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# Translanguaging, Word and Image, and the *Danse Macabre*

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## Abstract

The late medieval *Danse Macabre*, a bilingual word-and-image tradition, may be understood through the theoretical lens of translanguaging. This article begins with an analysis of the visual reception of this tradition in a public art installation in Luxembourg City during the coronavirus pandemic, and is followed by the challenges of applying paratranslation to a page of the early printed *Danse Macabre* (1486). Returning to the earliest translations of the *Danse*, the article also examines evidence of untranslatability and tensions between three literary languages in the Catalan *Dança de la Mort* (c. 1490).

## Keywords

medieval studies – *Danse Macabre* – translanguaging – modern public art – multilingualism – paratranslation

Literary multilingualism is often multimodal in its creative expression, blending words and images and thereby drawing attention to the fact that images have their own “languages” too. The focus on relations between the idioms of visual texts has become a dominant trend in recent research. This article presents the ways in which the visual, multilingual text can be theorized through three different receptions of the late medieval *Danse Macabre*, a poem-and-image cycle

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that depicts the disruptive presence of Death within society.<sup>1</sup> It emerges from an editing and translation project related to the *Danse Macabre* undertaken in 2020 with Oosterwijk and Ungeheuer (Léglu, forthcoming).

This project shed new light on a subject I had explored a few years before, with the coronavirus pandemic giving it new relevance (Léglu, 2018). During one of my daily walks in streets depopulated by the sanitary measures of partial lockdown, I encountered a modern art installation that adapted motifs from the macabre tradition. It was even more striking because it stood in an urban setting very similar to those medieval examples that have been studied notably by Gertsman (2010) and Chaganti (2018). This public artwork chimed with my own reflection on what could be the best approach to translating macabre texts and images that are familiar to modern people yet locked in their distant sociocultural contexts. Emerging from an encounter between a field of research (the *Danse Macabre*) and its immediate context, this article is an exploration of the translingual potential of an old tradition. Each of the three case studies explores how context, understood in terms of languages, sociohistorical milieu, and media, determines the expression of a set of standardized motifs.

The *Danse Macabre* is an artwork that asserts the equality of all people before Death, and their inevitable dissolution to bare bones. It depicts a series of figures, almost always male, ranked by social status from the Emperor and the Pope down to the Laborer, the Child, and the Hermit, as they are invited, one by one, to join the desiccated bodies of the dead in their dance. The dead interact with the living as their ghastly mirror reflection as well as their new companions. The words in prose and verse act as frames for, and as commentaries on, the powerful images (Figure 1).

The *Danse Macabre* is an “imagetext” as defined by Mitchell, as “composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine image and text”; Brantley first applied the term effectively to medieval works (Mitchell, 1994; Brantley, 2007). Most readers, even those who specialize in medieval studies, will experience the *Danse Macabre* primarily as image rather than as text. The relationship between the pictures and the words is not hierarchical in the sense that one is

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1 The bibliography on the *Danse Macabre* is huge, and in addition to the recent studies listed in this article, it is also useful to consult Laurent Brun's online bibliography: [https://www.arlima.net/ad/danse\\_macabre.html](https://www.arlima.net/ad/danse_macabre.html). For an introduction to this tradition, see <http://la-mortdanslart.com/>. For simplicity, I give the title in its most commonly used form as *Danse Macabre*. The original title of the Parisian work of 1424–25 appears as *Danse Macabré*. John Lydgate translated it two years later as the dance of *Machabree*. One early manuscript identifies one of the author figures as *Machabré docteur* (Paris BNF fr. 14989, fol. 12) (Wijsman, 2021). The tradition gives the French language the adjective *macabre* and the masculine noun *macchabée* (a cadaver).

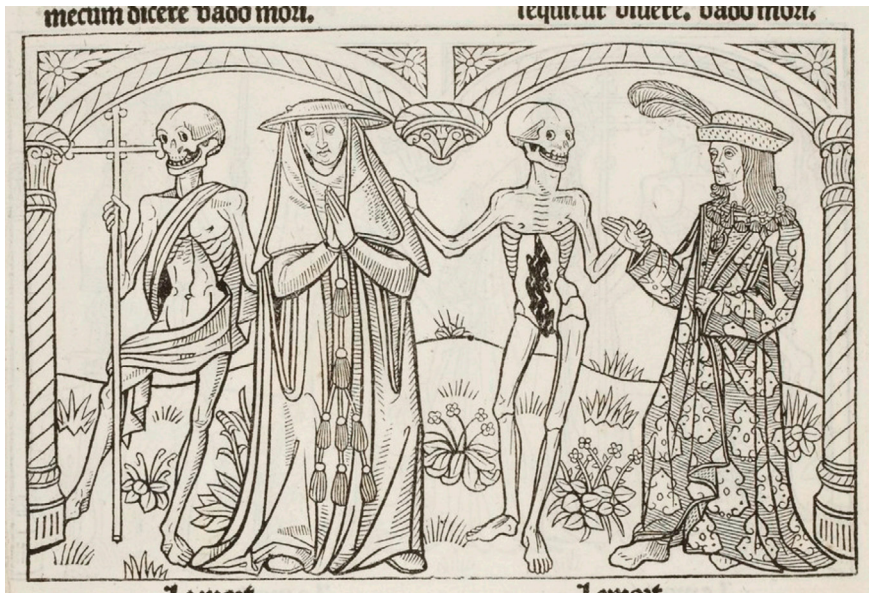


FIGURE 1 Guyot Marchant, *Miroir salutaire*, *La Danse macabre historiée*, Paris, 1486, page 13 (detail). © Bibliothèque nationale de France

not subordinated to the other. Instead, the words depend on the verbal gloss, but that gloss need not be present in the space of the image. Mitchell suggests that in analyzing imagetexts, “the starting point is with language’s entry into (or exit from) the pictorial field itself [...] situated within institutions, histories, and discourses” (1994: 98). The early *Danse Macabre* was bilingual, a French poem with a prologue and an epilogue in Latin prose accompanying the cycle of images. There is no neutrality in the interplay of these idioms (Latin and vernacular, visual and verbal), either for the fifteenth-century reader or the modern translator. Inequalities and tensions between languages that in the case of Latin and French have laid claim to universalism (Apter, 2013; Casanova, 2015) inform the three examples that are set out in this article.

The first-attested *Danse Macabre* was painted in Paris’s churchyard of the Saints-Innocents in 1424–5, a public space that was lined with charnel houses. The mural was painted on the back wall of the arcade that stood beneath the charnel house on the south side of the cemetery. Its creation was recorded as an important event by a Parisian diarist, and it was soon used as a dramatic backdrop for sermons (Oosterwijk, 2008). The texts of the Parisian wall painting were translated into English in 1426, and soon after, the text was painted as an imagetext in the cemetery of St Paul’s cathedral in London (Davidson and Oosterwijk, 2021).

Both the Paris and London mural cycles have disappeared, but in addition to the survival of many manuscript copies, the French poem was printed with woodcut illustrations in 1485 by Guyot Marchant, then reprinted several times with several additions (Wijsman, 2021; Zvonareva, 2021). The imagetext's French origins are disputed, as the Castilian *Dança general de la muerte* may be a close contemporary (Sola Solé, 1981; Marin Gallo, 2021). The Dance of Death was a popular tradition across Europe in a range of media, including wall paintings, books, performances, and objects (Kinch, 2013: 185–226; Davidson and Oosterwijk, 2021). Around twenty years after the mural in Paris, a *Totentanz* was painted in the cities of Basel, Lübeck (both are lost), and Tallinn (Reval) (Gertsman, 2010). Recent discoveries include actors' roles (scripts) from the duchy of Savoy (Fréchet, 2020) and the duchy of Cleves (Claassens and Sternberg, 1996), as well as an *aljamiado* text, in which the Castilian *Dança general de la muerte* was transliterated into Hebrew script (Infantes, 1997; Hamilton, 2012). This was a successful multilingual, multimodal imagetext.

The three case studies in this article take the concept of translanguaging as a springboard to explore the multilingual interpretation of visual work. Of late, the theoretical concept of translanguaging has grown into a broader inquiry into multilingual and multimodal communication (Baynham and Lee, 2019). The work of Lee is especially relevant because he stresses the creativity of translanguaging, and image literacy, in the visual arts (Lee, 2015; Baynham and Lee, 2019: 151–78). This dynamic has also been noted by Yoon-Ramirez, who states that “visual art is not a mere tool to enhance translanguaging practice, but a foundational literacy” (2021: 24–5). In her study of applied creative practice, Yoon-Ramirez underlines the importance of the “translanguaging space” as a site for the creation of dialogues and exchanges that may lead to new perceptions of identity and society (2021: 25).

There were many such sites in medieval Europe. Painted on walls, performed at court, and printed in books, the *Danse Macabre* does not fit any single literary, artistic, or “national” tradition, but rather has been circulated as an accessible set of codes for adoption and reinterpretation. It is an excellent illustration of Dembeck's statement that the study of literary multilingualism depends on “the assumption that it is not a necessary condition for any text [...] to be written (or uttered) in only one language, in the sense of a *langue*” (2017: 2). The first case study in this article looks at the effect of wordless images in a multilingual and multimodal “translanguaging space,” with the added layer of the contemporary reception of a medieval tradition.

### Translanguaging the *Danse Macabre* in Luxembourg

During winter 2020–21, at the height of the global coronavirus pandemic, the city of Luxembourg hosted an installation designed by the Luxembourgish artist Julie Wagener (b. Bogotá, 1990), produced in stained glass by the Belgian stained-glass artist Elora de Pape (Léglu, 2021) (Figs. 2 and 3). It was a window made up of four panels that each featured a human figure, with a frieze of small skeletons dancing beneath their feet. The design was based on a traditional stained-glass window, such as might have been created from the medieval to the modern era, often in Christian religious contexts.<sup>2</sup> A small label toward the bottom of the window named the composition in English as *Pillars of the Earth* (Figure 2).



FIGURE 2 Julie Wagener and Elora de Pape. *Pillars of the Earth*. Cercle Cité, CeCIL's Box, October 29, 2020–January 17, 2021. Image by Julie Wagener, reproduced with permission

In quotations that were published in the news media, Wagener stated that she wished the design to present “a reflection on power, ethics and defiance in our contemporary society.” The four human figures were, she stated, representations of the Environment, Society, Politics, and the Economy (Coubray, 2020).

2 There are stained glass windows depicting the Dance of Death in Norwich, Bern (1516–19), and Lübeck (a modern rendering, 1956). My thanks to Sophie Oosterwijk for this information.

However, these labels do not appear on the artwork, and they would not have been obvious to the viewer who had not read Wagener's words separately. The only text below the installation was the title of the work in English, *Pillars of the Earth*, and the names of its two creators. Instead, Wagener's words were published in newspapers and magazines as well as online, in English, French, and German. These messages were destined for multilingual speech communities, because the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg has three "administrative languages": French, German, and Luxembourgish.

Wagener and de Pape's reflective reception of the *Danse Macabre* echoes the new salience that this tradition had acquired during the global pandemic, a point made and developed by Chaganti (2020). Her studies of the *Danse Macabre* and its modern reception in the contemporary arts help illuminate the continuing relevance of the tradition (Chaganti, 2012: 14–5; Chaganti, 2018, 99–143, 145–87). She has drawn attention to the multimodality of the *Danse Macabre*, as well as to the importance of the urban setting that framed it, and that often features as a backdrop in its visual schemes (Chaganti, 2012: 16–7). The installation in Luxembourg City was a distant echo of the display in the city of Arras of four snow sculptures based on the *Danse Macabre* during the winter of 1434/35. The four figures were apparently identified as an Emperor, a King, a Laborer, and *le Mort* (either "the dead" or "Death"), but their significance for the people of Arras has been lost (Oosterwijk, 2013; Wijsman, 2021: 70).

In Luxembourg, the installation was on the corner of the Place d'Armes, one of the main squares of the city center and one of the two traditional meeting places for markets, music, and demonstrations. It was displayed in a pop-up exhibition window looking out of the Cercle Cité arts center, facing a row of cafeterias on the pedestrianized rue du Curé. The dancing skeletons seemed to reflect the daily reports of the national and international death toll. A partial lockdown was announced a few days after the unveiling of the installation, so the artwork invited passersby to look as they moved around their urban space (café terraces were closed) until the curfew at eleven o'clock.

The installation adorned a building that housed Luxembourg's Chamber of Deputies from March 2020 until October 2021. Thus, a reflection on "politics, the economy, the environment and society" (an interpretation diffused solely online or in print) decorated the site of a government assembly displaced by a global pandemic. The installation's context could be viewed as an example of Simon's (2015) "cities in translation," where languages, cultures, and political agendas are set in dialogue by their proximity in the urban space. Simon points out that each person living in a "linguistically contested city" is aware at all times of their multilayered context: "The city becomes a crossroads of codes, a place of double entendres, where collective language

insecurities nourish a culture of doubt [...] dissonance is understood as a productive force" (2015: 408).

The absence of a verbal gloss can dispel the sense of a "right" or "wrong" interpretation of public art, freeing the viewers to discuss and interpret in varied languages (Horowitz and Masten, 2017: 152, 154). Nevertheless, the installation seemed to draw little attention from passersby. Indeed, as the installation was unveiled on October 29, 2020, the images looked like displays of skulls and other macabre items at Halloween. Furthermore, macabre themes have been popular in street art in Europe for several decades, so dancing skeletons might not have seemed bizarre (Pineau-Farge, 2019; Kearl, 2015). A giant skull adorned the open-air street art area in Luxembourg City's former abattoir for several years (Chrisillusion, 2014).

As has been noted in this article, Wagener's explanatory words did not appear on-site. Linguistic diversity is a familiar feature of both the Luxembourg-born population and the international community (47.2 percent of the population in 2020) (Stateg, 2021: 11, 13). The absence of written language opens the image to multiple idioms and an equal number of cultural interpretations. The four words that accompanied the four figures point also to the current importance of English as a lingua franca in Luxembourg City (see also the street poster exhibition FLOW, 2020).

A useful theoretical approach can be found in Lee's (2015) study of the relationship between translanguaging and visibility in contemporary art. Lee reads translanguaging as an intercultural dynamic based on critique. Exploring two contrasting approaches taken by the artist Xu Bing in depicting the complex relationship between English and Chinese languages, Lee addresses the importance of the multilingual context and underlines the asymmetries of prestige and power that accompany these artworks (2015: 444). He points out "how translanguaging functions in literary art as a critical rhetorical resource," and stresses that it "turns a text into a meta-commentary on language and communication issues, as well as into a politicized and deterritorialized space that resides in the liminal" (442).

In the case of *Pillars of the Earth*, the English words had no ostensible connection with the allegorical human figures in stained glass. They are in the liminal space beneath the installation, labeling it for the viewer but not explaining it. The choice of English removes the image from the trilingual national context and into the international lingua franca. There is a disconnection between the word, image, and medium that invites multiple responses. Lee points out that "a text can be apparently monolingual (in the sense of being written using a single code) but de facto translanguaging, in that its monolingual surface-texture belies more than one linguistic and/or cultural layering" (2015: 443).



When identifying accumulated codes within an apparently simple artwork, viewers must rely on their own knowledge, and it follows that the larger the number of codes, the more of a burden there is on the interpreters to either recall or research their own understanding of them. Viewing and reading a translingual artwork is therefore a dynamic process that makes the viewer intensely aware of their possession (or otherwise) of interpretative keys. The snow sculptures in Arras in 1435 are another example of a work that challenged viewers' decoding activity, because it used the accessible iconography of the *Danse Macabre* but removed it from both the text and the context of mural, church, or cemetery (Oosterwijk, 2013). Instead, the medium (snow) carried the *Danse's* key message that all lives, bodies, and social identities will eventually melt away.

The title of Wagener and de Pape's installation may allude to Ken Follett's novel cycle about medieval cathedral builders, *The Pillars of the Earth*, therefore designating the aesthetic choices of stained glass and medieval iconography. Correspondingly, Wagener explained her choice of medium by the commission of a work of art in a window, and her choice of theme by her interest in "the cultural heritage of past civilizations" (Léglu, 2021, citing Wagener). However, she also states that the design explores contemporary political concerns (Figure 3).



FIGURE 3 Julie Wagener and Elora de Pape. *Pillars of the Earth*. Cercle Cité, CeCIL's Box, Luxembourg, October 29, 2020–January 17, 2021. Image by Julie Wagener, reproduced with permission



Wagener states that the four figures are personified “pillars”: “I visualize four key components of our globalized capitalist society, which are—in their present form and function—highly damaging to this planet, the human, animal and vegetal [*sic*] beings that live on it and hinder or even prevent a transition to a more just, sustainable and sane world” (Léglu, 2021, citing Wagener). While her dancing skeletons are an allusion to the satirical *Danse Macabre*, she has changed their original symbolism: “Apart from the uncomfortable reminder that Death comes for us all, I imply that ‘dancing along’ means complying with a dysfunctional and oppressing system” (Léglu, 2021, citing Wagener).

Wagener’s explanation of her work applies to the attributes of the personifications. In addition to carrying an abacus and throwing some coins, the Economy is crowned, implying that it rules the world. Another complex use of codes is in the figure that is cutting the stem of a rose (see Wagener’s comments, Coubray, 2020). The rose usually signifies Love in Western iconography, but once the viewer applies Wagener’s written statement that this image represents Politics, they can reinterpret the rose as the modern emblem of Socialism, though that would be red or black, and this rose is white. This same viewer may, if they wish to do so, ponder the significance of cutting the stem of a rose. One viewer will evoke a bitter lover, and the other will see a rejection of Socialism. They might at that point notice that Politics is a string puppet. During 2020–21, the center of Luxembourg City remained the site of political demonstrations, including #BlackLivesMatter, women’s rights, and weekly silent marches by the hospitality sector. The installation introduced a further, discreet message at a time when every outdoors activity and gesture carried some weight. In terms of the symbolism of the macabre, the mirror held by Society is also the “Miroir salulaire,” the salvific mirror that the dance of the living with the dead presents for the edification of society (Fein, 2014; Lemé-Hébuterne, 2011). When Society challenges the viewer to look into its mirror, the mirror itself is opaque. The face of Society should be the focal point for the viewer’s reflection, but Society’s has split in half and her eyes are half-closed, resting in their hand, unable to gaze back.

Lee interprets translanguaging as a means of addressing “(in)communicability” (2015: 463). This installation was separated from the artist’s written gloss by the media in which they appeared: a public street and online or print news. It was hard to find the words, in any language, that might unlock the allegory. An installation that opens numerous interpretative possibilities by refusing to supply a written gloss *in situ* cannot be reduced to a single meaning. Instead, it opens a translanguaging space where different idioms and responses can coexist.

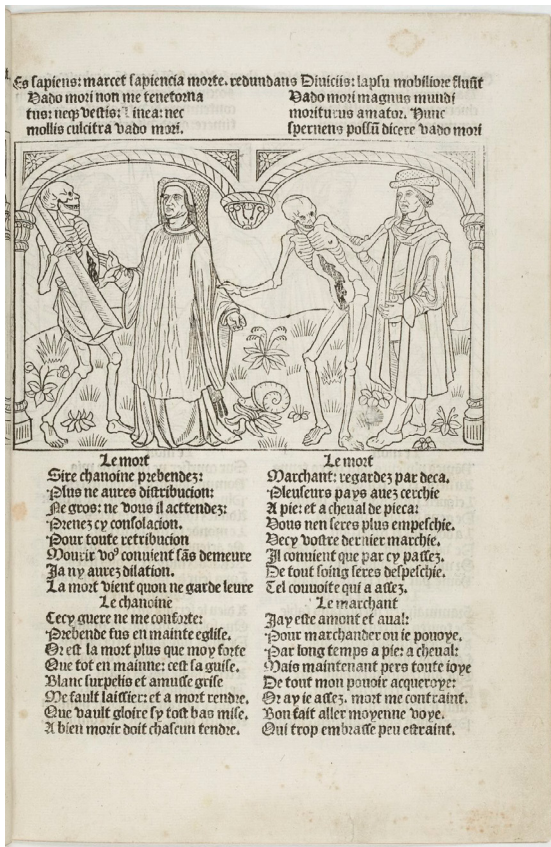
### Translanguaging Space on the Printed Page

The absence of readable language is another feature of the (in)communicability that Lee associates with translanguaging in imagetexts. A translanguaging space may construct a community by erasing or silencing those languages that do not serve its aims. To most modern readers of the medieval *Danse Macabre*, the Latin prologue and final words act as a pair of bookends to vernacular texts and wordless images, and some modern editions do not translate those sections, as a tacit acknowledgment that their value was more symbolic than semantic. Moving from the “translanguaging space” of a city during the coronavirus pandemic, I turn to the process of producing a modern translation of a medieval imagetext. Again, the idea of translanguaging is key, but this time it is a matter of rendering accurately both written languages in ways that do justice to the words’ relationship with the images. Although the *Danse Macabre* has been associated with modern *bande dessinée* (Taylor, 1989b), it is also resistant to that interpretive lens, as it circulates in image only, or as text alone, as well as in combinations of text and image. The *Danses Macabres* that were printed by Guyot Marchant in 1485–90 are not exact copies of the Parisian wall painting but are rather receptions of a wider tradition that had evolved over at least fifty years (Dujakovic, 2020). For example, the fresco of the *Danse Macabre* in the abbey of La Chaise-Dieu is preserved only as images, for the spaces allocated for its words have always been empty. The alignment of the images inside the abbey does not follow the order found in the early printed book based on the Parisian wall painting (Duchâteau, 2006; Hans-Collas, 2021: 86–8). It is identifiably a *Danse Macabre* but it does not reflect its supposed Parisian source, which is believed to be preserved most accurately in some manuscripts that are often not illustrated (Zvonareva, 2015; 2021).

As I noted, many modern studies of the *Danse Macabre* reproduce only the images and compare them with the French verses, devoting hardly any attention to the Latin prose and verse that were added by Marchant to his 1486 edition. Latin tends to be treated as an opaque code that signals authority but little else. There is little to recommend this decision to overlook the content of Latin at the expense of French, for even though Latin was accessible only to part of the *Danse’s* intended viewers, the literati would have been able to share their knowledge orally. Furthermore, the ability to read the verses in French would not have been the norm either. Modern language hierarchies may allow us to treat the Latin texts as either symbolic adornment or decoration, but the printed book of 1486 was created for a readership that could access both languages, if only through a third party, and that might have viewed Latin as the universal language of communication (Casanova, 2015).

Translating the printed book of 1486 invokes Yuste Frías’s insistence on treating word and image as a “couple texte-image,” analyzing both elements with the same degree of attention (2010: 295–300). He suggests that the translator approaches this “couple” as an inseparable unit, social and culturally conditioned, distinctive and never arbitrary (Yuste Frías, 2010: 300–1). His practice of paratranslation makes it impossible to ignore the Latin words, thereby restoring the multilingual richness of the work. Paying attention to the cultural interactions within each component of an imagetext is also typical of translanguaging (Lee, 2015; Baynham and Lee, 2019). Of course, translation adds a new language (in this case, modern English) to an interaction between three idioms.

Isolating one page in the 1486 *Danse Macabre* by Guyot Marchant is an exercise in unlocking this work, bearing in mind that the mural has been reframed for the printed page (Dujakovic, 2020) (Figure 4).



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

FIGURE 4 Guyot Marchant, *Miroir salutaire, La Danse macabre historíée*, Paris, 1486, page 19 (detail). © Bibliothèque nationale de France

Es sapiens: marcet sapiencia morte. redundans Diuiciis :  
lapsu mobiliore fluunt.

Vado mori non me tenet orna  
tus : neque uestis : linea : nec  
mollis culcitra vado mori.

Vado mori magnus mundi  
moriturus amator. Nunc  
Spermens possum dicere vado mori.

[Dead; Canon]

IMAGE

[Dead; Merchant]

Le mort  
Sire chanoine prebendez  
Plus naurez distribution  
Ne gros: ne vous y attendez  
Prenez cy consolation  
Pour toute retribution  
Mourir vous conuient sans demeure  
Ia ny aurez dilation  
La mort vient quon ne garde leure

Le mort  
Marchant regardez par deca  
Plusieurs pays auez cherchie  
A pie: et a cheual de pieca  
Vous nen serez plus empesche  
Vecy vostre dernier marche  
Il conuient que par cy passez  
De tout soing serez despesche  
Tel couuoite qui a assez

Le chanoine

Le marchant

Cecy guere ne me conforte  
Prebende suis en mainte eglise  
Or est la mort plus que moy forte  
Qui tout emmaine: cest sa guise  
Blanc surpelis: aumusse grise  
Me fault laisser: et a mort rendre  
Que vault gloire si tost bas mise  
A bien mourir doit chascun tendre

Iay este a mont et aual  
Pour marchander ou ie pouoie  
Par long temps: a pie: a cheual  
Mais maintenant pers toute ioye  
De tout mon pouoir acqueroye  
Or ay ie assez mort me contraint  
Bon fait aler moyenne voye  
Qui trop embrasse peu estraint

“Are you wise? Wisdom droops in death. Do you abound in riches? They flow away in swift flight” (CANNON, 2016: 182).

I am going to die. Neither clothing  
nor cloth can hold me back, nor a  
soft mattress. I am going to die.

I am going to die. The great lover of  
the world is going to die. Now  
I can say with disdain: I am going  
to die.

[Dead; Canon]

IMAGE

[Dead; Merchant]

The dead man

The dead man

<p>Sir prebendary canon          You shall no longer have your          allocation          Nor groats; stop expecting them.          Take comfort in this,          Your only reward is that          you must die without delay.          There will be no adjournment.          Death comes unexpectedly.</p>	<p>Merchant, look over here!          You have sought out many lands          on foot, and on horseback too.          You will no longer be burdened so,          because here is your last deal.          You must go this way.          You will be freed from all cares.          A man covets things who has got          enough.</p>
<p>The canon          This does not comfort me much.          I was a prebendary in many churches          Now Death is stronger than me,          Which takes everything away: that is          her habit.          White surplice and grey almuce            I must leave behind and surrender          to Death.          What use is glory when it cast down          so fast?          Dying well must be everyone's aim.</p>	<p>The merchant          I have gone uphill and down dale          to trade wherever I could,          a long time on foot, on horseback,          but now I lose all joy.            I used to earn money with all my          strength          Now I have enough, Death seizes          me.          It is good to take the middle path.            He who embraces too much holds          very little.<sup>3</sup></p>

As always, it is easiest to start with the image, which depicts an encounter between four human figures, set in a rectangular frame, with an arcade that divides them into two pairs. On the left, a canon seems to be in conversation with a verminous, skeletal cadaver that has taken hold of his hand and is carrying a coffin lid. The dead man on the right is tugging at the clothes of both the canon and the merchant, as if he is pulling them closer together (Davidson and Oosterwijk, 2021: 207). Meanwhile the merchant has laid his hand gently on the dead man's arm. Above the two pairs of living and dead are four lines of Latin verse in parallel columns, and below them are two eight-line stanzas each of the *Danse Macabre*.

3 In the following example, I quote the published translations by Cannon (2016: 182) and the edition and translation of the *Danse Macabre* by Davidson and Oosterwijk (2021: 171–93, and 182–3).

There are several challenges for a literary translation of this visual text. First, the visual layout must be preserved in a way that respects the source. Second, the image must not overshadow the texts, as the words take up over half the space on the page and their content (as well as their form) is important. In fact, on closer scrutiny, the image that dominates the middle part of the page connects the content of the Latin verses above and the *Danse Macabre* poem below. Furthermore, the words “Vado, mori” (I am going to die) appear four times, creating a self-contained unit that begins and ends with those two words.

The Latin verses are fragments of two poems. The top line is a quotation from the poem *Tobias* by Matthew of Vendôme (composed c. 1185), which was often used as a schoolbook. It is set above the two stanzas from the thirteenth-century poem known as *Vado mori*. The horizontal line replicates the top of the arcade in the image, and the two pairs of figures are echoed by the blocks of text, both above and below them. The French verses below the image underline the canon’s regret for his prosperous income and lifestyle, as well as the merchant’s resignation as he leaves his restless life of travel and trade.

There is both a visual and a verbal contrast between the two men. The canon’s accumulated church incomes and his comfortable vestments contrast with the merchant’s movement between lands and markets in search of wealth. Nevertheless, the merchant appears to embrace the opportunity to end his travels whereas the canon is regretful. As often in the *Danse Macabre*, the first quatrain of each stanza contrasts with the second. Thus, both the canon and the merchant have a change of perspective, moving from a regretful look at their life into a reflection on the best way to face the end. When the lines in the *Vado mori* are compared to those from the *Danse Macabre*, they seem to have been copied in order to echo the content of the French poem. The lines above the canon lament the loss of a comfortable life and those above the merchant indicate that a man who loves the world is about to leave it.

To sum up, four textual traditions cohabit on this page: the *Tobias*, the *Vado mori*, the *Danse Macabre*, and a proverb (the last line of the merchant’s stanza). The use of proverbs in the *Danse Macabre* has been seen as a distancing device, introducing a universal voice, that of proverbial wisdom, into the text (Fein, 2014; Taylor, 1989a). The image, a fifth tradition, pulls together these different codes and gives them visual and thematic coherence.

Modern reading habits silently set the accessible image above archaic French and below the “unreadable” Latin. It does not capture those readings that ensued when the book was read within a group that included the illiterate as well as the Latinate. The Latin verses on this page evoke the canon’s regrets over losing his comfortable bed and the merchant’s farewell to his love for the world (the site of his many travels and meetings). The reader may ponder also

if the *Marchant* on this page acts as a representation of Guyot Marchant, the editor and printer of the book (also a priest), whose love of trade and wealth cannot be doubted. It may even be that his hand touching the dead man's arm reflects a certain gratitude, for the second, expanded edition of 1486 reflects the success of his first edition of the previous year.

On this page, a gigantic snail sits directly below the pendentive of the arcade, at the middle point of the space between the two pairs of human beings. Neither the Latin nor the French verses refer to a snail. The snail's eye stalks are pointing in the same leftward direction as the canon and the merchant. The viewer is invited to ponder its significance unaided (or unencumbered) by the written word. The snail, moving quietly into the dance unobserved by its protagonists, allows the viewer to develop new ideas. The snail has an ambiguous symbolic status in human societies, as it is treated variously as food, as a competitor for food, or as vermin (Magnin and Martin, 2012). In this instance, the snail may be viewed as a further depiction on this page of the sedentary canon, fixed upon its "leaf" (paper as well as vegetable), but it is only one of the meanings that can be found for the image. This particular snail combines traditional disgust with anticlerical satire, but the animal could also signify idleness, music, and folly, as well as a symbol of the Resurrection (Cranga and Cranga, 1997: 84–8; Davidson and Oosterwijk, 2021: 207). Its presence is open to infinite interpretation by any number of readers. It might also be said that the wordless gastropod is the single untranslatable element in the text, a symbol rich in meaning, yet blank.

### Translanguaging and Untranslatability in the Catalan *Dança de la Mort*

Translation targets an audience that wishes to read an accessible version of the inaccessible original. That is a process of reception and reinvention. The challenge is to preserve the sense of the original, even when that text is obscure, but also to make it meaningful. This third and final section looks at the *Dança de la Mort*, an unillustrated Catalan translation of the French *Danse Macabre* (Zvonareva, 2015). In this instance, the "translanguaging space" is both textual (the manuscript) and contextual (the royal court at Barcelona).

Translation, including literary translation, played an important political role across medieval society (Classen, 2016: 289; Beer, 2019; Bak, 2016). The choice of a French source by a Catalan translator indicates competition between literary languages, as the Castilian *Danza general* was a near-contemporary or close predecessor of the French *Danse Macabre* and it remained popular well into the sixteenth century (Marin Gallo, 2021; Zvonareva, 2015: 5; Massip and



Morrás, 2014). The Catalan *Dança de la Mort* survives in one copy, followed by a continuation written around 1490 by the royal archivist Pere Miquel Carbonell (1434–1517) and his colleague Gaspar Nadal (Zvonareva, 2015; Massip and Morrás, 2014). This second “dance” describes a gallery of officers of the court of King Ferdinand II of Aragon (r. 1480–1516). It may have been intended as a playful variation for a small, elite audience, although Carbonell’s documented hatred of his colleagues puts his *Dança* in a more sinister light (Zvonareva, 2015: 4; Massip and Morrás, 2014: 449–50, 458–9). Indeed, these Catalan Dances might have been copied at a time when the royal court was fleeing an outbreak of plague (Massip and Morrás, 2014: 459), a rare instance of a direct association between the Dance of Death and an epidemic.

Zvonareva highlights the fidelity of the translation (which she attributes also to Carbonell) to a manuscript copy produced between 1425 and 1485 (Zvonareva, 2015: 5–9). She notes, however, that Carbonell never translates the noun or adjective *macabré* or *macabre*, and replaces it with *de la Mort* (Zvonareva, 2015: 8). Zvonareva interprets this as a sign that it was “a markedly French word, unfamiliar and unnatural in the Catalan-speaking context” (2015: 8). *Macabré/macabre* is a neologism that has never been elucidated (see n.1 of this article) but removing *macabre* from the *Danse Macabre* and substituting *de la Mort* also echoes the Castilian *Danza general de la Muerte* without otherwise alluding to the work. In 1490, Ferdinand II of Aragon was married to Isabel of Castile (r. 1474–1504) and acted as joint ruler of Castile and Aragon. The Latin Prologue is also cut, as are the images (the manuscript has no pictures), making this a monolingual work—at least on the surface.

Such tactics are reminiscent of Venuti’s 1990s concept of “domestication,” the muting or erasure of cultural difference to make the source text more attractive within its new linguistic and cultural context (1998: 31, 82). The *Danse Macabre* cites many proverbs (Taylor, 1989a), but many of them are either watered down or erased in the *Dança* (Zvonareva, 2015: 11). Most striking is the *Dança*’s omission of almost all the names of well-known historical or legendary figures, such as Charlemagne, that would have been familiar to an educated, courtly audience in Catalonia. If the work is read in the light of Venuti’s theory, then it sought to erase traces of the poem’s uncomfortable foreignness to the point of also attacking its bilingualism. The *Acteur/Auteur* (author/narrator), renamed *Mestre* (teacher, master), speaks only in the vernacular, as if the authority of Latin were also being erased. The famous opening of the *Danse Macabre* is maintained for the first quatrain but changed radically in the second. The central message about the equality of all human beings before their death is still there, but where the French text is pious, in line with the stern Prologue, the Catalan version (with no prologue) rails against Death (Zvonareva, 2015: 29).

[Latin prologue]

O creature raisonnable  
 qui desire vie eternelle,  
 tu as cy doctrine notable  
 pour bien finir vie mortelle.  
 La dance macabre s'appelle  
 que chascun à dancier apprend ;  
 a home et femme est naturelle ;  
 Mort n'espargne petit ni grant.

st. 1, lines 1–8

(Oh creature endowed with Reason, desiring eternal life, you have here an important rule in order to end [your] mortal life well. It is called the *Danse Macabre*, which everyone learns to dance; it is innate in men and women. Death spares neither the great nor the humble.)

[No Latin prologue]

*Parla lo Mestre*

O creatura rahonable  
 Qui desiges vida terrenal,  
 Tu has ací regla notable  
 Per ben finir vida mortal.  
 La present dança que veus tal  
 Es de la Mort poc delitosa.  
 Morir a tots es natural ;  
 La Mort és vil, molt odiosa.

ZVONAREVA, 2015: 15, st. 1, lines 1–8

(The Master speaks: Oh, creature endowed with Reason, desiring earthly life, you have here an important rule with which to end [your] mortal life well. The dance that you see here is about unpleasant Death. Dying comes naturally to everyone; Death is vile, most odious.)

The second most extensive change to the source is in the Lover's lament because the French love lyric and its Catalan equivalent required a different register and vocabulary. This stanza confirms that the translator was attempting to "domesticate" the source material.

Helas, or n'y a-il secours  
 contre la Mort – Adieu amourettes !  
 Moult va jonesse a decours  
 Adieu chapeaus, bouques, flourettes !  
 Adieu amans et pucelettes  
 Souviengne-vous de moy souvent  
 Et vous mires, se sage estes :  
 Petite pluie abat grant vent.

st. 47, lines 1–8

O llas, mesquí, socors no  
 trobaré  
 qui.m puixa de la mort lunyar !  
 O trist de mi, per qual camí iré ?  
 Ja no.m calra jes festejar  
 dones ni ab elles dançar.  
 O bé m'engana lo jovent  
 (pensi devia molt durar) :  
 Petita pluja bat gran vent.

ZVONAREVA, 2015, st. 47, lines 1–8

(Alas, there is protection against Death—farewell my little loves! Youth is going into decline. Farewell chaplets of flowers, bouquets, blossoms! Farewell lovers and young girls. Remember me often, and look upon yourselves, if you are wise. A light rain can strike down a strong wind.)

(Alas, poor wretch, I shall find no help that can take me far away from Death! Oh poor me, what path shall I take? I shall never again celebrate with ladies nor dance with them. Oh, Youth deceived me well [I thought that it would last]. Light rain can beat a strong wind.)

The diminutives that are typical of French lyric and dance poetry (*amourettes*, *flourettes*) have been replaced by a solipsistic concern with the Lover's sense of his own destiny. Youth is no longer simply declining; it has deceived the Lover into thinking himself immortal. Where the Lover danced with girls (*pucelettes*) in a setting awash with flowers, he now regrets the feasts and dances that he shared with ladies (*dones*). He does not invite the young and the lovers to reflect upon themselves. Rather, he is only concerned with his own demise. In both poems, the rain beats down the strong wind, but in the Catalan version, it destroys not the flowers and adornments of the bower but the Lover himself.

Reading through the lens of Venuti's influential theory of an ethics of difference in translation, it is easy to dismiss Carbonell's work as unethical. Venuti proposes that an ethical translation would be one that declares the foreignness of its source by inserting minor strategies of estrangement for the reader (1998: 115). It may be argued that the purpose of Carbonell's manuscript was not to provoke novel modes of thought but to make the *Danse Macabre* palatable to an audience that he knew intimately. This readjustment to suit a group's preferences included erasing French literary traces, shared historical allusions, and even the Latin language. In this respect, Carbonell adopted what Venuti terms an "ethics of sameness [...] establishing a domestic equivalence for foreign concepts and discourses that minimizes their unsettling differences" (Venuti, 1998: 116). The cultural differences between French and Catalan readers were quite minor, and this translation seems to go too far in erasing them for its purpose to be simple legibility.

There is an alternative approach. Lee Haring has challenged the suggestion that untranslatability should be deployed as a strategy of resistance against the global hegemony of a language. Haring argues that the task of the translator is to render a text for new readerships with energy, not to make it unpalatable (2014: 149, 151). By being "unfaithful" to the French and Latin source, and by rewriting and expanding his source without completely transforming it, Carbonell produced a dynamic translation that he hoped would suit his

small target audience. By inserting *de la Mort* where *Macabre* had been, he acknowledged the presence of the *Danza general de la Muerte* in his, and his audience's, multilingual context. By erasing difference, and the coexistence of Latin, French, Catalan, and Castilian, this translation makes it visible.

### Conclusion

The examples in this article have ranged across three “translanguaging spaces” in a contemporary street, a late medieval printed book, and a manuscript. They have offered further support for Lee’s suggestion, cited above, that “translanguaging turns a text into a meta-commentary on language and communication issues, as well as into a politicized and deterritorialized space that resides in the liminal” (2015: 443). The allusion to the *Danse Macabre* in an art installation in Luxembourg is an example of the creation of such a space, liminal and wordless, during a time of sociocultural crisis. The early printed Parisian *Danse Macabre* was equally rich in multilingual and visual complexity for its readers, pulling together old and new texts around images that could speak to many readers. Carbonell’s adaptation in Barcelona of the *Danse Macabre* reveals the unacknowledged presence of the Castilian poem and a willingness to move away from Latin as the language of authority. All three examples underline the multilingual context for which they were created. Finally, there may be no more extreme form of the liminal than the attempts to span the gap between the living and the dead through a common language built on poetry and images. In this respect as well, the *Danse Macabre* in its multiple translations and adaptations is a vehicle for translanguaging, a means of finding communication across great distances of time and space.

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