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Anonymous, *The Dance of Death (La Danza general de la Muerte)* (early 15th century)

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Introduction:

The Dance of Death or *Danse macabre* was a pan-European medieval phenomenon in which death personified speaks with one victim after another. Images of a personified death, sometimes a skeleton or hooded figure with a scythe moving arm and arm with human victims appear on Church walls and artifacts from Estonia to Spain. The best known of the European Dances—which are thought to arise as a reaction to the widespread black death of the mid-fourteenth century—are the German and French ones. The German frieze at Lübeck and the French funerary frieze at Cimetière des Innocents in Paris from 1424 (now lost) were visual images of the figure of death appearing alongside its human victims with explanatory text below. There are also several other vernacular Dances, including the Castilian, a Danish, a Tuscan, and a French Dance composed by Guyot Marchand in several editions in the 1480s, and a Catalan Dance from 1497.



Bernt Notke: *Surmatants (Totentanz)* from [St. Nicholas' Church, Tallinn](#), end of 15th century (today in the [Art Museum of Estonia](#)). [Public Domain](#)

The medieval Iberian Dance of Death survives in three Castilian versions. The copy of the *Danza general de la muerte* presented here is recorded in a manuscript housed at the Real Biblioteca del Monasterio del Escorial (b-iv-21). A later version from 1520 of the Dance was printed by Juan Varela in Seville. A shorter version of the *Danza general de la muerte* was also copied into a fifteenth-century collection of Hebrew *aljamiado* texts, i.e. Romance vernacular texts copied in Hebrew characters, now housed in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma, Italy.¹ Since the language of the latter is Castilian, although it is written using the Hebrew alphabet, I have classified it as one of the surviving Castilian versions of the *Danza general*.

All three of these versions are based on the same text, which has the form of a rhymed dialogue in which death greets one victim after another and the victim responds by almost always saying, “no, not now.” The victims alternate between secular and religious authorities beginning with the Emperor and Pope and moving down the ranks to the common folk such as the accountant and parish priest. The Dance of Death gives expression to the premodern view that Death is inevitable regardless of social class or religious affiliation. In the Castilian version, Christians, Muslims and Jews are all fated to die. No one creed will exempt the believer from this universal destiny.

¹ The Escorial text is over 600 verses long (632), in contrast to the shorter *aljamiado* version which has only 324 (53 stanzas).



This copy of the text (the Escorial version) is the earliest and the longest extant manuscript copy (the sixteenth-century print version is the longest) with a prose prologue and some 79 stanzas of eight verses each. The Escorial version of the Dance of Death is in all likelihood the earliest Castilian version, dating from the late fourteenth century. In this version, as in the others, Death meets people from the various social classes and religious communities of medieval Iberia. It is prefaced by a brief paragraph in prose explaining that this is a Dance of Death in which Death personified speaks directly with the audience, warning everyone, great or small, will come under his power. The first victims are a pair of young women in the prime of life. The remaining victims are men, and Death generally goes from the highest social level to the lowest, beginning with the emperor and pope and ending with the common laborer and itinerant holy man who begs for a living. The victims that Death calls to its mortal dance alternate between civil and religious figures, such as the emperor, the king, the duke, the Pope, the cardinal, and the archbishop. The Escorial version reflects the reality of *mudéjar* society with the inclusion of a rabbi and a Muslim cleric, or *alfaquí* among the victims.

Fize el sacull
 Delohym. Dios de habraha
 Que prometiste la redempcion
 No se q me faga co ta grado asan
 Gaudad me q amca no entiendo el son.
 no ha omie enel mundo de qntos v son
 q pueca fuir de su ma amieto
 belad me amies q my entedim.
 Se pierde del todo co grado ashao

Stanza in which the rabbi responds to Death in the copy of the *Danza general de la muerte*. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio del Escorial (b-iv-21), fol. 127r.

An important difference between the extant versions of the *Danza general* is their length. The Hebrew *aljamiado* version includes neither the rabbi nor the *alfaquí*—it has only 28 of the 33 victims found in the Escorial version. The 1520 print version of Juan de Varela is the longest with some 136 verses and includes many victims not found in the Escorial and Hebrew *aljamiado* versions, including a baker, a tailor, a butcher, spice-merchant and several others.

The figure of Death as depicted in this work may be a reflection of the multi-faith society of premodern Iberia. Death is not described in detail, but it is nowhere described as a skeleton, as it is often depicted in other European dances of death. From the dialogues that Death has with its victims in this version, we learn that it has teeth (stanza 20), claws and a gruesome visage (stanza 26), and that it hunts its victims using snares (stanza 6), bait (stanza 54), and a bow and arrow (stanza 1). We also learn that it plays a type of horn, a *charambela* (stanza 7) or *bozina* (stanza 64), and that its Dance is accompanied by a song, the *son* that several of its victims refer to (stanzas 1, 5, 9, 16, 22, 55, 71). Death tells the monk that his name may appear in the “book of life,” which may be an echo of belief in the Angel of Death. The latter was a belief shared by

Muslims and Jews in the Iberian Peninsula.² In the Islamic tradition, the Angel of Death is designated as Izra'il and shares many attributes with Angel of Death, Azrael, from the Jewish tradition. Both are associated with God's scrolls, on which appear the names of those destined to die. In addition, the Angel of Death is associated in both traditions with the sound of a horn or trumpet—a sound also associated with the Final Judgement or Apocalypse.³

While modern works that confront the issue of death often optimistically show the protagonist evading death, this is not the case in the premodern Dance of Death. We find in contemporary films such as *I am Legend* and the *Book of Eli*, there is hope for survival through a vaccine or through one particular religion, or in the videogame *The Last of Us* in which the goal is not a good death, but the quest for a cure. The focus in these modern works is not the inevitability of death as it is in the premodern Dance of Death, but how to escape. Our modern heroes are those who escape or cheat death. In the *Danza general* it is hard to define who is the protagonist and the focus is not on a daring deed or escape, but rather on the lives we lead and on the last moments of life. Despite the fact that critics have dismissed the Dance of Death as a particularly medieval genre that somehow no longer resonates with modern life, we still have not discovered how to cheat death. Our attitudes toward death will undoubtedly change given the realities of COVID-19. Death in the *Danza general de la muerte* is universal and is the fate that awaits everyone. The work is still relevant. Take, for instance, stanza 39, in which Death addresses the traveling salesman who will not return to Flanders for business, for he has been stricken by the plague (which caused the boils and buboes Death offers to give his victim). We may compare this with the example of the lawyer in Florida who this spring (2020) dressed as the grim reaper and walked the beaches to remind sunbathers that if they were not careful their choices could contribute not only to their own demise, but to that of loved ones.

Should we adapt this work to our own times, we might include other professions that did not exist in premodern Spain such as the professional athlete, movie star, dog walker, taxi driver or sanitation worker. But also, I think, in the spirit of its universal message, we might consider including other living things, such as animals or even entire biosystems, such as the earth—creatures and things that we now know live and die as we do. The work's message, to focus on doing good works in our daily lives because we never know when Death might come upon us, still remains relevant. The global pandemic we are currently living through makes this lesson particularly relevant today.



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Many of you have asked if I am willing to travel around Florida wearing Grim Reaper attire to the beaches and other areas of the state opening up prematurely. The answer is absolutely yes. Beginning May 1 we will hit the road here in state. Please retweet and spread the word.



11:02 PM · Apr 21, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

² See the Quran, Sura 32.11 and Sura 79. The latter talks about the angels of death (in the plural) who tear the soul from the body, “By those who tear forth and by those who draw forth” and we find literary accounts of these angels in the Arabic *aljamiado* (Romance language written in Arabic letters) literature of 15th-century Aragon.

³ Sura 50.41 (“And listen on the Day when the Caller will call out from a place that is near”) where the angel is described as a “caller.” While the Quran simply mentions a caller (*al-munadimin*), in the *tafsir*, or commentaries on the Quran, this caller, identified as Israfil, is also identified with the horn blast of the Resurrection.

Language of the text

In the original Castilian text, Death and his victims often use the *voseo* (the second person singular form *vos*) as a sign of respect or social distance, as for example, in stanzas 11, 13, 15 and 17). The reader will also find several archaic terms, such as *aqueste* (stanza 17), as well as terms that are from Provençal, Catalan, Aragonese, and Hebrew such as *ca* (stanzas 5, 15, etc.), *saje* (stanza 26), *y* (in the sense of allí), and *dayan* (stanza 71). In addition, the reader will find the syntax is often changed for the rhyme (anastrophe).

The Dance of Death (*La Danza general de la muerte*)

Prólogo en la traslación.

Aqui comienza la dança general. en la qual tracta / como la muerte dize atodas las criaturas que Pare mientes en la brevedad de su vida e que della mayor cabdal non sea fecho que ella meresçe. E asy mesmo les dize e Requiere que vean e oyan bien lo que los sabios pedricadores les dizen e amonestan de cada día. dando les bueno e sano consejo que pugnán En fazer buenas obras porque ayan conplido perdón de sus pecados. E luego syguiente mostrando por espiriençia lo que dize e llama e requiere a todos los estados del mundo que vengan de su buen grado o contra su voluntad. Començando dize ansy.

Dice la muerte

Yo so la muerte çierta atodas criaturas que son y seran en el mundo durante demando y digo: o: ome, por que curas de vida tan breve en punto pasante Pues no ay tan fuerte nin Rezio gigante que deste mi arco se puede anparar Conviene que mueras quando lo tixar con esta mi frecha cruel traspasante

Que locura es esta tan magnifiesta Que piensas tu omne. que el otro morr E tu quedaras por sy bien conpuesta la tu complisyon e que durara non eres çierto sy en punto verna sobre ty adessora alguna corrupción de landre o carbonco o tal ynplisyon por que el tu vil cuerpo se dessatara

¿O piensas por ser mançebo valiente o nino dedias / que alueñe estare. E fasta que llegues aviejo impotente:// la mi venida me detardare avisate bien que yo llegare aty adesora. que non he cuydado.

Prologue to the translation

Here begins the universal dance, which depicts how death says [and] announces to all living things that they should pay attention, for their lives are brief, and in the end merit the greatest of attention. For this [reason] it tells them and requires of them that they see and listen well to what the wise preachers tell them and warn them about, every day giving them good and healthy advice that they should try to do good works so that they may be pardoned for their sins. And then revealing to them what the experience [is like] and what is said, called for and required of people from all levels across the globe who either come willingly or against their will. [The dance is] beginning, it goes like this:

1 Death says

I am Death, certain to all creatures that exist or will exist in this cruel world. I have come calling and say to you: O, human, why do you care about this fleeting life that passes in an instant? For there is no giant so strong or tough that he can protect himself from my bow. You must die when I strike with this my cruel, mortal arrow.

2 What clear madness is this, that you, oh human, think that others will die, but you shall remain with your complexion and humors intact and you will survive. You are not convinced that some corruption will overwhelm you suddenly— be it a boil or buboe or some such lesion that will be the undoing of your body.

3 Or do you think that just because you are a strapping young man, or a young child, that I will keep away until you grow up to be old and impotent, and that I will delay my arrival? Be warned that I will arrive

que tu seas mançebo / o viejo cansado.
que qual te fallare tal te levare.

La platica. nuestra. seer pura verdad.
aquesto que digo. syn otra fallençia.
la santa escriptura. con çertinidad.
da sobre todo su firme sentençia.
atodos diziendo fazed penitencia
que amorir avedes non sabedes quando
sy non ved el frayre que esta pedricando
mirad lo que dize de su grand sabiençia

dize el pedricador

Señores honrrados. la santa escriptura
demuestra e dize. que todo omne nasçido
gostara la muerte maguer sea dura.
Ca truxo al mundo un solo bocado.
Ca papa. o Rey / o/ obispo sagrado.
Cardenal.// o duque e conde exçelente
El enperador con toda su gente.
que son enel mundo de morir han forçado

bueno e sano consejo

Señores punad en fazer buenas obras.
non vos fiedes en altos estados
que non vos valdrán tesoros nin doblas
ala muerte que tiene sus lazos parados
gemid vuestras culpas. dezid los pecados
en quanto podades con satisfaçion
sy aver queredes aver complido perdon
de aquel que perdona los yerros pasados

fazed lo que digo non vos detardedes
Que ya la muerte encomiença. a hordenar
una dança esquivada de que non podedes
por cosa ninguna que sea escapar
Ala qual dize que quiere levar.
atodos nosotros. lançando sus Redes
abrid las orejas que agora oyredes
de su charambela. un triste cantar.

Dize la muerte

ala dança mortal venit los nasçidos
que enl mundo soys de qual quiera estado

when you least expect it, for I care not
whether you be young or old.
And I will take just as I find you.

4 What we say is the whole truth.
This I say without fail:
the holy scripture with all certainty
this solemn statement gives to all,
letting everyone know, “Do penance,
for you are all fated to die and you know not
when.”
If [you are] not [convinced], look at the friar who is
preaching,
look at what he in his wisdom says.

5 **The Preacher says**
Distinguished gentlemen, this our scripture
shows and says that every person born
will experience death, even if it is hard.
He who came into the world with next to nothing,
just as the pope or king or holy bishop,
cardinal or duke or esteemed count.
The emperor and all his people:
everyone alive is forced to die.

6 **Good and clear advice.**
Gentlemen, try doing good works,
and don’t put your faith in your high position,
for you treasure and doubloons will not save you
to Death, who has his snares laid.
Decry your guilt. Tell it your sins
while you still can, knowing with satisfaction
[that is what you must do] if you want to receive
forgiveness,
from He who pardons past errors.

7 Do what I say. Do not wait.
For Death has already begun to arrange
a ghastly dance, from which you can not
by any means escape.
And in which it wants to carry off
all of us, catching us in its nets.
Open your ears and now you will hear
from its lonely flute a sad melody.

8 **Death says**
To my dance, Come! All who are born
to this world, no matter their position.
Whoever does not want to, by force and against
your will,
I will make you come instantly to your spot [in the
dance].

el que non quisiere. afuerça e amidos⁴
fazer le he venir muy toste parado
Pues que va el frayre vos ha pedricado
que todos vayays a fazer penitencia
El que non quisiere poner diligencia
Per mi. non puede ser mas esperado

Primera mente llama asu dança ados donzellas

Esta mi dança / traxe de presente
Estas dos donzellas. que vedes fermosas
Ellas vinieron de muy mala mente.
oyd mis cançiones. que son dolorosas
Mas no les valdran flores e Rosas
nin las conposturas que poner solían
De mi sy pudiesen partir se querrian
Mas non puede ser. que son mis esposas

A estas y atodos por las aposturas
Dare fealdad. la vida partida.
E desnudedad. por las vestiduras
Por syempre jamas. muy toste aborrida
O por los palaçios. dare por medida
Sepulcros escuros. de dentro fedientes
E por los manjares. gusanos rroyentes
que coman de dentro su carne podrida

E por que el santo padre - es muy alto señor
Que en todo el mundo non hay su par.
E desta mi dança sera guiador
Desnude su capa. comience a sotar
non es ya tiempo de perdones dar
nin de celebrar en grande aparato
que yo le dare. en breve mal rrato
dançad padre santo syn mas de tardar

Dize el padre santo

Ay de mi triste. que cosa tan fuerte
Ay que tractava tan grand perlazia
Aber de pasar agora la muerte
Oy non me valer. lo que dar solía

So, the Friar is leaving—he has warned you all
to go do your penance.
He who does not want to do so diligently,
I am waiting for expectantly.

9 **It calls two young women to be the first in its dance**

To this, my dance, I bring first
these two beautiful young women that you see.
They came most unwillingly.
Listen to my songs—they are so painful.
Neither flowers nor roses will be of any help to
these young women.
Nor will the face masks they were used to applying.
If they could have, they gladly would have tried to
escape from me.
But that is not to be, for they have already become
my brides.

10 For these two, and for everyone, I exchange their
good looks
for ugliness as I take their life.
And I force them to exchange their clothing for an
abhorrent nakedness
that they shall wear for all eternity.
In exchange for palaces, I give them
dark graves that are rotting within.
And for tasty morsels, I give them devouring
worms
to eat from within their putrid flesh.

11 And because the Holy Father is a mighty lord;
and in this world has no equal,
he will be the leader of this my dance.
Take off your cape. Start to dance.
Now is not the time to grant pardons
or to celebrate with a large production,
for shortly I will show you a bad time.
Dance, Holy Father, without further delay.

12 **The holy father says**

Oh, poor me. This is a terrible thing.
Oh, I was having such a pleasing time.
And then should Death pass by.
Today all that I used to have in this world—

⁴ *amidos*: 'with fear'

benefiçios e honrras e grand señoria
tove enel mundo. Pensando vevir.
pues de ti muerte. non puedo fuyr
val me ihu xpo e tu Virgen maria

Dize la muerte

Non vos enojedes señor padre santo
De andar en mi dança. que tengo / ordenada
non vos valdra el bermejo manto
delo que fezistes abredes soldada
non vos aprovecha echar la cruzada
Proveer de obispados nin dar beneficios
aquí moriredes syn ser mas bolliçios
Dançad inperante. con cara pagada

Dize el enperador

Que cosa es esta que atan syn pavor
Me lleva asu dança afuerça syn grado
Creo que es la muerte que non ha dolor
De omne que sea grande/ o cuytado.
non ay ningund rrey. nin duque esforçado
Que della me pueda agora defender
acorred me todos mas non puede ser
que ya tengo della. todo el seso turbado

Dize la muerte

Enperador muy grande enel mundo potente
non vos cuytedes ca non es tiempo tal.
Que librar vos pueda. Inperio nin gente
oro nin plata nin otro metal
aquí perderedes el vuestro cabdal.
que athesorastes con grand tyrania.
faziendo batallas de noche e de día
Morrid |. non curedes vengas el cardenal.

Dize el cardenal

Ay madre de dios. nunca pense ver
tal dança como esta./ aquí me fazen yr
querria sy pudiese. la muerte estorçer
nose donde vaya. comienço athremer
Syempre trabaje. noctar y escevir
por dar benefiçios alos mis criados
agora mis miembros. son todos tornados
que pierdo la vista E no puedo oyr.

Dize la muerte

Reverendo padre. bien vos avise

—benefits and honors and a large estate—
will not help me. I thought I would live.
But from you, Death, I cannot flee.
Help me Jesus and Mary.

13 **Death says**

Holy Father, don't be angry
at having to walk in my dance, which I have
organized.
Your crimson robe will not help you.
Your works will be recompensed.
Now it will not avail you to launch a Crusade,
or to hand out bishoprics or benefits.
You will die here with no more bulls.
Dance, emperor, you who is so satisfied.

14 **The Emperor says**

What is that they are playing fearlessly?
It is bringing me to its dance by force, against my
will.
I think it is Death who afflicts all
men, no matter how important or busy.
There is no king or valiant duke
who can now help protect me against it.
Everyone, come help me! But it's not to be;
It's already got me. My mind is all confused.

15 **Death says**

Emperor, you who are an important potentate in
this world,
Don't worry, for there is not time [and]
your empire, people, gold, silver or
precious metals —[none of] it can free you [from
Death].
Here you will lose all your greatness.
that you acquired through great tyranny,
making battles day and night.
Die. Don't worry. Come along Cardinal.

16 **The Cardinal says**

Oh, Mother of God! I never thought I'd see
a dance like this. Now they make me go [join].
If I could have, I would have liked to escape death.
I don't know where I might go [to escape]. I am
beginning to tremble.
I always worked through the night writing
to give benefits to my servants.
Now my limbs are all twisted.
I have lost my sight and I cannot hear.

17 **Death says**

Reverend Father, I gave you fair warning

Que aquí abriades por fuerça allegar
 Enesta mi dança. en que vos fare
 agora ayna un poco sudar
 Pensastes el mundo por vos trastornar
 Por llegar apapa. e ser soberano
 Mas non lo seredes Aqueste verano
 Vos rrey poderoso venit adança

Dize el rrey

Valia. valia. los mis caballeros
 Yo non querria yr atan baxa dança
 llegad vos conlos ballesteros
 hamparad me todos por fuerça de lança
 Mas que es aquesto que veo en balança.
 Acortarse mi vida e perder los sentidos
 El coraçon se me quexa con grandes gemidos
 adios mis basallos. que muerte me trança

Dize la muerte

Rey fuerte tirano que syempre rrobaste
 Todo vuestro rreyno E fenchistes el arca
 De fazer justiçia. muy poco curastes
 Segunt es notorio por vuestra comarca
 Venit para mí que yo so monarca
 Que prendere avos E aotro. mas alto
 llegat a la dança cortes en un salto
 En pos de vos venga luego el patriarca

dize el patriarca

Yo nunca pense venir atal punto
 nin estar en dança. tan syn piadad
 ya me van privando segunt que barrunto
 De beneficiõs e de dignidad
 ohomme mesquino. que en grand çeguedad
 andove enel mundo. non parando miente
 como la muerte con sus duros dientes
 Roba a todo omne de qual quier hedad.

Dize la muerte

Señor patriarcas. yo nunca Robe
 En alguna parte. cosa que non deva
 de matar. a todos costumbre lo he.
 De escapar alguno de mi non se atreva
 Esto vos gano vuestra madre eva
 Por querer gostar fruta devedada
 Poned en Recabdo vuestra cruz dorada
 sygase con vos el duque antes que mas beva

that you would have to come here by force
 to my dance, in which I will make
 you now sweat a little.
 Did you think because you were pope and
 sovereign that
 the world [and the natural way of things] would be
 disrupted?
 Well, you will not [be pope] this summer.
 You, powerful Kng, come and dance.

18 The King speaks

Help me, help me, my knights:
 I did not want to go in such a vile dance.
 Come with your crossbows;
 All of you, protect me with your weapons.
 But, what is this I see on the scales,
 cutting short my life and making me lose my
 senses?
 My heart is entreating me with enormous sobs.
 Goodbye, my vassals, Death has trapped me.

19 Death says

Strong King, you tyrant who always robbed
 all in your kingdom and stole from its coffers.
 You cared little for justice,
 as is notorious in your lands.
 Come to me, for I am a monarch
 [fated] to take you and one even greater.
 Come, jump in the courtly dance,
 and behind you, the Patriarch should come and take
 his place.

20 The Patriarch says

I never thought I would come to this point,
 nor be in such a pitiless dance.
 I suspect they are already taking
 my benefits and dignities.
 Oh, [I am a] poor man, that in such great blindness
 I walked through this world, not noticing
 how Death, with its hard teeth
 robs everyman no matter [his] age.

21 Death says

Mister Patriarch, I never robbed
 anywhere something that I should not.
 It's my custom to kill everything.
 No one dares to escape from me.
 This is what your mother Eve gained for you,
 because she wanted to taste the forbidden fruit.
 Secure your gold cross.
 The Duke should follow you before he drinks
 anymore.

Dize el duque

O que malas nuebas son estas syn falla
que agora me trahen que vayan atal juego
yo tenia pensado de fazer batalla
espera me un poco muerte yo te rruego
sy non te detienes. miedo he que luego
me prendas / o me mates abrede dexar
todos mis deleytes. ca non puedo estar
que mi alma escape de aquel duro fuego.

Dize la muerte

Duque poderoso. ardit e valiente.
Non es ya tiempo de dar dilaciones
Andad enla dança. con buen continente
Dexad a los otros vuestras guarniçiones
Jamás non poderedes çebar losalcones
hordenar las justas nin fazer torneos
Aqui abran fyn los vuestros deseos
venit arçobispo dexat los sermones

Dize el arçobispo

Ay muerte cruel que te mereçi
O por que me llevas tan arrebatado
biviendo en deleytes nunca te/ temi.
fiando enla vida quede engañado
Mas sy yo bien rrijera mi arçobispado
de ty non oviera. tan fuerte temor
mas syempre del mundo fuy amador
bien se que el infierno tengo aparejado

Dize la muerte

Señor arçobispo pues tan mal Registres
vuestros subdictos o clerezía
gostad amargura por lo que comistes
Manjares diversos. con grand golosia
Estar non podredes en santa maria.
Con palo Romano en pontifical.
Venit ami dança. pues soes mortal.
Pase el condestable. por otra tal vía

Dize el condestable

yo vy muchas danças de lindas donzellas
De dueñas ferrosas de alto linaje
Mas segunt me paresçe no es esta dellas
Ca el thañedor trahefeo. visaje
Venid. camarero; dezid a mi paje
que trayga el cavallo que quiero fuyr

22 The duke says

Oh, what terrible news this is, without a doubt,
that they bring me, [namely] that I must go in such
a dance!
I was thinking of going to war.
Wait for me a little, Death, I beg you.
If you don't slow down, I am scared that
you will soon take or kill me. I will have to leave
all my delights, for I cannot live.
May my soul escape from that hard fire.

23 Death says

Powerful, courageous and valiant Duke,
now is not the time for excuses.
Walk in the dance with a good visage.
Leave your troops for others [to command]
You will never be able to prepare your hunting
falcons,
arrange jousts or participate in tournaments again.
Here your desires come to an end.
Come, Archbishop, leave off your sermons.

24 Dear Archbishop

Oh, cruel Death. What have I done to deserve you
or why must you take me so suddenly?
I never feared you while living a life of pleasure.
Trusting in this life, I was deceived.
If I had administered my archbishopric well,
I would not be so scared of you.
But I was always a lover of this world,
and I know well that I have a special place in hell
prepared for me.

25 Death says

Your excellency, Archbishop, you were very bad at
supervising
your subjects and clerics.
Taste bitterness in place of the
diverse tasty morsels you eat so gluttonously.
You cannot [in the name of] Holy Mary
wield the Roman staff as pope.
Come to my dance, for you are mortal.
And, Constable, please step up to the other side.

26 The Constable says

I have seen many dances with beautiful young
women
[and] of beautiful, high-borne ladies.
But, as far I can tell, this is not one of them,
for the leader, playing the flute, has a foreboding
look.

que esta es la dança / que dize morir
sy della escapo thener me han por saje.

Dize la muerte

fuyr non conviene al que ha de estar quedo
Estad condestable. dexat el cavallo
andad en la dança alegre muy ledo
syn fazer rruído. Ca yo bien me callo
Mas verdad vos digo que al cantar del gallo
seredes tornado de otra figura
alli perderedes vuestra fermosura.
venit vos obispo aser mi vasallo

Dize el obispo

Mys manos aprieto. de mis ojos lloro
Porque soi venido atanta tristura
yo era abastado de plata y de oro
De nobles palaçios e mucha folgura
agora la muerte con su mano dura
trahe me en su dança medrosa sobejo
parientes amigos poned me consejo
que pueda salir de tal angostura.

Dize la muerte

Obispo sagrado que fuerdes pastor.
De animas muchas por vuestro pecado
a juyzio yredes ante el Redemptor
E daredes cuenta de vuestro obispado
Syempre anduvistes de gentes cargado
En corte de rrey y fuera de yglesia.
Mas yo Sorzire la vuestra pelleja
Venir cavallero que estades armado

Dize el caballero

A mi non paresçe ser cosa guisada
que dexé mis armas E vaya dançar
atal dança negra de llanto poblada
que contra los bivos quisiste hordenar
Segunt estas nuevas conviene dexar
merçedes e tierras que gane del rrey
Pero ala fyn syn dubda non sey
qual es la carrera. que abre de levar

Dize la muerte

Cavallero noble ardit e ligero
fazed buen senblante. en vuestra persona
non es aqui tiempo de contar dinero
oyd mi cançion por que modo./ cantona

Come Steward, tell my page,
to bring the horse, for I want to flee.
This is the dance they call [the dance] of death.
If I can escape from it, they will take me for a sage.

27 **Death says**

Fleeing is not an option for one who must remain.
Be still, constable. Leave the horse.
Come along in this happy dance with joy,
not making a sound. For I am extremely quiet.
And truthfully, by the cock's crow you will
have a very different aspect
and by then you will lose your good looks.
You, Bishop, come and be my vassal.

28 **The Bishop says**

I clench my fists. I cry from my eyes
because I have come to such a sad end.
I was well supplied with gold and silver,
with noble palaces and lots of free time.
Now Death, with its cruel hand,
brings me into its frightful dance, in which I am
[but] one more [victim].
Friends and loved ones—tell me
how I might get out of this tight spot.

29 **Death says**

Holy Bishop, you were the pastor
to many, but because of your sin
you will go before the Redeemer to be judged
and you will give an account of your time as bishop.
You always went around with an entourage
and spent time at the king's court, but not at
church.
I will tan your hide.
Come, Knight, [even though] you are armed.

30 **The Knight says**

It still does not seem like a good idea
to leave my weapons and go dance
in such a black and woeful dance,
into which you want to force the living.
According to these events, I should give up
the favors and lands the king gave me,
but to arrive at the end I am not sure
what is the path that I will have to take.

31 **Death says**

Noble Knight, lithe and valiant,
be a good example in what you do.
This is not the time to count money.
Listen to my song and how it is played

aqui vos fare morer la athaona
 E despues veredes como ponen freno
 alos dela banda que Roban lo ageno
 Dançad abad. gordo con vuestra corona

Dize el abad

Maguer provechoso. so. alos Religiosos
 De tal dança amigos. yo non me contento.
 en mi çelda aína manjares sabrosos
 de yr non curava comer a convento
 dar me hedes sygnado como non consyento
 de andar enella. Ca he grand Resçelo
 E sy tengo tiempo provocho e apelo
 Mas non puede ser que ya desatiento

Dize la muerte

Don abad. bendicto folgado viçioso
 que poco curastes de vestir çeliçio
 abraçad me agora. seredes mi esposo.
 Pues que deseastes plazer e viçio
 Ca yo so bien presta avuestro serviçio
 aved me por vuestra quitad devos saña
 que mucho me plaze con vuestra compañía.
 E vos escudero venit al/ofiçio

Dize el escudero

Dueñas e donzellas abed de mi duelo
 que fazen me por fuerça dexar los amores
 Echó me la muerte su sutil anzuelo
 fazen me dançar dança de dolores
 non thrahen por çierto fyrmalles nin flores
 los que en ella dança. mas grand fealdad
 ay de mi cuytado. que en grand vanidad
 andove en el mundo sirviendo señores

Dize la muerte

Escudero polido de amor sirviente.
 Dexad los amores de toda persona
 venit ved mi dança e como se adona
 E alos que dançan acompañaredes
 Myrad su fygura tal vos tornaredes

Here I am to kill your [money] mill,
 and you will see how those
 of the group that rob others are stopped.
 Fat Abbot with your “crown,”⁵ come dance.

32 The abbot says

Although I am a servant to the faithful,
 my friends, I do not feel like joining in such a
 dance.
 [I have] back in my cell tasty morsels
 I never cared to go eat in the cloister.
 You will note that I don’t consent
 to walk in it, for I have a lot of misgivings
 and if I have time, I object and appeal,
 But it seems I can’t, for I am already losing my
 understanding.

33 Death says

Sir blessed Abbot, fun-loving and given to vice,
 [you] who cared little for wearing the hair shirt,
 embrace me, for now you will be my husband,
 for you loved pleasure and vice,
 And thus am I here now in your service.
 Take me as your beloved, don’t be angry.
 I find your company so pleasing!
 And you Squire, come to this service.

34 The Squire says

Young women and ladies, mourn for me
 for they are making me give up love by force.
 Death has set its subtle hook in me.
 They are making me dance the dance of pain.
 For sure, those in its ranks bring neither jewels nor
 flowers,
 but rather they bring great horror.
 Oh my, I am grief stricken, for it was all for
 nothing,
 the time I spent serving lords in this world

35 Death says

Elegant Squire, servant of love:
 Leave off the love of any human.
 Come, see my dance and how it’s done,
 and you will accompany those who are dancing.
 See their horrible aspect: you will soon be like
 them,

⁵ Here Death refers to the abbot’s “crown.” This is not a reference to a real crown, but to the abbot’s tonsured head. The ring of hair left appears like a crown. See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tonsure>

que vuestras amadas non vos querran ver
 abed buen conorte que asy ha deser
 venit vos dean non vos corrogedes

Dize el dean

Ques aquesto que yo de mi seso salgo.
 Pense de fuyr e non fallo carrera
 grand Renta. tenía e buen deanazgo
 e mucho trigo enla mi panera.
 allende de aquesto estava en/espera
 de ser. proveydo de algund/ obispado
 agora la muerte envio me mandado
 mala señal veo. pues fazen la çera

Dize la muerte

Don Rico avariento dean muy hufano
 Que vuestros dineros trocastes en oro
 a pobres e a viudas çerrastes en la mano
 E mal despendistes el vuestro thesoro
 non quiere que estedes ya mas en el. coro
 salid luego fuera syn otra pereza
 yo vos mostrare venir apobreza
 venit mercadero ala dança del lloro

Dice el mercadero

¿A quién dejaré todas mis riquezas
 Y mercaderías que traigo en la mar
 Con muchos trasposos y mas sotilezas?
 Gané lo que tengo en cada lugar.
 Ahora la muerte vino me llamar
 ¿qué será de mí? No sé que me haga,
 O muerte, tu sierra a mí es gran plaga
 Adios mercaderos que voyme a finar

Dice la muerte

De hoy mas no curedes de pasar en Flandes.
 Estad aquí quedo e iredes ver la tienda que
 traigo
 De bubas y landres
 De graçia las do, no las quiero vender.
 Una sola de ellas vos hará caer
 De palmas en tierra. dentro en mi botica
 En ella entraredes maguer sea chica.
 Y vos arcediano venid al tañer

Dice el arçediano

O mundo vil malo e fallesçedero
 Como me engañaste. con tu promisyon.
 Prometiste me vida dety non la espero
 syempre mentiste en toda sazón

and your beloveds will not want to look at you.
 Take some comfort, for this is how it must be.
 Come here Dean, don't run away.

36 **The Dean says**

What is this that [is making] me lose my mind?
 I thought I could flee, but I don't see a way.
 I had a large income and good position,
 and a lot of wheat in my pantry.
 And on top of that I was waiting for
 and about to be given a bishopric.
 But now death has sent its orders:
 It's a bad sign that I see, they are preparing the wax.

37 **Death says**

Sir dean, greedy, rich and self-satisfied,
 for you exchanged money for gold,
 yet you closed your fist to the poor and widows.
 and you wasted your treasures.
 I don't want you to be in the choir any longer:
 come on out and no more excuses.
 I will show you what it is like to live in poverty.
 Come, Merchant, to the woeful dance

38 **The Merchant says**

To whom will I leave my riches and
 merchandise that I brought from across the seas
 with much hardship and skill?
 I earned what I have traveling from place to place.
 Now Death has come to call me.
 What will become of me? I'm not sure what it is
 doing to me.
 Oh Death, your saw is like a great plague to me.
 Goodbye, Merchants, for I am going to my end.

39 **Death says**

After today you will no longer worry about
 traveling to Flanders.
 Come here and be still and you will see the shop I
 have set up
 [selling plague] boils and buboes
 I am giving them away, I do not want to sell them.
 Just a single one of them will make you fall
 to the ground face down, [here] in my drugstore
 will you enter, even if it is tiny.
 And you, Archdeacon, come to the tolling.

40 **The Archdeacon says**

Oh, vile world, false and perishable,
 How you have tricked me with your promises!
 You promised me life; I don't expect it though.
 You always lie about everything.

faga quien quisiere la vesytacion.
de mi arçedianazgo por que trabaje
ay de mi cuytado grand cargo tome
agora lo syento que fasta aqui non

Dize la muerte

Arçediano amigo quitad el bonete
Venit ala dança suave e onesto
Ca quien enel mundo sus amores mete
El mesmo la faze venir atodo esto
vuestra dignidad segunt dize el testo
es cura de animas e daredes cuenta
Sy mal. las Registes abredes afruenta
dançad abogado dexad el digesto

Dice el abogado

Que fue ora mesquino de quanto aprendy
De mi saber todo / emi libelar
Quando estar pense/ entonçe cay
çego me la muerte non puedo estudiar
Resçelo he grande de yr al lugar
do non me valdra libelo nin fuero
peores amigos que syn lengua muero
abarco me la muerte non puedo hablar

Dize la muerte

Don falso abogado. prevalidador
Que de amas las partes levastes salario
Venga se vos miente como syn temor.
volvistes la foja por otro contrario
El chino e el bartolo e el coletario.
non vos librarian de mi poder mero
aqui pagaredes como buen Romero
e vos canonigo dexad el brevario

Dice el canonigo

Vete agora muerte non quiero yr contigo
Dexa me yr al coro ganar la rraçion
non quiero tu dança nin ser tu/amigo
En folgura bivo. non he turbaçion
aun este otro dia obe promisyon
desta calongia que me dio el perlado

Whoever wants from the archdiocese where I
worked
can arrange the [funeral] visitation.
Oh, woe is me, I accepted this important office,
Now I regret it. [I did not think] to come here

41 **Death says**

My friend, Archdeacon, take off the miter.
Come to the sweet and honest dance,
for whosoever puts their love in this world,
they themselves come to this.
according to the scripture, your holy excellence
is pastor of souls, and you will be held to account:
if you have mismanaged them, you will have a
reckoning.
Dance, Lawyer; leave off [consulting Justinian's]
Digest.

42 **The Lawyer says**

Oh no, poor me! What has become of all I learned
[and] all my knowledge, and me about to sue?
When I thought to be [in court], just then I fell.
Death blinded me; I cannot study.
I really don't want to take a place [in the dance]
Where no suit or defense will help me
Friends, the worst is that I am dying and I lack the
words.
Death overtakes me, I cannot speak.

43 **Death says**

Oh false Lawyer, prevaricator:
You got paid by both parties [of the lawsuit].
Come along, since you brazenly
exchanged one contract for that of the opponent.
The Chino, Bartolus [de Saxoferrato] and the
Collection⁶
will not liberate you from my modest power.
Here you will pay like a good pilgrim.
And you, Ccanon, leave off the breviary.

44 **The Canon says**

You go on ahead, Death. I don't want to go with
you.
Let me go to the choir to get my ration.
I am not interested in your dance or in being your
friend.
I live a comfortable life; I don't have any problems.

⁶ Bartolus of Saxoferratus (d. 1357) was an Italian law professor and expert of canon and Roman law.

Desto que tengo soy bien pagado
vaya quien quisiere a tu vocaçion.

Dice la muerte

Canonigo amigo non es el camino
Ese que pensades dad aca la mano
El sobre peliz delgado de lino
Quitad lo de vos e yres mas liviano
dar vos he un consejo que vos sera sano
tornad vos a dios e fazed penitencia
Ca sobre vos çierto es dada sentencia
llegad aca fisico que estades ufano

Dize el fisico

Myntio me syn dubda el fyn de aviçena
Que me prometio muy luengo bevir
Rygiendo me bien/ a yantar y çena
Dexando el beber despues del dormir
Con esta esperança pense conquerir
dineros e plata enfermos curando
Mas agora veo que me va llevando
la muerte consygo conviene sofrir.

Dice la muerte

Pensastes vos fisico que por Galeano.
o don. ypocras. con sus inforismos
seriades librado de comer del feno
que otros gastaron demas sologismos
non vos valdra fazer gargarasmos
Conponer xaropes nin tener diecta
non se sy lo oystes. yo so la que apreta
Venid vos don cura. dexad los bautismos

Dice el cura

Non quiero excepciones nin conjugaciones
con mis parrochanos quiero yr folgar
Ellos me dan pollos e lechones
E muchas /obladas con el pie de altar
locura seria mis diesmos dexar.
Oyr atu dança de que non se parte
Pero ala fyn non se por qual arte
Desta tu dança. pudiese escapar.

Dice la muerte

Ya non es tiempo de yazer al sol.
Con los parrochanos beviendo del vino
yo vos mostrare un Remifa sol.
que agora compuse de canto muy fyno

Just the other day, I was promised
this canonry as a gift from the prelate.
I am well paid and content with what I have.
Let someone else follow your vocation.

45 **Death says**

Canon, my friend, this is not the path
you planned on. Give me your hand.
That fine linen surplice you wear,
take it off; you will travel more lightly.
I will give you some advice that is sure to help you.
Turn to God. Do penance.
For you have certainly been judged.
Proud Physician, come here.

46 **The physician says**

Avicenna's *Art* lied to me without a doubt.
It promised that I would live a long life
if I followed a regimen of fasting and feasting
and not drinking after bedtime.
I was hopeful that thus I could gain
money and silver, curing the sick.
But now I see that Death is taking me
with it. I will have to suffer.

47 **Death says**

Did you think, Physician, that Galen
or Sir Hippocrates with their knowledge
would free you from eating hay?
Others tried with even more syllogisms.
It won't help you to make gargles,
to compound medicinal syrups or create diet plans.
I'm not sure you heard: I am the one who strangles.
Come, good sir Priest. Leave off the baptisms.

48 **The priest says**

I don't want to do strange things or have
intellectual debates.
I want to go pass the time pleasantly with my
parishioners.
They leave me chickens and baby pigs,
and lots of tasty fish at the foot of the altar.
It would be crazy for me to give up my tithes
upon hearing your dance, which no one can leave.
But I don't know what art I
can use to escape from it after all.

49 **Death says**

Now is not the time to lay out in the sun,
drinking wine with your parishioners.
I will show you a Do-Ray-Mi-Fa-So-Lay
that I have just composed; a fine song.

tal como avos quiero aber por bezino
que muchas animas tovistes en gremio
Segunt las Registes abredes el premio
dançe el labrador que viene del molino

Dize el labrador

Como conviene dançar al villano
que nunca la mano saco dela Reja
busca sy te plaze quien dançe liviano
dexa me muerte. con otro trebeja
Ca yo como toçino e avezes oveja
e es mi/ofiçio trabajo e afân/
arando las tierras para senbrar pan
por ende non curo de oyr tu conseia

Dize la muerte

Sy vuestro trabajo fue syenpre syn arte
non faziendo surco. en la tierra agena
Enla gloria eternal. abredes grand parte
Epor el contrario sufriredes pena
Pero con todo eso poned la melena
allegad vos ami yo vos venire
lo que a otros fize avos lo fare
e vos monje negro tomad buen estrena

Dize el monje

Loor ealabança sea para siempre
Al alto señor que con piadad me lleva
asu santo Reyno adonde contemple
por syenpre jamas la su magestad
de carçel escura. vengo a claridad
donde abre alegria. syn otro tristura
Por poco trabajo. abre grand folgura
Muerte non me espanto de tu fealdad.

Dize la muerte

Sy la Regla sta del monje benedicto
guardastes del todo syn otro deseo
syn dubda tened que soes escripto
En libro de vida segunt que yo creo
Pero sy fezistes lo que fazer veo
a otros que handan fuera dela Regla
vida vos dara que sea mas negra
dançad usurero dexad el correo

Dize el usurero

Non quiero tu dança nin tu canto negro
Mas quiero prestando doblar mi moneda
con pocos dineros que me dio mi suegro

I want someone like you for a neighbor.
You had many souls in your guild—
as many as you brought in, so you shall be
rewarded.

Dance, Worker coming from the mill.

50 **The Worker says**

Why would the villager, who never
took his hand off the plow, come dance?
Look for someone who wants to do a silly dance.
Leave me alone, Death, go play with another.
For I eat bacon and sometimes lamb.
It's my job and task
to plow the earth and plant [the wheat for] bread.
And in the end, I don't care for your advice

51 **Death says**

If your work was always without deceit,
not making ruts in others' land,
you will have a part in eternal glory.
But if it was the opposite, you will suffer pain.
Enough of this, put on your horsehair coat
and meet me halfway.
What you did to others, I will do to you.
And you, black Monk, have a good introduction [to
death].

52 **The Monk says**

“Praise and blessing forever” be [given]
to the Lord in heaven, who, out of pity
takes me to his holy kingdom where I may
contemplate
his majesty forever.
Out of a dark prison, I come into [serene] clarity,
where I will be happy, without any more sadness.
Just for a little work, I will have a great reward.
Death, I am not scared off by your ugliness.

53 **Death says**

If the rules of the holy Monk
you kept, without having any other desire,
without a doubt, you can assume that you are listed
in the Book of Life, or so I believe.
But if you did what I see [so many] others
do who chose paths outside the rules of the order,
you will be given a life that is much darker.
Dance, Usurer, leave off your correspondence.

54 **The Moneylender says**

I don't want your dance or your ugly song,
rather I want to lend at double interest my money
along with a little my father-in-law gave me.

otras obras fago que non fizo beda.
Cada año los doblo demás esta queda
la prenda en mi casa que esta por el todo
allego rriquezas y hyaziendo de cobdo
Por ende tu dança ami non es leda.

Dize la muerte

Traydor usurario de mala conçençia
Agora veredes lo que fazer suelo
En fuego ynferral syn mas detençia
Porne la vuestra alma cubierta de duelo
alla estaredes do esta vuestro huelo
que quiso usar segund vos usastes
por poca ganança mal syglo ganastes
E vos frayre menor venit aseñuello

Dize el frayre

Dançar non conviene. a maestro famoso
Segunt que yo so enla Religyon
Maguer mendigante vivo viçioso
E Muchos desean oyr mi sermon
Dezides me agora que vaya atal son
dançar non querria sy me das urgar
ay de mi cuytado que abre adexar
las honrras e grado que quiera/ o que non

Dize la muerte

Maestro famoso sutil e capaz
que en todas las artes fuerdes sabidor
non vos acuytedes linpiad vuestra faz
que apasar abredes por este dolor
yo vos levare ante un sabidor.
que sabe las artes syn ningunt defecto
sabredes leer por otro decrepto
Portero de maça venid al tenor

Dize el portero

ay del rey. barones acorred me agora
lleva me syn grado esta muerte brava
non me guarde della/ tomome adessora
apuerta del Rey guardando estava
oy eneste dia al conde esperava

I do even more than Bede.⁷
Each year I double my money, the rest is safe
and sound at home, which is the best.
I accrue riches and am very frugal.
And so your dance is does not seem very fun to me.

55 **Death says**

Traitor, Usurer of bad conscience,
you will now see what I usually do.
Without hesitation I will put your soul, all
covered in mourning, in hell fire.
You will be there where your grandfather,
who, just like you, wanted to lend at high rates.
For so little gain, your reward is a bad afterlife.
And you, Friar Minor,⁸ come take the bait.

56 **The Friar says**

It is not becoming for a famous teacher to dance,
for I am a religious man.
Although a beggar: I live a life of vice,
and many wish to hear my preaching.
And now you tell me that I should dance to such [a
bad] tune?
I would not want to dance, [even] if you rake
through me.
Oh, poor me! I will have to leave
my honors and position, whether I want to or not.

57 **Death says**

Famous master, sharp and gifted,
who was knowledgeable of all the arts,
don't worry, clean your face,
for you will get through this suffering:
I will take you before one who knows.
He knows all the arts perfectly.
You will learn how to read another's decree.
Chamberlain, come [dance] to the tune.

58 **The Chamberlain says**

Oh, the king! Barons, come help me now!
This fierce Death is pitilessly taking me away.
I didn't protect myself from it, and it took me
unawares.
I was guarding the king's door.

⁷ Bede was an eighth-century Benedictine monk from England. He was the author of many religious and academic treatises, including an important early work on counting and the calendar, *De temporibus*.

⁸ In medieval Castilian, a 'frayre menor' (modern Castilian 'fraile menor') refers to a member of the Franciscan order, or 'Order of Friars Minor' in English.

que me diese algo por que le dy la puerta
 guarde quien quisyere/ o fynquese abierta.
 que ya la mi. guarda non vale una fava

Dize la muerte

Dexad essas bozes llegad vos corriendo
 Que non es ya tiempo de estar enla vela
 las vuestras baratas yo bien las entiendo
 E vuestra cobdiçia por que modo suena
 Cerradas la puerta de mas quando yela
 al omne mesquino que bien alibrar
 lo que del levastes abres apagar
 E vos hermitaño salid dela celda

Dize el hermitaño

La muerte Reçelo maguer que so viejo
 Señor Jhu Xpo. aty me encomiendo.
 Delos que te sirven tu eres espejo
 Pues yo te servi. la tu gloria atiando
 Sabes que sufre lazeria viviendo
 En este desierto en contenplaçion.

de noche e de dia faziendo oraçion
 E por mas abstinence las yerbas comiendo

Dize la muerte

fazes grand cordura llamarte ha el señor
 que con diligencia pugnastes servir
 Sy bien le servistes abredes honor
 En su santo Reyno do aves abenir
 Pero con todo esto abredes ayr.
 Enesta mi dança con vuestra barvaça
 De matar atodos aquesta es mi çaça.
 Dançad contador despues de dormir.

Dize el contador

Quien podría pensar. que tan syn disanto
 abia /a dexar mi contaduría
 llegue: ala muerte E vi/del barato
 que fazia enlos omnes con grand /osadia.
 ally perdere toda mi valia.
 aberes/y joyas y mi grand poder
 faza libramientos / de oy mas quien quisier
 Ca çercan dolores el anima mia

Contador amigo. ssy bien vos catades
 Como. por favor: E avezes por don.

This very day I was waiting for the count,
 who was going to give me something because I had
 let him in [to see the king].

Now, whoever wants can guard the door or it can
 stay open,
 for now my guarding it is not worth a hill of beans.

59 **Death says**

Stop shouting. Come running.
 For now is not the time to keep vigil.
 I am well aware of your tricks
 and what your greed sounds like.
 You would close the door when it's bitter cold
 to the poor man who well needed it.
 That which you took from him you will have to
 pay.
 And you, Hermit, come out of your cell

60 **The Hermit says**

I recoil from Death, even though I am old.
 Lord Jesus Christ, I entrust myself to you.
 You are the mirror of those who serve you:
 and since I served you, I expect your glory.
 You know that being alive means suffering
 in this dessert, living [a life of] contemplation,
 praying night and day,
 and to be more abstemious, eating [only] grass.

61 **Death says**

You are very smart: the Lord may well pick you.
 You strived to serve Him with diligence.
 If you served Him well, you will receive honor
 in His holy kingdom where you will go.
 But all that said, you must now go
 into my dance with your big, long beard.
 Killing everyone: this is my task.
 Dance, Accountant, after having slept.

62 **The Accountant says**

Who could think that so suddenly
 I would have to leave my accounts.
 I arrived to Death and saw the mess
 it makes so brazenly of man.
 In it [death] I will lose all my value:
 assets, jewels and great power.
 From today on, whoever wants can make the
 orders of payment,
 for sorrows are closing in on my soul.

63 My friend, Accountant, if you look closely and see
 how for a favor and a gift you sometimes

librastes las cuentas/ Razon es que ayades.
Dolor e quebranto . por tal occasyon
non vos terna pro: Eyredes comigo
Cuento de algarismo nin su duvisyon
andad a ca luego. asy vos lo digo
E vos diacono venid. alección: //

Dize el diacono

Non veo que tienes gesto de lector
tu que me conbidas que vaya a leer
non vy en salamanca maestro nin doctor
que tal gesto tenga nin tal paresçer
bien se. que con arte. me quieres fazer
que vaya a tu dança. parame matar
sy esto asy es. venga administrar
otro por mi. que yo vome a caer.

Dize la muerte

Maravillo me mucho de vos clerizon
Pues que bien sabedes. que es mi doctrina
Matar atodos por justa rrazon
E vos esquivades oyr mi bozina
yo vos vestiré almática fina
labrada de pino en que ministredes
fasta que vos llamen enella yredes
venga el que rrecabda e dançe ayna

Dize el Recabrador

Asaz he que faga. en Recabdar
lo que por el rrey. me fue encomendado
Por ende non puedo nin devo dançar
Enesta tu dança. que non he acostumbrado
quiero yr agora apriessa priado¹⁰
por unos dineros que me han permitido
Ca he esperado e el plazo es venido
Mas veo el camino del todo çerrado

Dize la muerte

Andad aca luego syn mas tardar
Pagad los cohechos que abes levado

fixed the books, then you should face
pain and heartbreak. On this occasion
you will benefit from counting by the hundreds
or division [of your accounts] (you will go with me).
Walk that way now, that's what I say.
And you, Deacon, come [hear] the lesson

64 **The Deacon says**

I see that you do not have the likeness of a reader,
you, who invites me to go read.
I never saw a professor or instructor at Salamanca
who looked like you or had your nature.
I am well aware that with trickery you want to make
me
go to your dance, in order to kill me.
If this is so, another should come take over
for me: I am going to fall.

65 **Death says**

I am astounded at you, big man,
for you know well it's my doctrine to
kill everyone with good reason.
And [although] you may try to get out of hearing
my horn,
I will dress you in a fine dalmatica⁹ [fine garment]
crafted out of pine in which you can minister
until they call you. You will go in it.
Come quickly, Tax Collector, and dance

66 **The Tax Collector says**

I have exceeded in doing my collecting,
which was entrusted to me by the king.
And so, I cannot, nor should I dance
in this your dance, with which I am not familiar.
I want to go now, quickly, secretly
for some money that has been permitted me.
For I suspect my time has come.
But, I see that the way is totally blocked.

67 **Death says**

Come on, right now, without any more delays.
Pay [for] the bribes you have taken.

⁹ *Almática*, from *Dalmática* which refers to several types of gowns, including a liturgical vestment with large sleeves. It can also mean a white tunic with wide sleeves that is decorated with the Tyrian purple, a dye made from the glands of mollusks found in Lebanon. The loose shape and wide sleeves of the garment was popularized by the Romans, but thought to have originated in Dalmatia. See: <https://dle.rae.es/dalmático>. Here Death uses the term to refer to the cleric's coffin, his new metaphorical garment.

¹⁰ *Priado* means "con prontitud." See <https://dle.rae.es/priado>.

Pues que vuestra vida fue entrabajar
 Como Robariedades al omne cuytado
 dar vos he un poyo en que esteys asentado
 O fagades las Rentas. que tenga dos pasos
 allí dares cuenta de vuestros trasposos
 venid subdiacono alegre e pagado

Dize el subdiacono

Non he menester de yr atrocar
 Como fazen essos que traes atu mando
 antes de evangelio me quiero tornar
 estas quatro temporas que se van llegando
 En lugar de tanto. veo que llorando
 andan todos essos. non fallan abrigo
 non quiero tu dança. asy telo digo.
 Mas quiero pasar el salterio Rezando

Dize la muerte

Mucho es superfluo. el vuestro a legar
 Por ende dexad aquessos sermones
 Non tenes manera de andar adançar
 nin comer obladas çerca los tizonos
 non yredes mas enlasproçisyones
 do davades bozes muy altas en grito
 Como por enero fazia el cabrito
 venit sacristan//dexad las Razones

Dize el sacristan

Muerte. yo te rruego. que ayas piadad
 De mi que so moço . de pocos días
 non conoçi adios. con mi moçedad
 nin quise tomar. nin syguir sus vías
 fia de mi. amiga. como de otros fias
 por que satisfaga del mal que he fecho
 aty non se pierde jamas tu derecho
 Ca yo yre sy tu por mi enbias

Dize la muerte

Don sacristanejo de mala picaña
 ya non tenes tiempo de saltar paredes
 nin de andar de noche con los de la caña
 faziendo las obras. que vos bien sabedes
 andar a Rondar vos ya non podredes

Since you dedicated your life's work to
 robbing from the troubled man,
 I will give you a hole in which you can sit,
 where you will pay what you owe in two stages.
 There you will answer for your embezzling.
 Come, happy and well-paid Subdeacon.

68 **The Subdeacon says**

I have no need to go bargain,
 as those do who you bend to your will.
 Instead of the gospel, I want to turn to
 the Embertide fasts¹¹ that are coming up.
 But instead, I see that all these people
 who are walking [with you] are crying. They do not
 find shelter.
 I do not want your dance. There, I've said it.
 I prefer to pray the rosary.

69 **Death says**

Your arguments are useless,
 so stop with the sermons.
 You cannot go off to dance,
 or eat funerary bread near the burning pokers.
 You will no longer march in the processions,
 bellowing loudly
 like a kid (baby goat) in January.¹²
 Come, Sacristan. Stop your rationalizations.

70 **The Sacristan says**

Death, I beg you to have pity
 on me—I am a young man in my prime.
 I did not know God as a child,
 nor did I want to take up or follow His ways.
 Trust me, friend, just as you trust in others,
 I will make up for the evil I have done.
 Your right [to exact justice] will never be lost.
 For I will come if you send for me

71 **Death says**

Sir Sacristan, my deceitful friend,
 you no longer have time to scale the walls
 nor to sneak around at night with your drinking
 buddies,

¹¹ The expression *quatro tempora* or “témpora” derives from the Latin *quatuor tempora* and refers to four liturgical phases of the year which correspond to the transitions between the four seasons and during which believers pray, fast and do penance. See: <https://dle.rae.es/témpora>.

¹² Baby goats cry when uncomfortable. In January they could not only be low on quality feed, but also cold.

nin presentar joyas a vuestra señora
sy bien vos quiere quite vos agora.
venit vos rrabi.aca. meldaredes.¹³

Dize el rrabi¹⁴

Oelohym.¹⁵ Edios de habraham
Que prometiste la Redepçion
Non se que me faga con tan grand afan
Manda me que dançe non entiendo el son.
non ha omne enel mundo de quantos y sson
que pueda fuyr de su mandamiento

velad me dayanes¹⁶ que mi entendimiento.
Se pierde del todo con grand afliçion

Dize la muerte

Don rrabi. rrabi barbudo que syenpre estudias
Enel talmud. E enlos sus doctores
E dela verdad. jamas non curastes
Por lo qual abredes penas e dolores
llegad vos aca. con los dançadores
Ediredes por tanto vuestra beraha.
dar vos han posada. con rrabi açã
venit: alfaqui dexad los sabores.

Dize el alfaqui

Sy . alaha. me vala. es fuerte cosa
estoque me mandas agora fazer
yo tengo muger discreta graçiosa
de que he gazajado e assas placer
todo quanto tengo quiero perder.
dexa me con ella sola mente estar
de que fuere viejo manda me levar
E aella con migo sy aty plugiere

making mischief. You know [what I'm talking
about].

You can no longer wander around bothering
[people]

or giving jewelry to your lady.

Please, get going now.

Come, you, Rabbi. You will read over here.

72 **The Rabbi says**

O Lord and God of Abraham,
who promised redemption,
I'm not sure what it is doing to me so eagerly.
It commands me to dance, but I am unfamiliar with
the music.

There is nobody, from all the people in the world,
that can flee from its command.

Elders of the [Jewish] community, keep vigil for
me, for my understanding
is slipping away, and I am greatly afflicted

73 **Death says**

Sir Rabbi, bearded Rabbi, you always studied
the Talmud and its scholars,
you never cared for the truth,
and for that you will have pain and suffering.
Come here with the dancers.
You will say thus your beraha¹⁷
and they will give you a spot with rabbi Aza.¹⁸
Come, Alfaquí, leave off the tasty morsels.

74 **The Alfaquí says**

God is great. This is a heavy thing
that you now command me to do.
I have a graceful and discreet wife,
who is my good companion and [who is] quite
pleasing.

All that I have I want to lose,
[but just] let me be with her.

When I get old, command me to take

¹³ *meldar*, Old Spanish for 'to read, recite, learn, teach' from Latin *meletare*.

¹⁴ There appears to be a scribal error here (see the image of fol. 127r in the introduction). The scribe begins to introduce this stanza as being the response of the sacristan to Death's command. However, we see from the preceding stanza and the following lines that in fact here it is the rabbi with whom Death is speaking and who responds.

¹⁵ *Elohim* is a Hebrew term for God.

¹⁶ *Dayan* is a Hebrew term for a judge and so a position of prestige in the community.

¹⁷ *berakhab* is Hebrew for blessing.

¹⁸ *Açã* is likely a Hispanized version of the Hebrew name *Yitzḥaq* (Eng. Isaac).

Dize la muerte

Venit vos amigo. dexat el Rallan¹⁹
 Ca el game²⁰ no pedricaredes
 Alos veynte e siete vuestro capellan
 nin vuestra camisa non la vestiredes
 enmecca nin en layda²¹ y non estaredes
 Comiendo bunnuelos en alegría
 busque otro alfaqui vuestra morería
 Passad vos santero vere que diredes

Dize el santero

Por çierto mas quiero. mi hermita servir
 que non yr alla. do tu me dizes
 tengo buena vida. aun que ando apedir
 E como alas vezes pollos e perdizes
 se tomar al tiempo bien las cordonizes
 Etengo en mi huerto assas de Repollos
 vete que non quiero tu gato con pollos:
 adios me encomiendo y aseñor sanhelizes

her with me, if you please

75 **Death says**

Come, my friend, forget the gates of Heaven,
 for you will not preach [in] the Mosque.
 You will not wear your jellaba [robe]
 or your imam's robe on the 27th,²²
 neither [in pilgrimage] to Mecca or on the 'Eid: you
 won't
 [get to] eat mini-donuts²³ in celebration.
 Your community will have to look for another
 Alfaqui.²⁴
 Come, traveling Holy Man, Let me see what you
 have to say.

76 **The Holy Man says**

Clearly I want to serve my hermitage even more,
 and not go there where you tell me to.
 I have a good life, even though I go around
 begging,
 and sometimes I eat chicken and partridge.
 In the good times [there is] quail to eat.
 And I have plenty of chicks in my garden.
 Go. I don't want your cat [in] with the chickens.
 I put my faith in God and to the lord of San
 Helices.²⁵

Death says

¹⁹ The term *Rallan* is unclear. *Rayyan* in Arabic is the name of one of the gates of Paradise mentioned in the *hadith* of al-Buhkari (Book 30, hadith 6) and Sahih Muslim (Book 13, hadith 12). Alternatively, verb *rallar* can mean 'to bother of try someone's patience' ("Molestar, fastidiar con importunidad y pesadez"), and in Salamanca can mean to speak disrespectfully ("Hablar descaradamente").

²⁰ This passage is unclear. It reads in the manuscript as *gamenno* (with no word division). *Gamenno* is probably a transliteration of *ġami'*, alluding to the Friday or congregational Mosque [*masjid ġami'*] plus the negative adverb "no."

²¹ Mecca, the city in central Arabia, is the site of the Muslim pilgrimage. I have read *layda* as *al-'eid*. Eid refers to a Muslim religious holiday. Eid al-Fitr is the holiday marking the end of Ramadan. Eid al-Adha celebrates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael, as related in Islamic tradition.

²² *Laylat al-Qadr* ("Night of Power") commemorates the sending down of the Qur'an to earth, and the revelation of the first verses of the Qur'an to Muhammad. It falls during the last 10 days of Ramadan, here on the 27th.

²³ According to the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, *buñuelos* are made from flour fried in oil and often served with sugar or other sweet fillings. See: <https://dle.rae.es/buñuelo>. *Buñuelos* are found in early Romance recipe books such as *Llibre de Sent Soví*, adapted from earlier Andalusí recipes, such as those found in the thirteenth-century *Fuḍālat al-ḥīvam fi ṭayyibāt al-ṭa'ām wa-l-ahwān* by the Andalusí author, Ibn Razīn Al-Tuġībī. I think the author/s seek to evoke the scene of street food on the weekend, similar to the *beignets* I have seen sold as street food from carts in Fez, Morocco.

²⁴ This term refers to a learned Muslim doctor or religious authority, from the Arabic *faqih*. See: <https://dle.rae.es/alfaqui>.

²⁵ There is a town in Cuenca of Roman origin, repopulated after the Christian conquest of al-Andalus called Saelices, from the Latin *Sancti Felicis* (Saint Felix). There is an annual festival of Saelices celebrated in September. There is also a small town in Coimbra named San Felices with a thirteenth-century parochial Church with statues of Peter and Christ.

Dize la muerte

Non vos vale nada vuestro Reçelar
 andad aca luego vos don taleguero
 que non quisistes . la hermita adobar
 fezistes alcuza de vuestro guarguero
 non vesitaredes la bota de cuero
 con que amenudo soliades beber
 çurron nin talegua non podres. traer
 nin pedir gallofas como de primero

Lo que dize la muerte a los que non nombro
 A todos los que aquí. non he nombrado
 De qual quier ley /e estado o condiçion
 les mando que vengan. muy toste pirado
 /a entrar en mi dança. syn escusaçion
 non Resçibire jamas exebçion
 nin otro libelo nin declinatoria
 los que bien fizieron abran syenpre gloria
 los qual contrario. abran dapnaçion.

Dize a los que han de pasar por la muerte
 Pues que asy es que amorir abemos
 De nesçesdiad. syn otro Remedio
 con pura conçiencia. todos trabajemos
 En servir adios. syn otro comedio
 Ca el es prinçipe. fyn ./el medio
 Por do sy le plaze abremos folgura
 aun que la muerte con dança muy dura
 nos meta en su corro en qual quier comedio

77 Your fear will do you no good.
 Come here you, Mr. Crook.
 You did not want to keep up the shrine.
 You made your throat a pitcher [by drinking down
 so much].
 You would not put on the leather wineskin
 that you so often drank out of.
 You cannot take with you what you have stolen nor
 the bag [you put them in],
 or ask for bread as [you did] in the beginning.

78 What Death says to those he didn't name
 To all that I have not here named,
 of any religion or social class in whatever situation:
 I command you to come quickly, dullard,
 and start dancing without [offering] excuses.
 I will never grant exceptions,
 passes or [accept] a motion to dismiss.
 Those who did good works will have glory forever,
 and those who [did] the opposite will have
 damnation.

79 It says to those that have to pass through death
 It is thus that we all must die:
 it is necessary and there is no remedy.
 Let us all work with a pure conscience
 to serve God, for there is no other sovereign.
 For He is the beginning and the end, and the means
 by which, if it please Him, we will achieve reward,
 even if Death with its terrible dance
 places us in its line [as it passes through] whatever
 region [we may be in].

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