

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Journal of Gender Studies on 03/11/14, available online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2014.950557>

# Death and the erotic woman: the European gendering of mortality in times of major religious change

C. Welch

Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Winchester, Winchester, UK

This paper explores the use of European erotic death imagery produced in the Death and the Maiden (D&M) genre in two time periods. It compares and contrasts D&M imagery produced by the Germanic-speaking proto/early-Reformation artists, Hans Baldung (alias Grien) (c1484–1545), Niklaus Manuel (known as Deutsch) (c1484–1530) and Sebald Beham (known as Hans Sebald Beham) (1500–1550) which highlighted the folly, futility and transience of earthly vanities during the transition from Roman Catholic to Protestant Christianity, with contemporary calendar art produced by Cofani Funebri (from 2003) and Lindner (from 2010) which advertise coffins manufactured in the increasingly secular countries of Italy and Poland. Drawing on Biblical narrative, Augustinian theology and European socio-cultural perceptions of gender, this paper argues that these D&M images are highly eroticised and place woman as signifiers of transient life (*vanitas*) and earthly pleasure (*voluptas*), juxtaposing her with a masculine/male representation of death; Death being imaged as an individual in the sixteenth century, and as a coffin in the contemporary works. The paper also contextualises the imagery in terms of traditional European Christian notions of life and death, as informed by the Biblical Fall narrative, with its elucidations of sin, concupiscence and punishment. It thus asserts that both socio-cultural and religious attitudes towards gender are highly significant in D&M imagery and indeed in terms of the artworks, argues that the masculine signifier of Death can be placed as Adam, whilst the Maiden, as fecund life, represents Eve. However, the overt eroticism of both sets of artworks also allows for a reading that draws on Messaris' [(1997). *Visual persuasion; the role of images in advertising*. London: Sage] notion that visual images 'make a persuasive communication due to iconicity; the emotional response to the visual image presented'. Thus, this paper contrasts D&M imagery produced over 400 years apart to examine consciously erotic gendered thanatological allegories of women as *vanitas* and *voluptas*, and the male/masculine as representations of Death.

Keywords: gender; erotic; death; Christianity; Reformation Europe; contemporary Europe

## Introduction

This paper explores the gendered representations that appear in 'Death and the Maiden' (herein D&M) artworks produced in Europe in two time periods, the early sixteenth century and the late-twentieth into the early twenty-first century. Both periods are characterised by religious change, namely the start of the Protestant Reformation for the former and the embedding of more secular approaches to everyday life throughout Europe

in the latter. By exploring the representations of gender in the D&M genre of art, the paper fits within the Special Issue theme of the *Journal of Gender Studies*, 'Diversity on gender and visual representation', whilst bringing to the academy an unusual body of work in the form of erotic coffin calendars. In comparing and contrasting the gendered images in these calendars with D&M artworks produced almost 500 years previously, this paper will allow an interdisciplinary audience to explore gendered visual representations of life and death from within the socio-religious context from which they were produced. Two aspects of the artworks are of particular interest; first, the masculine signifier for Death and the overt eroticisation of the Maiden, and second, that both the historic and contemporary D&M artworks juxtapose the erotic with Death.

Eroticism and death reflect the oppositions of immanence and transcendence, the earthy and the spiritual, the here-and-now and the ever-after. Culturally fascinating, the marriage of eroticism and death in Europe has a long history and one intimately tied to religion, and from the Reformation onwards, also to gender. However, the reading of imagery representing the potent combination of eroticism, death and gender, such as D&M, often marginalises the significance of their socio-religious contexts. D&M is a genre where a woman, the symbol of life, is imaged in the company of a symbol of mortality. Historically due to the influence of Augustinian theology, this was typically a male or masculine image of death; in the two sets of D&M images explored herein, I have continued to read representations of Death as male/masculine due to the hetero-normative lens of the socio-religious contexts in which the artworks were/are produced.

Contrasting against the male/masculine image of Death is a highly eroticised and sexualised<sup>1</sup> representation of a woman, who signifies life in its most fecund state. Paul Messaris (1997) has argued that visual images 'make a persuasive communication due to iconicity; the emotional response to the visual image presented' (pp. viii–xv), and the producers of the artworks have consciously exposed the viewer to this feeling. The deliberate juxtaposing of life as an erotically posed female, and Death represented by the masculine within these two sets of D&M images, ensures that the viewer has an emotional (and potentially sexually-charged) response to the artworks.<sup>2</sup>

The first set of visual images to be explored were produced by sixteenth-century German and German-speaking artists with Reformist beliefs that intentionally positioned an eroticised woman in the company of a lecherous male representation of death (Binion, 2003, p. 231). As will be shown, in these artworks, Death is portrayed by the artists as a lewd masculine figure actively highlighting the sexuality of his female co-protagonist. These images were designed to highlight the folly, futility and transience of earthly pleasures and allied vanities during a time of religious reform. During the Protestant Reformation, shifts in understandings of the after-life meant that the lustful pursuit of earthly pleasure might result in an eternity in hell. The second set of images comprises contemporary calendar art produced by coffin manufacturers in Italy and Poland; countries that remain nominally Roman Catholic despite encroaching secular attitudes into everyday life. These images similarly position an eroticised woman in the company of a representation of Death, this time in the form of a coffin – the modern metaphor for mortality. The coffin signifies masculinity in these images in two specific ways. The first is the hetero-normative context in which these images are produced (this will be explored later in the paper), and the second is that by drawing on Lefebvre's (1991) concept of abstract space, the coffin can be read as phallic, with its cold wooden rigidity and inherent implications of violence and authoritarianism standing in stark contrast to the warm soft fleshiness of the maiden<sup>3</sup>; as Lefebvre (1991) notes, the phallic denies the sensual and acts like a subject despite not being one (pp. 49, 51). Thus in Europe's current period of

increasing secularisation (or at least a decline in adherence to traditional Christian beliefs<sup>4</sup>), the calendar images highlight the desirability of earthly pleasures and vanities, and speak of the potential triumph of fecundity over, if not death itself, then contemporary concerns over mortality and one's after-life destination.

There are of course potential issues in exploring imagery almost 500 years apart, and that has been produced in diverse European locations and from different Christian traditions. However, once the socio-religious contexts of the gendered imagery is prioritised, reading these D&M images is not as problematic as it may appear. Over the past 500 years, the stark differences between Roman Catholicism and early Protestantism in Europe have partly ebbed away as the continent has become more modern, global and secular (Casovana 2006). Further, the control of the Church (whether Roman Catholic or Protestant) has diminished; meaning, the once powerful influence of Christianity on European death and after-life beliefs (Ariès, 2004; Kroener, 1996, p. xix) has shifted towards a focus on more personal interpretation of doctrine and scripture (Walter, 1994) although the use of Christian symbols and signifiers in art has remained strong. With this in mind, the paper explores D&M as an artistic genre through the lens of shifting Christian notions of life, death and the after-life to reflect on how significant religious changes in Europe during the Reformation, and in the contemporary-era, have been visualised using gendered thanatological allegory. In exploring the two uses of the D&M imagery (a genre that places eroticised representations of woman in contrast to masculine images of Death), the paper examines the theological symbolism of Death as male and life as female (the Maiden), while highlighting the significance of exploring historic and contemporary visual representations of death in terms of socio-cultural and religious attitudes towards gender.

#### Background: death in medieval/pre-Reformation Europe

In order to establish the socio-religious context of the two sets of D&M images explored herein, a brief history of the representation of death in medieval Europe is required, as is a general background on medieval after-life beliefs and a basic guide to theologically standard conceptions of gender in medieval period.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of gender, in medieval-era Europe (and indeed well into early-modern Europe), maleness, theologically, was considered socially normative, with woman understood in philosophical and theological debates as defective males<sup>6</sup> (van der Lugt, 2010). Women were generally perceived as passive, as well as weaker and less intelligent than men. Further, they were considered physically out-of-balance at a time when Galenic conceptions of the body was standard; indeed meat and fish from the male of the various species was considered superior to eat for this reason (Cadden, 1993, pp. 170, 178, 226). As such, it is unsurprising that because masculinity was the normative orthodox signifier of humanity (and indeed of all creation) during this time, we find relatively few medieval images of ordinary women in public spaces. Decorated public areas, such as churches with their wall paintings and other visual representations, imparted and reinforced the Church's teachings on social norms, especially concerning images of death and the corpse (Rosewell, 2011) The pedagogical use of such imagery finds echoes in Bakhtin's (1990, p. 150) notion of the non-theoretical 'folkloric (wo)man', and with their sensitive need for the material in the world; only a small portion of society were educated enough to read Latin (the language of the Church) with the masses relying on visual imagery and vernacular oral/aural communication for information about God's created world and His designs for their after-life.

The image of the corpse has always played a crucial role in Europe and although there is not enough time to delve into the history of its visual representation, suffice to say that in

medieval times, when the religion of Europe was Roman Catholicism, there were two typical styles of representations of the dead: The 'Three Living, Three Dead' (3L3D) style of representation and the 'Dance of Death' (DoD) genre. 3L3D is believed to have originated in France in the thirteenth century and depicts anonymous featureless skeletons mirroring living adults. The three living individuals were typically wealthy men,<sup>7</sup> and there are still examples of the genre on the walls of medieval churches around Europe. DoD imagery, rather than being a single image of static figures as in 3L3D, was a mural featuring living individuals of varying social status each accompanied by a skeleton – often dancing.<sup>8</sup> Again believed to originate in France, the first known DoD mural dates to 1424–1425 and was located in the cloister of the Cimetière des Innocents, Paris. This mural featured only males as representations of the living, however, in due course, women were added to DoD scenes<sup>9</sup>; the first DoD featuring females as well as males was painted onto the cloisters walls of St Paul's Cathedral in London, England. Now lost, John Lydgate's replica of the Paris DoD featured an additional six characters, four of them women. The reason for the addition of females to the Parisian DoD is not known, but as Oosterwijk (2009, p. 127) posits, the Parisian mural may not have been the only one in existence and we have no information on the commissioning of the St Paul's mural; as such, Lydgate may have merged influences in his St Paul's DoD. However, what we do know of all the DoD murals is that this genre of art showed viewers that from babies to bishops, death took everyone equally, regardless of social status and wealth.

Although a serious subject, DoD images often had a playful touch, bringing some carnivalesque to their scene (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 51). At Lucerne, Switzerland, a DoD mural dating to 1626–1635, painted under the eaves of Spreuer Bridge, features skeletons parodying their living partners; a king on horse-back fights a skeleton in armour, a bishop hearing council has Death as one of his advisors and a duke in fancy clothing looks over a contract – at his side, a skeleton copies his pose wearing equally fancy clothing and an outrageous caricature of the duke's hat.<sup>10</sup> Further, a DoD mural painted by Niklaus Manuel (Deutsch) between 1517 and 1519 on the outer wall of Berne's Dominican church (Butts & Hendrix, 2000, p. 257), features a playfully erotic scene of Death groping a Maiden; it is the only known erotic image in the DoD genre and shows Death kissing a girl with his bony hands fondling an exposed breast. This mural is also notable for its rare image of Death as female. Typically in the DoD genre we find Death imaged as ungendered, or as a skeleton dressed in male garments, yet Niklaus Manuel, an artist whose D&M work informs this piece, chose in one scene to present Death as an aged female (Guthke 1999, p. 119).<sup>11</sup> Death then, in medieval and early-modern Europe, although mostly represented as genderless, occasionally took the form of a male or very occasionally a female. However, regardless of the gendering of Death, the image of Death in both the 3L3D paintings and DoD murals, reinforced death as inevitable and an eventual social leveller; for all bar the sainted had to purge their earthly venial (forgivable) sins before resurrection reunited them with God in Heaven.

Central to Roman Catholic theology and medieval European vernacular belief was purgatory. Effectively a debtors' prison, purgatory was understood a physical place where the souls of the deceased would reside until they had purged/purified themselves of their earthly sins (Sadlier, 2008, p. 12). Because during this era there was no clear differentiation between the body and soul that we find in later Cartesian thought (Bynum, 1995, p. 11), the boundaries between the spiritual and the physical/material were blurred. As such, purgatory was a place of severe and painful sufferance, a transitory kind of hell understood in everyday terms to have physical punishments that reflected ones venial (non-mortal) sin for example the greedy would be forced to eat dust, whilst the proud had

large stones on their back that ensured they looked only at the ground<sup>12</sup> (Welch, 2013). This punishment was not unwelcomed however, as it resulted in one's (re-)unification with God. Time spent in purgatory varied according to the sinful nature of one's soul, and certain acts conducted during one's lifetime would give purgatorial remission, such as going on pilgrimage to visit the relics of saints and the buying of indulgences (official documents confirming a fixed amount of remission from the temporal punishment of purgatory<sup>13</sup>). However, prayers from the living were believed to aid the dead in purgatory by lessening the pains they suffered (Swanson, 2007), and the ringing of church bells on All Souls would bring the dead comfort and remind them they were not forgotten (Hutton, 1996, p. 45). Thus, both in life and after death, there were ways to lessen post-mortem purgatorial torment (Le Goff, 1981, p. 293).

However, with the Protestant Reformation (popularly symbolised by Martin Luther posting his 95 Theses on the door of Castle Church in Wittenburg, Germany, in 1517<sup>14</sup>), the notion of Catholic purgatory came into question, and eventually, purgatory was abolished by the religious Reformers. The Reformers believed in salvation by faith and typically that the dead should be solely responsible for the sins that they committed in their own lifetime, and thus, at death, one either went to Heaven or Hell. This shift, I argue, can be seen in D&M imagery produced by early/proto-Reformist artists of the period.

### Death in Reformation Europe

The visual representations of death found in the early/proto-Reformist D&M genre differs enormously from that of the earlier 3L3D and DoD. Where previously, the image of death was a largely featureless (often genderless) skeleton, the personification of death in D&M gave us Death; a distinct (almost always male) individual.<sup>15</sup> The first visual representation of Death that we know of comes from Albrecht Dürer.

Dürer (1471–1528) was born a Roman Catholic and although it is believed he never totally abandoned his faith, he appears to have had Reformist sympathies, for despite being artist to the Holy Roman Emperor, Dürer had contacts with various Reformers and is known to have been sympathetic to Lutheranism (Harbison, 1976). With the Reformist thrust towards the responsibility of the individual, especially in terms of the after-life (Davis, 1977, pp. 94–95), it is perhaps of no surprise that in Dürer's work, we find the beginnings of this new oeuvre of artistic representation of death: Death, the symbol of mortality, depicted as a lone and sexually-predatory male, in the company of the symbol of life, a woman.<sup>16</sup> To clarify this linkage, a brief exploration of theological reasoning is required but it needs to be noted that this image, as with all those explored in this section, was designed to arouse lustful thoughts in its male viewers. Further, these images were part of the anti-Catholic propaganda that was rife in the proto/early-Reformation period (Potter, 1979; Cole, 1972<sup>17</sup>). Additionally, the use of iconicity in these new D&M images was didactic, designed to remind the male viewer of their sinful humanity and that purgatory was at the very least, theologically questionable if not theologically incompatible with Christian doctrine. With women acting as the signifier of pleasure, erotic D&M images 'warned men not to fall victim to the seduction of women, which always led to sin . . .' (Knöll, 2008, p. 19). Thus, the viewer's focus should not be on transient everyday pleasures of the flesh as depicted in the images, but one's eternal after-life destination (as denoted by the image of Death).

Theologically, death was connected to Adam (the first man), whereas life was connected to Eve (Adam's wife, and the first woman). This is clear from the following Biblical verses. In Genesis 3:20 we find, 'And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living'; additionally Eve in Hebrew means life (Bechtel, 1997,



p. 79). However, in Romans 5:12, the Bible states that it was man that brought death; 'Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin'.<sup>18</sup> In German, the language of the proto/early Reformist artists (as well as Dürer), this connection between death and the male/masculine was well-defined: *Der or Herr Tod* (Mr Death).

However, as previously noted, across medieval Europe, images of death took both male and female forms, although typically this was through the use of gendered clothing on an ungendered skeletal form. The formerly mentioned image of Death as a fully en fleshed female, known as *Death and the Canon* (1516–1517)<sup>19</sup> which formed part of Berne's DoD mural by Niklaus Manuel, depicted Death as an ugly elderly woman with pendulous breasts. By dragging off her living victim, the canon was effectively humiliated, as was the Catholic Church to which he belonged; Catholic clerics took a vow of celibacy and their interactions with women were limited, thus having a canon taken by a female image of Death implied degradation. We have direct evidence of the political nature of Death imagery by Niklaus Manuel (Butts & Hendrix, 2000, p. 257) and the other early/proto-Reformist artists that inform this article. However, to fully understand their work, the theological understandings of women in the Reformation-era and their connection with concupiscence/lust (one of the seven deadly sins, all of which could be purged in Purgatory depending on the severity of the act) requires some explanation.

As noted earlier, Luther, in posting his 95 Theses, can be understood as the Father of the Reformation. With Luther's theology grounded in the works of St Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE), Augustinian perceptions of women, sin and lust become highly influential in Reformation thought. Augustine, in *City of God* (14:21), claimed that sexual intercourse before the Fall would have occurred without concupiscence/lust, and thus, Eve in 'The Garden of Eden' would have remained a virgin despite bearing children to Adam. Augustine also claimed that it was the sin of disobedience in eating from the fruit of 'The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil' that brought lust and death to the human condition, and that it was Adam that was directly responsible for this disobedience (13:23)<sup>20</sup>: Genesis 3:17–19 makes this clear:

Then to Adam He [God] said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': Cursed is the ground for your sake . . . For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return"

However, whilst death stems from Adam, lust comes from Eve, as it was Eve that encouraged Adam to eat of, and give into his desire for, the forbidden fruit. With Eve biblically linked with desire (Genesis 3:16), she becomes the temptress, and Adam the tempted. Thus, we have in the Reformation a dualistic mode of thinking that equates Adam, as male with death, and Eve as female with life and lust: not only is she the one who tempted Adam in the Garden, but in Genesis 3:16, God commands Eve to desire her husband, effectively ensuring the sin of concupiscence lies ultimately with woman.

During early modernity, in European culture, women were typically perceived as signifiers of wantage, of pleasure and the 'unruly' (Purkiss, 1992, pp. 74, 78), with works such as the *Malleus Maleficarum* ('The Hammer of Witches', written by German clerics, Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Springer) reinforcing the general social and theological view that women were weaker in faith than men, and more carnal. Published 13 times between 1487 and 1520, *The Malleus Maleficarum* sought to demonstrate potent interrelations between female sexuality (including masturbation), sin and witchcraft (Broedel, 2003, p. 178). With women strongly associated with concupiscence (Weisner, 2000, p. 272), females were generally regarded as dangerous. Their sexual voraciousness was understood to extend beyond acceptable hetero-normative acts, and with Luther (1995, vol. 1, p. 134)

firmly believing only sex within marriage was blessed, any non-marital sex (including homosexual relations) was deemed depraved, and therefore bad for one's soul, family and honour (Luther, 1966, vol. 44, p. 8).<sup>21</sup> Whilst sexual desire was natural and God-given (Genesis 1:28), concupiscence (lustful desire) was sinful, and unmarried women, as autonomous females, were considered especially dangerous by those of Reformist persuasions (Wiesner-Hanks 2000, p. 64). This concept is most notably expressed in a woodcut by the Beham brothers entitled *Three Nude Women and Death*<sup>22</sup>; Sebald Beham, who reworked (in 1546–1550) the original plate created by his brother Barthel (in 1535–1537), is one of the early/proto-Reformist artists explored in more detail below. The work depicts Death as a leering skeleton present at a ritual of female mutual masturbation. He stares wide eyed, open mouthed with lolling tongue, at a young woman's breasts, while a mature woman reaches for the youth's genitals – this second woman has her foot firmly on a skull and wraps an arm around an elderly woman who holds the gaze of the young female. The three women and the skeleton form a circle – youth, maturity, old age and death – and whilst this image reflects the circle of life, it also didactically represents women, through their sexual act, as signifiers of unnatural fleshly desire; female mutual masturbation stands in stark opposition to the belief of Aquinas' (1225–1274) who held in *Summa Theologica* 11-11, 154<sup>23</sup> that unnatural sexual acts were sinful. This image then is designed to elicit iconicity, to arouse the senses of the viewer and remind them that such carnal acts could lead one to sin and thus an after-life of damnation.

Having established that during this period of history, men in D&M imagery were associated with death whilst women symbolised life and lust, we can move onto the three most significant artists of the D&M genre and explore the politics, and theological symbolism, of their gendered thanatological images.

First to Niklaus Manuel (Deutsch) (c1484–1530), a German-speaking Swiss religious reformer who used art to express his political activism (Potter, 1979, p. 381). Between 1515 and 1520, Niklaus Manuel painted a large fresco for the Bernese Dominicans in the traditional style of the DoD. This mural, which as previously stated provides the only erotic D&M image in the DoD genre,<sup>24</sup> links him directly with the Reformation as he deliberately attacked the 'evils of the [Catholic] Church in the text [written] underneath' the frescos of his mural (Van Abbe 1952a, p. 181). Amongst these 'evils', were the abuse of the Mass, the belief in purgatory and the payment of indulgences; all Roman Catholic practices.<sup>25</sup> Notably, less than a decade after producing the fresco, Niklaus Manuel became a leading politician in Berne, where in 1525, purgatorial indulgences were abolished, and in 1528, the Catholic Mass was banned (Blakeley, 2006, p. 58); the city was firmly in favour of religious reform, as was Niklaus Manuel. According to the proto/early Reformers, the New Testament preached simplicity, and for Niklaus Manuel, his evangelical belief led him to give up his art and concentrate on following in the footsteps of Jesus, working for the poor and oppressed; notably, part of his work in public service included petitioning for an organised welfare state (Van Abbe, 1952b, p. 296). However, alongside his government service, Niklaus Manuel wrote poems, plays and political tracts, which all spoke potently of his Reformist beliefs, including his assertions that lust, swearing and frivolity should not be tolerated. Indeed, he went so far as to state that 'How fine a thing it would be if ye could so easily foreswear the world and recognise how greatly sin parts ye from God' (Manuel in Van Abbe 1952b, p. 295).

Niklaus Manuel's 1517 D&M engraving, *Der Tod und Das Mädchen* (Death and the Maiden)<sup>26</sup> powerfully clarifies his feelings toward worldliness, and pedagogically situates the vanity of beauty and the sin of lust. Death is depicted as an active yet rotting body ravishing a young woman; Death is kissing the maiden, his hand holding up her baroque-



style dress to display her bare legs and the playful garter-ribbons at her knees, meanwhile, she is depicted holding his decomposing hand at her genitals. The image is an allegory – humanity may have its tempting earthly pleasures, but at death, we must each account for our sins before God. The engraving informs visually that it is to the after-life, not this-life, that one should turn one's attentions. The image is consciously pornographic. It potently resonates with Messaris' iconicity as it was part of the artist's trope to stimulate, the 'lustful thoughts it supposedly was intended to discourage' (in Sekules, 2001, p. 170); only by engaging the viewer holistically (in body and mind, emotionally and physically), could the soul take precedence and ensure that it was heavenly, not earthly pleasures, which were the centre of one's lived experience.

Further clarifying the link between individual sin in life and a concern for death and the after-life is the work of Hans Baldung (alias Grien) (c1484–1545), the most prolific of the Reformist artists working in the D&M genre. Notable amongst his images is the *Girl and Death* (1517).<sup>27</sup> As with Niklaus Manuel's work, a young woman stands alone whilst Death, depicted as a rotting male, takes her; she is the symbol of voluptas (pleasure), young, beautiful, fleshy, in the prime of life and essentially fecund. However, unlike Niklaus' Manuel's female, in Grien's image, the Maiden is unwilling, pleading for mercy and life, Death meanwhile parodies the benediction – a religious invocation for divine guidance. Using his left hand rather than right, and with arm held downwards rather than upwards to Heaven, Death's mock benediction reverses the well-being blessing and points to the tomb on which they stand. The painting informs that death and the eternal union with God in the after-life is preferable to this-life with its temporary pleasures and vanities. The association of the Maiden as voluptas with the transience of life (vanitas) is evident from the words on the painting, *Hie must du yu* (Here must you go), but can be seen more clearly from his earlier painting the *Three Ages of Women* (1509–1510)<sup>28</sup> which depicts three females in the company of Death. Symbolically this work depicts the vanity of youth, with the maiden ignorant of Death's presence (she looks at her reflection in a mirror and arranges her long hair) and the desire for this-life over the after-life (an older woman seeks to stave off Death's hour-glass - an artistic signifier of life's transience); an infant plays at the Maiden's feet aware only of this young woman and the promise of pleasures to come. Notable here is the gendering of Death. With rag-like flesh in the place of genitals, Death is very obviously male, and indeed, many of Baldung's images from this time resonate with the Augustinian Adam/male/Death and Eve/woman/life and lust link that is based on the Fall narrative in Genesis.

There are four images by Grien in the D&M genre that depict the Fall,<sup>29</sup> and there is a clear similarity between the positioning of Adam in these images and the positioning of Death in his D&M works. In all Grien's work, both Adam and Death approach the female subject from behind, however, whereas Adam caresses, Death grasps. This grasping is most obvious in *Woman and Death* (1519),<sup>30</sup> where clasping at the woman's breast, Death's kiss is actually a bite. This painting is highly symbolic in two further ways; firstly, the woman holds open her robe to display her naked torso, and in doing so forms a V shape emphasising her genitals and as such her sex, whilst her robe is a large white cloth signifying (or possible even being) a burial shroud – the connection made here between sex and death is potent.

The link between women and sex in Baldung's work goes beyond theological understandings of the day however. As noted earlier, it was concupiscence and unmarried sex, rather than sex per se, that was unacceptable. For whilst women were understood as temptresses and in every way inferior to men (with their natural role as dutiful wife and mother), Luther and many of the reformers did not necessarily see all women in the way

that *The Malleus Maleficarum* presented, that is, as witches.<sup>31</sup> Baldung however who illustrated books on witches often providing sexually explicit, if humorous depictions,<sup>32</sup> appears to have generally conceived of women as purveyors of carnality, and therefore as potential witches. In much of his Fall work and many of his D&M images, women of child-bearing age are imaged with a sexually knowing expression and occasionally in potentially suggestive stances.<sup>33</sup> Although more a humanist and an approver of the new religion, rather than a zealous religious reformer like Niklaus Manuel (Brady, 1975, p. 309), Grien's connections between women and sex appear to have resonance with the general early modern concerns over the regulation of women and their sexual desire (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000, p. 92). With women understood as descendants of the temptress Eve, their inherent moral frailty led to a gendered understanding of their sexual morality, and as such, their conduct in society was differently measured from that of men (Growing, 1996, p. 3).

This sense of women's inherent lack of sexual propriety as being related to the Fall is evident in the second metaphor found in Grien's 1519 work, *Woman and Death*; the significance of Death's bite. In all Grien's Fall images, Eve holds an apple, an often used symbol of the forbidden fruit she took from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in Genesis 2:16–17. The connection between the sin of disobedience in taking this fruit was commented on by Luther, who stated that, 'most people believe that [death] just happens ... [but] Scripture teaches us that death comes ... from the bite of the forbidden fruit' (in Koerner, 1996, p. 292). In Latin, *Mors* is death, whereas *Morsus* is bite, and thus the bite of Death on the cheek of the sexually mature woman in Grien's painting provides both a literary and artistic pun (Koerner, 1995, p. 87); the bite of the forbidden fruit brought the bite of death into the world.

The Adam and Eve metaphor for sex and death can also be seen in the last of our proto/early-Reformation artists, Sebald Beham (1500–1550) – one of the so-called 'godless painters' (Stewart, 2012). In 1525 Beham, was briefly expelled from Nuremberg, Germany, for heresy against Lutheranism as he felt Luther had not gone far enough in his criticism of the Roman Catholic Church (Stewart, 1996, pp. 1–2). With a personal theology based on the iconoclasm of Andreas Karlstadt (1486–1541), and the political and religious extremism of Thomas Muntzer (c1488–1525), a leader of the abortive Peasant's War (1524–1525) which invoked Divine Law to demand political and legal rights for agrarian workers (Lindburg, 1977), Beham's work potently reflects his radical religious reformism (Stewart, 1996, p. 505). Beham believed that each individual was responsible for his own sins in his own lifetime, and it was the Fall that brought desire and death into the world.

Beham's theological understandings of sex and death are most clearly expressed in his 1541 work, *The Hour is Over*.<sup>34</sup> In this image, we are once more in the realm of iconicity; as with the overtly erotic Niklaus Manuel 1517 D&M image, *The Hour is Over* is designed for sexual arousal. Beham's work deliberately places female genitalia centre stage with her labia majora clearly visible and placed in the middle of the image; indeed, it is at the centre of a cross formed by her right arm and left leg, and Death's left wing and her right leg – the viewer cannot avoid being a voyeur. In the engraving, we see a sexually-mature woman lying asleep on a couch, her legs are wide apart and Death, as a winged skeleton, grins lecherously at her naked form whilst holding an hour-glass. A bedpan under the couch gives the work a base and earthly feel (there is a playfulness here but also a resonance with Bakhtinian notions of the grotesque and the real), while the sheet on which she lies is reminiscent of a burial shroud. Beham, as with Niklaus Manuel, and Grien firmly links sexual desire to death.

This sexual desire and death connection is clearly theological for Beham, as it was the other two proto/early Reformist artists, with his 1529 work *Death and the Indecent Pair*,<sup>35</sup> solidifying the link to the Fall. Here Death, fleshy and with an erect penis, encourages Adam to fondle Eve's genitals, and smiles knowingly as she grips Adam's penis; a child watches the scene – the eventual outcome of their lustful desire. In Latin, script on the drawing states, 'Death, the final boundary of things' (*Mors vitima linea rerum*). Even from Beham's early works we see his reformist tendencies. Sexual desire leads to death and Death is male. For Beham, as with the other artists explored herein, Biblically, sexual desire (lust) was considered more a female than a male attribute, and this is particularly evident in Beham's 1543 *Adam and Eve*.<sup>36</sup> Here Eve pleasures herself while she and Adam hold an apple being bitten by a snake; Death as a skeleton acts as the Edenic Tree in this Fall image, with his male gender evident from the lustful look he casts at Eve.<sup>37</sup> *Vanitas* and *voluptas* are central features of Beham's works.

A few years later in *Death and the Standing Naked One* (1547),<sup>38</sup> Beham once more highlights the folly of *vanitas*. Again a D&M image with a naked woman and Death as a winged male (this time fleshy rather than skeletal and about to bite her cheek), this woodcut can be seen to sum up proto/early Reformist art. In Latin, an inscription on the work reads 'Death destroys all human beauty' (*Omnem in homine venvstatem mors abolet*). Here then we find a young, fecund woman – a daughter of Eve – the symbol of life and *Vanitas* (the transient nature of materiality) being taken by Death; in the end, she, and thus we and all earthy things (including sinful sexual desire), will be annihilated.

Therefore, in the late 1500s and early-to-mid-1600s, in the early days of the Reformation, when many Northern Europeans were struggling with the transition in after-life beliefs from Roman Catholicism, with its safety net of purgatory, to the Reformed belief that one accounted individually for one's own earthly sins, three artists of Reformist persuasion reflected the socio-political and theological changes in regards to death and desire. With the importance of the Fall in Reformist theology, man, associated with Adam, became the symbol of Death, while woman, associated with Eve, stood for *vanitas* (earthly transience) and *voluptas* (sexual pleasure). The D&M images that these artists created acted as *memento mori*, a form of didacticism informing the viewer to remember that they will die, and thus, they should live with their after-life destination firmly at the forefront of all they said, thought and did. By making the D&M works explicitly erotic, the Reformist artists ensured their (predominantly male) viewers were physically aroused, and thus the message was not just visual, but visceral. By ensuring the didactic was holistically transmitted, the viewer was reminded in body, mind and soul to attend to their after-life destination, and not get too embroiled in the desires (especially the sexual desires) of this-life.

## Death in contemporary Europe

In terms of contemporary Europe, the focus of D&M imagery shifts from Germanic-speaking Reformist artworks, where death linguistically was male (*Herr Tod*), to Italy and Poland. Although the traditional linguistic designation for death is feminine in both languages,<sup>39</sup> and death has been personified as a woman in both Italian and Polish high art and literature (Guthke, 1999, p. 7), the symbol of death in the following Italian and Polish D&M calendar images is in the form a coffin. As noted in the introduction, by drawing on Lefebvre's (1991) concept of abstract space, and through a close socio-contextual reading of the calendar imagery, the coffins in the calendar art act as a male/masculine signifier<sup>40</sup> that juxtaposes with the Maiden in the typical D&M style. Indeed, as Schechter (2009)

notes in relation to the Cofani Funebri images, they feature, 'hot babes dressed like porn stars and striking salacious poses atop a selection of handsomely carved [funeral] caskets ... [are] guaranteed to be a major turn-on' (p. 271).<sup>41</sup> However, to add further weight to my assertion that the coffins connote the masculine, it must be noted that both countries are essentially Roman Catholic, and whilst secularisation has much reduced the institutional power of the Church, hetero-normativity remains standard.<sup>42</sup>

The first company to use coffins in terms of D&M imagery was Cofani Funebri who are based in Rome, Italy. Their first calendar appeared in 2003.<sup>43</sup> Featuring six photographs, one for every two months, this initial foray into coffin calendar marketing could be classified as a soft form of D&M. Every image contained a company coffin as a signifier of death juxtaposed with a signifier of life, in this case models dressed as angels and poetic life-affirming messages.<sup>44</sup> However, one of the photographs featured a male angel, and the remainder, although all female angels, lacked the overt eroticism that is evident in the proto/early-Reformation D&M works. Although the angels and poetic cantos indicated the eternity of death and the transience of life, their didactic is a far cry from the memento mori warnings of the Reformation-era artists. This is perhaps hardly surprising, for in contemporary Europe the process of secularisation, even in previously staunchly Roman Catholic countries like Italy and Poland, means that young people are attending church less than their forebears and moving away from traditional moral norms; in both countries, there are rising levels of co-habitation, and fewer baptisms, communions and confirmations.<sup>45</sup> In effect, contemporary Europe has moved away from a focus on religion and the after-life, to being increasingly focussed on the self and this-life; Walter (1994, p. 48) has termed this, a turn to the neo-modern. This neo-modern turn is reflected in the contemporary D&M photographs produced by the two coffin manufacturers.

By 2004, Cofani Funebri had begun to establish the potent links between desire and death in their coffin calendar art that was once ubiquitous in Reformist D&M imagery. All the models were now female and each had an erotic or sexually-knowing expression<sup>46</sup>; the humorous website 'tonyrogers.com' ironically noted that the Italian casket pin-up calendar features, 'a nice set of caskets ...' in reference to the overt display of cleavage.<sup>47</sup> In 2005, the first scantily-clad women in sexual poses appeared and the calendar moved to a monthly format.<sup>48</sup> In this particular edition, all the sexily-dressed women are seen 'manufacturing' the coffins, apart from Miss April who, dressed in lingerie, poses in front of a suspended coffin in a stance reminiscent of the crucifixion; she gazes upwards, as a shaft of light emanates in all directions. This particular photograph connects sexual desire (the erotic) with death in a powerful way through the use of explicitly Christian imagery; perhaps surprising given the company is located close to the seat of power in the Roman Catholic Church, this image has not received any condemnation from the religious authorities in Rome.

Eroticism as a theme develops over the next few years with the 2006 calendar<sup>49</sup> featuring two photographs of women in lingerie chained to a coffin (June and August) and one where the model is touching her genital area (March). The year 2007<sup>50</sup> had a funeral theme with the models draped across company coffins wearing skimpy black lingerie, hold-ups and high heels, plus the black top-hat traditionally favoured by funeral directors. The May 2007 model additionally wears a belt with 'SEX' emblazoned on it to clarify the theme for the viewer. The 2008 calendar depicts women in various states of undress posing provocatively on or against coffins.<sup>51</sup> The message is clear; women equate to fecund life and the coffin symbolises Death. The images are set firmly in the D&M genre, although whereas in the Reformation-era, Death took the women, here we see the women taking-on Death. Further, whilst both sets of images reinforce that life is short and death eternal, the

connotations of the images are starkly different. The proto/early-Reformation images were designed to direct the viewer towards thoughts of their after-life destination (an eternity in Hell paying for ones earthly sins), whilst the calendar images keep the viewer's thoughts firmly in the realms of earthly desire.

The year 2009 was the first year that Cofani Funebri shot their photographs outdoors.<sup>52</sup> In this edition, they were more explicit in regard to, not only eroticism, but also the connections between death and religion. Corsetry was the chosen costume theme and a single coffin style was used throughout; on the long side of the coffin, was a carving of Jesus' head and torso, arms outstretched, head tilted to one side – although there was no cross incorporated into the design, the carving was clearly of Jesus' crucified body and his head was decorated with the crown of thorns. In the October photograph, the carving of Jesus' crucified body was deliberately placed between the outstretched legs of the model, her stocking tops and naked thighs clearly visible above his head. In the March shot, the model replicates Jesus' pose with her outstretched arms lying across the coffin lid, his tortured body clearly visible.

Furthering the desire versus death and religion link in the 2009 calendar was the cover shot which featured a model standing in the crucifixion pose. Here, the Jesus-design coffin acted as the cross-piece for her pseudo-crucifixion, with the models outstretched arms mirroring those of Jesus as imaged on the coffin. Surrounding the photograph are the words, 'denial', 'depression', 'acceptance', 'bargaining' and 'anger' – the five stages of grief identified by Kubler-Ross (1969) in her seminal work on palliative care for the dying. This cover design explicitly placed the calendar in the realms of D&M. When it comes to making a statement about death, religion and desire, Cofani Funebri are not afraid to be controversial, and indeed, this edition also included two images featuring corseted women seductively posed with a processional crucifix, as well as the Jesus-design coffin (July and August<sup>53</sup>).

The company continued to push the boundaries with their 2010 calendar,<sup>54</sup> which had a bondage and domination (B&D) theme. The cover shot featured a male gravedigger, one woman in PVC bondage wear and another with a ball-gag in her mouth; the ubiquitous company coffin (although not the Jesus-design one) featured in this and every other shot. The 12 monthly shots all contained either B&D imagery, or women in corsetry, and several included the gravedigger as a character in the scene; this was the first time a man had appeared in the calendar since the November/December 2003 angel. However, the human man in this calendar did not signify Death, for in one of the shots he was lying inside a coffin with two women in the process of burying him (December); once more the company coffin took the role of Death as, in effect, the Grim Reaper who takes all mortals.

The 2011 calendar featured some topless photographs amongst a plethora of erotica, B&D imagery and coffins<sup>55</sup>: a theme that continued into 2012, although here the wooden company coffin was replaced by a clear perspex one<sup>56</sup> (which the company neither manufactures nor sells) – inside the coffin was a consciously posed skeleton. The maleness of this skeleton was obvious from his posed hetero-normative reactions to the seductiveness and eroticism of the young female model. Miss October, dressed just in a corset and heels, holds a riding crop, and the skeleton, as Death, covers where his genitals would be, mouth aghast in anticipation of his punishment. Miss January holds a feather duster against the see-through coffin at the point where the skeleton's genitals would have been; he presses his knees together and appears to chuckle in response. Miss February pulls up her mini-dress suggestively, her knickers stretched around her wide-apart ankles, and with one bony arm, the skeletal Death half-covers his eyes to peek at the erotic scene before him. Miss December straddles the coffin, playing with herself while the skeleton is posed breaking through the perspex. These images are without doubt playfully erotic and echo much of



Bakhtin's carnivalesque (1984, pp. 19, 50), notably the liminality, the parody and the ever-present themes of fertility (sex) and death. Further, the skeleton clearly acts as the male figure of Death (notably remaining inside the coffin in every shot), and given the sexually explicit poses in the previous calendars, and the frequent use of the coffin as a phallic symbol in the shots, there can be little doubt the coffin acts as a male signifier.

In terms of D&M then, from 2004 the women in the calendars by Cofani Funebri echo the female sexual availability and overt eroticism of the Reformist artists working in this genre. They can be linked to woman as Eve in terms of their being a temptress, and in regard to their explicit fecundity; the models are all young women, sexually mature and sexually-knowing. The calendars though are less pornographic (and anatomically obvious) than the proto/early-Reformation works. This is perhaps unsurprising because the Reformist artists were expressing their theological positioning through iconicity, deliberately ensuring the viewer felt sexually aroused and thus got the *memento mori* message viscerally. The context of the Cofani Funebri calendars meanwhile is commercial marketing, and sex sells, even it seems, when it comes to coffins.<sup>57</sup> This is also evident in the second company that produces erotic calendars to publicise their coffins.

Lindner first produced their coffin calendar in 2010.<sup>58</sup> Aware of Cofani Funebri's success, this Polish firm joined the unusual market of death-related calendars.<sup>59</sup> Their first calendar was a location shot and aimed to set the scenes in famous Polish landscapes. In a similar vein to the Italian shots, the photographs featured scantily-clad women alone in the company of, and dominating, the signifier of Death – the company coffin. However, Lindner chose a variety of death-related situations for their scenes. Miss April wears a skimpy combat bikini and, holding an assault rifle, lays on a coffin with back arched in a sexually provocative manner. Miss August wears a basque and stocking set as she emerges from a coffin, scythe in hand, and Miss October sits on a coffin wearing knee-length black high-heeled boots and the tiniest piece of strappy lingerie, while she leans knowingly on a large sword. The women here are empowered and empowering. The scythe, rifle and sword are symbolic of patriarchal power, of death and destruction, yet they are in the hands of women, the signifier of life, and thus in this calendar there are echoes of Niklaus Manuel's DoD mural with his two images of women – one as Death and one as the Maiden. Woman in the 2010 calendar shots can be seen as an ambiguous figure, being both the signifier of life and acting as one who takes life.

Other photographs in the 2010 calendar suggest the female model has killed her lover/husband. Miss January sits astride a coffin in her hitched-up wedding dress; her bare thighs and ample cleavage are visible as she reaches to rip open the coffin lid in an aggressive rather than distraught fashion. Miss December drags a coffin across an enclosed bridge, champagne bottle in hand and dressed only in short fur jacket, hold-ups and heels – she is no grieving widow. These women are not allowing death to take them, they are conquering the signifier of death (although of course, are unable to conquer death itself). These photographs denote female sexuality and autonomy, but they connote the importance of eroticism and pleasure in this-world, over concerns for death and the next-world.

The 2011 calendar played with a Gangster movie theme, and featured guns, women with heaving bosoms, casinos and whiskey.<sup>60</sup> In every shot, there is a company coffin, but whilst the previous calendar reversed the D&M trope with woman conquering the symbol of death, in this calendar, the symbol of death is a discrete backdrop to worldly pleasures, and a reminder that death is inevitable even in the throes of hedonism. Miss October in her pearls and bright red lipstick, holds a revolver as she poses in a mirror. Lingerie-clad Miss August is posed having murdered her similarly attired female rival – her biker boyfriend looks on nonchalantly, and Miss April has tied up her lover with rope and has him at gun



point. The January shot depicts a man about to murder another, with an erotically attired woman begging him to stop – she is trying to save her man from his brutal murder. The theme here then is love and destruction (love of money, of whiskey, of men, of beauty) and that in the end, death will conquer all. This calendar can be seen as a D&M *memento mori* in the traditional form. The theological underpinning is largely absent but death is ever present and the Maiden appears to be a signifier of earthly pleasures. However, the tradition is twisted on the reverse of the calendar where a couple are shown having coitus perched on a coffin; he is topless, and her stockinged legs are wrapped around his waist, his hand at her genitals. Sexual desire literally has the last word here, and in the end whilst death may take us individually, it is, this calendar informs, sexual desire that keeps humanity going.

The 2012 calendar by Lindner took the Football World Cup as its theme.<sup>61</sup> Each month featured a naked model posed with a company calendar; each model was body painted to appear ‘dressed’ in the attire of a competing country. Miss March is France, and her tiny shorts and a naval-style jacket give an erotic edge to a military theme. Miss May represents America and the model is painted with a short dress; a Marilyn Monroe look-a-like, her coffin has musical notes and a guitar engraved in the wood. Again each shot shows an erotically posed young woman in the company of a coffin. The Maiden acts as a counterpoint to the finality of death, a representative of the material, a symbol of life; she is Eve, signifier of *vanitas* and *voluptas*, of this world and its transient pleasures, especially the pleasures of sexual desire.

These calendar photographs, like the proto/early-Reformation images before them, utilise the D&M trope: they image an erotic woman in the company of a signifier of death. The women in both sets of images remains a constant, but the shift in imagery from a clearly male Death to an inanimate object as a signifier of Death, can be seen to pose analytical issues. However, the phallic symbolism of the coffins in these photographs, as well as the choice of poses, gives these inanimate objects a masculine gendered feel which echoes Lefebvre’s (1991, p. 51) assertion that the phallic object acts like a subject even though it is not one. Notably, even when the Lindner Maiden acts as both a fecund signifier of life and a potential image of morality, the coffin remains present. Further, within Europe’s dualistic and hetero-normative worldview, where there is life there is death, and where there is woman there is man; the calendar girls’ natural, fleshy, erotic, fecundity juxtaposes with the rigid manufactured coffin in a world where death is largely hidden away. In Reformation-era Europe, rotting bodies and skeletons would have been, if not common place, then at least not unusual; people died at home, coffins were rare, graves were shallow and often reused with bones stripped of their remaining flesh and placed in ossuaries or charnel houses (Koudounaris, 2011). In today’s Europe, funeral homes and funeral directors means death is distanced and commercialised (Davies, 2002; Walter, 1994), and a skeleton as much associated with the medical profession than with the death profession (Quigley, 2005). In all artworks, allegory is commonplace but contextual, and whereas Death as Adam/male was appropriate to the early/proto-Reformation Europeans, for contemporary Europeans a coffin is a more appropriate and recognisable symbol of mortality. Thus, the coffin in these photographs takes on the gendered role of Death, and in the process shifts the trope away from the overt pornography of the proto/early-Reformation, to the playfully erotic.

## Conclusion

The Reformation D&M imagery was produced in a time of religious transition, a time when communal Catholicism was being challenged by individualistic Protestantism; a

time when the security of purgatory was officially over; the living and the dead could no longer support each other to get out of the debtor's gaol and no longer were only the truly bad damned to an eternity in hell. In the new form of Christianity, everyone was responsible for their own sins, and only God knew where they went after death; should you die before atoning for your sins, and this was a genuine fear of the era (Ariès, 2004), then a bad death could mean a terrible after-life. Death was therefore a central concern, and thus the proto/early-Reformation D&M images acted as a *memento mori* and were designed to remind one of human weakness, of the sin of earthly temptations. The Maiden was a signifier for *voluptas* (pleasure), and of Eve whose desire for the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden brought about sinful lust. These images had iconicity, they were deliberately made to arouse that lust and despite the fact that the Maiden stands in front of Death, the meaning is that Death and theologically reasoned transcendence, should be centre stage and the transient pleasures of life, secondary.

The coffin calendars too have been produced in a time of major religious transition. Although both Poland and Italy are traditionally still essentially Roman Catholic, the process of secularisation in terms of adherence to Christianity has meant the eroding of traditional beliefs and values, and with fewer people attending church, there is a concomitant lowering of belief in a traditional after-life (Halman & Draulans, 2006; Voas & Crockett, 2005). Further, many Death Studies theorists, such as Walter (1991), Bauman (1992) and Davies (2002) argue that contemporary Western society is death denying with materiality, commercialisation, secularisation and the quest to hold onto youth and fecundity for as long as possible, all symptoms of a society that tries to hold onto life and living. I argue that we see this here in these calendars. On one level, they are just advertising; they were produced to market coffins (and they have been successful in raising the profile of the two firms), but when the images are read at a deeper level, they conform to the D&M genre, but turn it on its head. They no longer demonstrate the transience of *voluptas*, for *voluptas* is now a long lasting reality. In these images, the women's fecundity and eroticism highlights worldliness, desire and sexuality, and reflects Western contemporary society's obsession with youthfulness and a focus on this-life. Although the Maiden remains in front of Death, Death is replaced with a modern metaphor of mortality; a coffin, for contemporary Westerners are typically shielded from the realities of a rotting corpse or skeleton.

This paper then asserts that in Europe in times of major religious change, D&M images act to reflect understandings of mortality, but can only be fully comprehended when the role of iconicity is considered, and the subjects are examined through the lens of gender norms. By exploring the socio-religious context of the artworks, and the iconicity they engender, the rationale for a male signifier of Death and an erotic representation of woman as the Maiden becomes clear. As such, these images act as contextualised gendered thanatological visual allegories that resonate with Messari's notion of iconicity.

## Notes

1. For the purposes of this paper, sexualised designates images of women that highlight their sexual maturity. Historically, this is typically in terms of nudes imaged with breasts, hips and a rounded belly; symbols of female fertility that allude to the sex act. It also applies to images where clothing focuses the viewer's attention on the sexual areas of the female body such as breasts and genitals. The term erotic is used to designate images of women that are designed evoke a sense of titillation or sexual pleasure in the viewer. Eroticism is intimated in terms of actions, gestures and/or positions that emphasise the sexual nature of the woman, and/or in regards to clothing, such as depictions of women in intimate lingerie, or fetish wear.

2. Where possible, I have provided URL links for the images discussed. The Italian Cofani Funebri calendars are only available from 2009 via the site of the co-owner and photographer, Maurizio Matteucci, while the Polish Lindner calendar portfolio is held on their website <http://www.kalendarzindner.pl/editions/> (accessed 3 April 2014).
3. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre describes the cultural geography of space through his notion of abstract space. He argues that abstract space is masculine and culturally and symbolically connected to capitalism and commodification. He notes also that it 'relates negatively to that which perceives it . . . ' (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 51). This can be related to coffins as the funeral casket industry dates only to the late nineteenth century and the burgeoning of consumer culture (Quigley, 2005, p. 84), and further, the coffin is generally perceived as a negative cultural artefact
4. Whilst studies indicate that across Europe there is a general decrease in traditional Christian beliefs and practices (Catholic and Protestant), it would be inaccurate to assume other religions and traditions are seeing such a decline. For a brief overview of secularisation see Halman and Draulans (2006).
5. For a fuller and far more nuanced picture of gender during this time see Muravyeva and Tovio (2013).
6. Religious women such as saints and especially Mary, Mother of Jesus, are for brevity's sake, excluded from this discussion. However, it must be noted that the common perception of women as defective can be found in St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, first part, question 92; a stance Aquinas disagrees with, although, talking an Aristotelian stance on women, he did believe that maleness was species standard – see Hartel (1993) for a full discussion.
7. Although most 3L3D images were of wealthy males, some imaged three wealthy living women with three skeletons, such as that found in the commissioned Psalter of Robert de Lyle (c1310).
8. Occasionally DoD features fully enflashed or rotting corpses but typically, death in DoD was signified by a skeleton.
9. Examples of both 'DoD' and 'Three Living/Three Dead' imagery can be found on the web site <http://www.lamortdanslart.com/danse/dance.htm> (accessed 31 July 2013).
10. Examples of the Lucerne images can be found on the web site <http://goeurope.about.com/od/lucerne/ig/Lucerne-Pictures/lucerne-bridge-art.htm> (accessed 31 July 2013).
11. There are a few images of a skeletal Death in women's attire, but the Niklaus Manuel mural is the only one in existence that depicts Death as distinctly female.
12. For example in *Dante's The Divine Comedy Canto X: 97–137* the proud carry heavy stones on their backs to ensure they only look at the ground.
13. On venial (non-mortal) sins could be purged in purgatory, committing mortal sins, such as murder, meant an eternal punishment in hell.
14. As with all movements, it must be remembered that Luther and other Reformers had a socio-historical context to their ideas and Catholic views on purgatory had never been uncontentious (see Wei, 2012).
15. In essence, Death in D&M becomes a noun, a precursor to the Grim Reaper figure that is prevalent in popular culture.
16. See *Young Woman Attacked by Death; or The Ravisher* (Dürer 1495) [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:02\\_The\\_Ravisher.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:02_The_Ravisher.jpg) (accessed 31 July 2013).
17. Dürer, it must be noted was not part of the anti-Catholic movement and indeed was official court artist to the Holy Roman Emperor (Wisse, 2002).
18. Sin in Romans 5:12 refers to the disobedience of Adam and Eve in taking fruit from the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3).
19. The copy of the image can be found in Guthke (1999, p. 119).
20. For a fuller exploration of Augustine on sin, sex and death, see Clack (2002, pp. 21–37).
21. See Reggio (2012) for further details on Luther on marriage.
22. See [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Death\\_and\\_Three\\_Nude\\_Women.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Death_and_Three_Nude_Women.jpg) (accessed 31 July 2013).
23. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/aquinas-homo.asp> (accessed 31 July 2013).
24. See [http://wolfgangcapito.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/fille\\_berne.jpg](http://wolfgangcapito.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/fille_berne.jpg) (accessed 31 July 2013).
25. It must be noted though that the text did not exceed the accepted limits of the day.
26. See [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Niklaus\\_Manuel\\_Deutsch\\_003.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Niklaus_Manuel_Deutsch_003.jpg) (accessed 31 July 2013).
27. See <http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/baldung/ages/girl-death.jpg> (accessed 31 July 2013).

28. See [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hans\\_Baldung\\_007b.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hans_Baldung_007b.jpg) (accessed 31 July 2013).
29. See Adam and Eve (1511 – [http://0.tqn.com/d/arthistory/1/0/y/Q/hbg\\_art\\_02.jpg](http://0.tqn.com/d/arthistory/1/0/y/Q/hbg_art_02.jpg)), Eve, Serpent and Death (1512 – [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bf/Hans\\_Baldung\\_Grien\\_-\\_Eve,\\_Serpent\\_and\\_Death.JPG](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bf/Hans_Baldung_Grien_-_Eve,_Serpent_and_Death.JPG)), Adam and Eve (1519 – [http://alreproductions.com/adam-and-eve-1519-by-hans-baldung-grien\\_h650.jpg](http://alreproductions.com/adam-and-eve-1519-by-hans-baldung-grien_h650.jpg)) and Adam and Eve (1531 – [http://www.museothyssen.org/en/thyssen/ficha\\_obra/935](http://www.museothyssen.org/en/thyssen/ficha_obra/935)) (accessed 31 July 2013).
30. See [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hans\\_Baldung\\_025.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hans_Baldung_025.jpg) (accessed 31 July 2013).
31. Whilst works such as *The Malleus Maleficarum* equated witchcraft with carnal lust and claimed women were sexually insatiable and formed pacts with the Devil to achieve gratification, Luther believed sexual desire to be an issue for both genders (Karant-Nuun & Wesiner-Hanks, 2003, p. 13).
32. See Sullivan (2000) for a fuller exploration of Grien and his Witch images. *The Witch and the Dragon* (1515) gives an indication of the overt sexuality of the witches he drew; see [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hans\\_Baldung\\_-\\_Stehende\\_Hexe\\_mit\\_Ungeheuer.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hans_Baldung_-_Stehende_Hexe_mit_Ungeheuer.jpg) (accessed 31 July 2013).
33. See especially Adam and Eve (1524) and Eve, the Serpent, and Death (1510–12).
34. See <https://www.flickr.com/photos/kintzertorium/2985750653/> (accessed 31 July 2013).
35. See <http://www.hans-sebald-beham.com> (accessed 31 July 2013).
36. See [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sebald\\_Beham\\_001.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sebald_Beham_001.jpg) (accessed 31 July 2013).
37. It must be noted that whilst there are some images of lesbian activity from this period of history, and a few trials of women accused of female sodomy, masturbation and even transvestitism, such acts were considered an abomination, connected with prostitution and witchcraft (Phillips & Reay, 2011). In terms of theology, female sexual desire was conceived of only in phallogocentric terms, and as these works are works informed by Reformist theology, it must be assumed that androgyny or homosexuality were not considered by the artists. Including these particular acts in D&M would alter the message, which was firmly *memento mori*; women here symbolised life and lust, not just lust, and in being placed with Death highlighted the necessity for a focus on the after-life.
38. See [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Death\\_and\\_the\\_Standing\\_Nude.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Death_and_the_Standing_Nude.jpg) (accessed 31 July 2013).
39. In Italian, death (*morte*) is linguistically feminine, as it is in Polish (*śmierć*).
40. In e-mail correspondence with both companies this reading of the coffin as masculine being linguistically feminine (*bara* or *casso da morto/cassa funebre*), as it is in Polish (*trumnai*). The directors of both companies have produced their calendars to be erotic and have chosen locations, models and props specifically to achieve this end.
41. This aspect of the imagery has, as far as I am aware, yet to be determined accurately.
42. Although a small sample, none of my lesbian friends found these calendars erotic, and all noted the coffin signified masculinity to them.
43. See <http://www.cofanifunebri.it/2003-calendar.htm> (accessed 31 July 2013).
44. Notably, the poetic messages were from the start in English, not Italian.
45. For secularisation in Italy see Sansonetti (2009, p. 138), and for Poland, see Arnold (2012, p. 204).
46. See <http://www.cofanifunebri.it/2004-calendar.htm> (accessed 31 July 2013).
47. See [http://www.tonyrogers.com/humor/coffin\\_company.htm](http://www.tonyrogers.com/humor/coffin_company.htm) (accessed 31 July 2013).
48. See <http://www.cofanifunebri.it/2004-calendar.htm> (accessed 31 July 2013).
49. See <http://www.cofanifunebri.it/2006-calendar.htm> (accessed 31 July 2013).
50. See <http://www.cofanifunebri.it/2007-calendar.htm> (accessed 31 July 2013).
51. See <http://www.cofanifunebri.it/2008-calendar.htm> (accessed 31 July 2013).
52. See <http://www.cofanifunebri.it/2009-calendar.htm> (accessed 31 July 2013).
53. These photographs are deliberately unavailable on their website.
54. See <http://www.cofanifunebri.it/2010-calendar.htm> (accessed 31 July 2013).
55. See <http://www.cofanifunebri.it/2011-calendar.htm> (accessed 31 July 2013).
56. See <http://www.funeralcommunity.com/en/blog/article/4561> (accessed 31 July 2013).
57. The D&M theme for marketing coffins is interesting in terms of the concept of sex selling as sexual desire is typically used to increase the overall desirability of the product (see Reichert & Lambiase, 2003). However, using eroticism to sell a coffin raises two issues. First, whilst it might be acceptable for someone having their car fixed to see an erotic calendar in the mechanics workshop, it would not be appropriate for the bereaved to see one in the funeral directors.

Therefore, these cannot be calendars that death-professionals would purchase. Second, no one is sexier when they are dead than when they were alive and thus the calendars are unlikely to be a marketing tool to the individual coffin consumer. E-mail correspondence with Cofanifunebri suggests that sales of coffins have increased since the calendars were produced, as has their profile as a coffin manufacturer throughout Europe. The company was unable however to explain who purchased these calendars (which are for sale on-line) and were unwilling to discuss why this specific style of imagery was employed by their marketing team.

58. See <http://www.kalendarzindner.pl/2010-en/> (accessed 31 July 2013).
59. Erotic death related calendars are still rare. In 2007, Men of MortuAriès featured topless male funeral directors and morticians as a fund-raising stunt (see <http://www.menofmortuaries.org/>), while the medical company Eizo produced a series of erotic shots for their 2010 medical imagining publicity campaign (see [http://www.medgadget.com/2010/06/eizo\\_medical\\_imaging\\_pinup\\_calendar\\_2010.html](http://www.medgadget.com/2010/06/eizo_medical_imaging_pinup_calendar_2010.html)) (accessed 31 July 2013).
60. See <http://www.kalendarzindner.pl/2011-en/> (accessed 31 July 2013).
61. See <http://www.kalendarzindner.pl/2012-en/> (accessed 31 July 2013).

## References

- Aquinas, T. (1920). *Summa theologiae*. Online edition. Retrieved from <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/index.html>
- Ariès, P. (2004). *The hour of our death*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Arnold, M. (2012). How does religion matter in Poland today? Secularisation in Europe and the 'Causa Polinia Semper Fedelis'. In A. Maik & L. Przemysław (Eds.), *Europe and America in the mirror: Culture, economy, and history* (pp. 199–238). Krakow: NOMOS.
- Augustine, A. (1998 [c.413]). *City of God* (R.W. Dyson, Trans) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1984). *Rabelais and his world* (Hélène Iswolsky, Trans). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1990). Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel: Notes toward a historical poetics. In M. Holquist (Ed.), *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (C. Emerson and M. Holquist, Trans) (pp. 84–258). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bauman, Z. (1992). Survival as a social construct. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 9(1), 1–36.
- Bechtel, M. L. (1997). Rethinking the interpretation of Genesis 2.4b–3.24. In A. Brenner (Ed.), *A feminist companion to Genesis* (pp. 77–117). Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Binion, R. (2003). Death as rapist: Europe's formative trauma eroticized. In J. Piven (Ed.), *Eroticisms: Love, sex, and perversion, psychological undercurrents of history* (Vol. V, pp. 225–241). Lincoln, NE: Bloomusdem.
- Blakely, J. J. (2006). *Popular responses to the 'Reformation with without' in the Pays de Vaud* (PhD thesis). University of Arizona. Retrieved from <http://www.books.google.co.uk/books?isbn%0542946157>
- Brady, T. A. (1975). The social place of a German renaissance artist: Hans Baldung Grien (1484/85–1545) at Strasbourg. *Central European History*, 8, 295–315.
- Broedel, H. P. (2003). *The Malleus Maleficarum and the construction of witchcraft: Theology and popular belief*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Butts, B., & Hendrix, L. (2000). *Painting on light: Glass in the age of Dürer and Holbein*. Los Angeles, CA: J. Paul Getty Trust.
- Bynum, C. W. (1995). *Resurrection of the body in western Christianity, 200–1336*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.



- Cadden, J. (1993). *The meaning of sex differences in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Casovana, J. (2006). Rethinking secularisation: A global comparative perspective. *Hedgehog Review*, 8, 7–23.
- Clack, B. (2002). *Sex and death: a reappraisal of human mortality*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Cole, R.G. (1972). The dynamics of printing in the sixteenth century. In L. P. Buck & J. W. Zophy (Eds.), *A social history of the Reformation: In honour of Harold L Grimm* (pp. 93–105). Columbus: Ohio State University.
- Dante, Alighieri (2008 [1320]). *The divine comedy* (Charles, H. Sisson, Trans) Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Davies, D. (2002). *Death, ritual and belief: The rhetoric of funeral rites*. London: Continuum.
- Davis, N. Z. (1977). Ghosts, kin, and progeny: Some features of family life in early modern France. *Daedalus*, 106, 87–114.
- Growing, L. (1996). *Domestic gangers: Women, words and sex in early modern London*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Guthke, K. S. (1999). *The gender of death: A cultural history in art and literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Halman, L., & Draulans, V. (2006). How secular is Europe? *British Journal of Sociology*, 57, 263–288.
- Harbison, C. (1976). Dürer and the Reformation: The problem of the re-dating of the St. Philip engraving. *Art Bulletin*, 58, 368–373.
- Hartel, J. F. (1993). *Femina ut imago Dei: In the integral feminism of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Rome: Editrice Pontifica Universite Gregoriana.
- Hutton, R. (1996). *The rise and fall of merry England: the ritual year, 1400–1700*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Karant-Nuun, S. C., & Wesiner-Hanks, M. E. (Eds.). (2003). *Luther on women: A sourcebook*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Knöll, S. (2008). Death and the maiden; a German trope? In H. Fronius & A. Linton (Eds.), *Women and death: representations of female victims and perpetrators in German culture 1500–2000* (pp. 9–27). Rochester, NY: Camden House.
- Koerner, J. L. (1995). The mortification of the image: Death as a hermeneutic in Hans Baldung Grien. *Representations*, 10, 52–101.
- Koerner, J. L. (1996). *The moment of self-portraiture in German Renaissance art*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Koudounaris, P. (2011). *The empire of death: A cultural history of ossuaries and charnel houses*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Kubler-Ross, E. (1969). *On death and dying*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Le Goff, J. (1981). *The birth of purgatory* (A. Goldhammer, Trans). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lindburg, C. (1977). Conflicting models of ministry – Luther, Karlstadt, and Muentzer. *Concordia Theology Quarterly*, 41, 35–50.
- Luther, M. (1966 [1519]). *Christian in society I*. In J. Atkinson (Ed.), *Luther's works* (Vol. 44). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press.
- Luther, M. (1995). *Lectures on Genesis 1–5*. In J. Pelikan (Ed.), *Luther's works* (Vol. 1). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press.
- Messariss, P. (1997). *Visual persuasion; the role of images in advertising*. London: Sage.
- Muravyeva, M., & Tovio, R. M. (Eds.). (2013). *Gender in late medieval and early modern Europe*. London: Routledge.
- Oosterwijk, S. (2009). 'From Paris to Ingold'? The dance macabre in text and image in late-medieval England (Doctoral thesis). Leiden University. Retrieved from <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/13873/03.pdf?sequence%2BC15>
- Phillips, K. M., & Reay, B. (2011). *Sex before sexuality: A premodern history*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Potter, G. R. (1979). Niklaus Manuel and the reformation in Berne. *History Today*, 29, 377–385.
- Purkiss, D. (1992). Material girls: The seventeenth century woman debate. In C. Brant & D. Purkiss (Eds.), *Women, text and histories, 1575–1760* (pp. 69–100). London: Routledge.
- Quigley, C. (2005). *The corpse; a history*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.



- Reggio, T. O. (2012). Martin Luther on marriage and family. *Historical Research*, 2, 195–218. Retrieved from [http://snd.gu.se/sites/snd.gu.se/files/History\\_Research.pdf#page%427](http://snd.gu.se/sites/snd.gu.se/files/History_Research.pdf#page%427)
- Reichert, T., & Lambiase, J. (2003). *Sex in advertising: Perspectives on the erotic appeal*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Rosewell, R. (2011). *Medieval wall paintings in English and Welsh churches*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press.
- Sadlier, M. A. M. (2008). *Purgatory: doctrinal, historical and poetical*. Charleston, SC: Forgotten Books.
- Sansonetti, S. (2009). Social indicators of secularisation in Italy. In B. A. Kosmin & A. Keysar (Eds.), *Secularism, women and the state: The Mediterranean world in the 21st century* (pp. 137–153). Hartford, CT: ISSSC.
- Schechter, H. (2009). *The whole death cataolg: A lively guide to the bitter end*. New York, NY: Ballantine/Random House Publications.
- Sekules, V. (2001). *Medieval art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stewart, A. (1996). Sebald Beham and Barthel Beham. In J. Turner (Ed.), *Dictionary of art* (Vol. 3, pp. 505–508). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stewart, A. G. (2012). Sebald Beham: Entrepreneur, printmaker, painter. *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art*, 4(2). Retrieved from <http://www.jhna.org/images/pdfs/sebald-beham-entrepreneur-printmaker-painter-.pdf>
- Sullivan, M. (2000). The witches of Dürer and Hans Baldung Grien. *Renaissance Quarterly*, 53, 332–401.
- Swanson, R. N. (2007). *Indulgences in late medieval England: Passports to paradise*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Van Abbe, D. (1952a). Change and tradition in the works of Niklaus Manuel of Berne (1484–1531). *Modern Language Review*, 47, 181–198.
- Van Abbe, D. (1952b). Niklaus Manuel of Berne and his interest in the Reformation. *Journal of Modern History*, 24, 287–300.
- Van Der Lugt, M. (2010). Sex differences in medieval theology and canon law: A tribute to Joan Cadden. *Medieval Feminist Forum*, 46, 101–121.
- Voas, D., & Crockett, A. (2005). Religion in Britain: Neither believing nor belonging. *Sociology*, 39, 11–28.
- Walter, T. (1991). Modern death: Taboo or not taboo? *Sociology*, 25, 293–310.
- Walter, T. (1994). *The revival of death*. London: Routledge.
- Wei, I. P. (2012). *Intellectual culture in Medieval Paris: Theologians and the university c1100–1330*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Weisner, M. E. (2000). *Women and gender in early modern Europe* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Weisner-Hanks, M. E. (2000). *Christianity and sexuality in the early modern world: Regulating desire, reforming practice*. London: Routledge.
- Welch, C. (2013). For prayers and pedagogy: Contextualising English carved cadaver monuments of the late-medieval social and religious elite. *Fieldwork in Religion*, 8, 127–132.
- Wisse, J. (2002). Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528). Heilbrunn timeline of art history. New York, NY: 2000. Retrieved from [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/durr/hd\\_durr.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/durr/hd_durr.htm) The Metropolitan Museum of Art.