the Bold (died 1477), and described in a letter<sup>3</sup> to him, before its purchase, by a subject of the duke's sojourning in Vienna.

Many impulses were at work in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—so many, that it is not yet possible to disentangle them and say: Here, at this point, arose the Dance of Death. One mental habit of the Middle Ages expressed itself in lists and classifications; another and more widespread, the fondness for contrast and for argument, expressed itself in debates—of Body and Soul, of Wine and Water, of the Owl and the Nightingale, of the Ivy and the Holly, etc. And upon each of these larger tendencies the immediate Death-interest of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries could find a point of attachment. Wherever a list was connected with the

<sup>1</sup> These will shortly appear.

<sup>2</sup> See Fournier, *Théâtre français avant la Renaissance* (2d ed.), 216 ff.

<sup>3</sup> See Jubinal, *Tapisseries à Personnages* (1840), 52 ff.

idea of death, one step was taken, and the *Vado mori* resulted; when such a list became a dialogue, the *Lamentatio* took form; when in this dialogue Death (or the Dead) became the interlocutor, the Dance of Death appeared. But whether the list or the debate or the figure of Death were the fertilizing idea in the final union, what the exact relationship may be between two such mediaeval products as the Dance and the Legend of the Living and Dead, we have not yet sufficient evidence to decide.

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