

*DANSE MACABRE: ORIGINS, EVOLUTION, AND
EXECUTION*

Steven A. Bardon



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COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

DANSE MACABRE: ORIGINS, EVOLUTION, AND EXECUTION

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE

HONORS COLLEGE

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR HONORS IN THE DEGREE OF

BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ART

COLLEGE OF THE ARTS

BY

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ABSTRACT

The *Danse Macabre* is an allegory in which all living things – grand and otherwise – are equally escorted to death's embrace. Most cultures, from ancient to contemporary, have a belief in an afterlife and interpreted death through funerary practices and religious artwork. Such spirituality associated with *Danse Macabre* is especially influential within the arts, such as visual storytelling. Two series in particular, *Passion* and *Castles of the Damned*, incorporate the *Danse Macabre* allegory through its implementation and accompanying concepts: the Faustian archetype, the Gothic narrative, and the Byronic hero. Through exploring the *Danse Macabre* within their dystopian narratives, the notion of a hero is emphasized as an integral component within their natural laws. These spiritual ideals perpetuate the Christian concept of death and influence one's uncertain thoughts towards dying as a respected inevitability within the natural cycle of creation.

INDEX WORDS: death, *Danse Macabre*, Dance of Death, Catholic, Faustian, Gothic, Byronic

TABLE ABSTRACTS

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FaustFall

FaustFall centered on a young boy named Lucifer, who lives with his English father and Japanese mother and sisters. Through the course of the series, he is flung into a nightmarish world in which he battles the forces of Hell with supernaturally manifested claws and poisonous bloodlust. As I created it, I realized I was inspired by both my involvement with the concepts of family and death and my growing maturity. Nevertheless, a character like Lucifer remained a

INTRODUCTION

As a traditional illustrator and sequential artist, I was indirectly introduced to the Dance of Death, or *Danse Macabre*, back in 2008 during my enrollment at Powhatan High School. My life up to that point was relatively mundane albeit for the loss of my grandparents in my teenage years prior to high school. In truth, I believe such familial loss played a more integral role in the longevity of my work, but not as conspicuously during high school. I studied both popular media, such as manga (Japanese graphic novels) and artworks from various art movements at the time. In the case of manga, the *Death Note* series exposed me to mature storytelling and complex characterizations, and I sought to emulate these qualities through my own characters, in both narrative and visual elements – especially given the series' inclusion of Christian iconography. Art movements such as the Northern Renaissance guided me toward the Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch, whose dreamlike monsters fueled my desire to design similarly fantastical creatures. Though I had always been interested in drawing stories and creating inhuman characters since my childhood, these specific sources unlocked a special drive to consolidate my creativity into an actual series. Thus, I began to mature my artistic and scholarly processes by refining my ability to draw, research, and remain committed to centering my artistic practice towards a fully realized body of work. My efforts eventually resulted in my first mature series:

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FaustFall centered on a young boy named Lucifer, who lives with his English father and Japanese mother and sisters. Through the course of the series, he is flung into a nightmarish ordeal in which he battles the forces of Hell with supernaturally manifested claws and possessive bloodlust. As I created it, I realized I was inspired by both my involvement with the concepts of family and death and my growing maturity. Nevertheless, a character like Lucifer remained a

personal favorite to illustrate in the years entering the early-2010s. The desire to write prose waned, however, and I instead focused more of my time towards researching macabre concepts and refining my drawing fundamentals.

I enrolled into Columbus State University in Fall 2013 and continued my practice of illustration and research. My innate drive towards visual storytelling resurfaced through my foundational coursework. I found myself in an intriguing dilemma in which the media my narratives were presented, such as simplistically animated videos with voiceover, were catching the attention of my peers but were hampered by technical errors. Several of them suggested I take up narrative illustration, or comic-making, as my tendency to illustrate – and rather obsessively at that – matched the medium well. I, therefore, enrolled in Professor Orion Wertz's Narrative Illustration in Spring 2016. Prior to that year, I came across a video game series called *Bloodborne*, developed by FromSoftware.¹ The game's marriage of the Gothic monster tale and Lovecraftian horror rekindled my ambition to include the quality of an engaging fictional universe in my work. Through my renewed drive and creating my first, serious comic-book through Professor Wertz's class, my artistic process underwent a dramatic shift from interrelated vignettes to a fully ongoing series.

The previous *FaustFall* was revitalized as a medieval dystopia that mingled Judeo-Christian and Pagan theology, body horror, and spirituality. My affinity for macabre concepts, especially the *Danse Macabre*, increased tenfold. *FaustFall* became an outlet for me amidst familial turbulence in the household, my growth as both a man and student, and my prowess as a visual storyteller. For three years, the series helped me with my studio and Honors requirements. *FaustFall*, in fact, was self-published as a hardcover anthology for my part in the Art

Department's Senior Thesis Exhibition during Fall 2017. I began noticing the flaws in its early issues, and used my new skills in creating a new series.

The new series was started in late 2017 and was titled *Cardinal Junction*, which encompassed a character-driven narrative set in a 19th century-inspired dystopia where the conventions of *Danse Macabre* were most prominent. My research into the 19th century (specifically of the American Civil War), the principles behind the *Danse Macabre*, and my own growing perception of death, gave me a far different challenge, unlike of its kin series *FaustFall*.

The importance of familial loss is rooted in *Cardinal Junction's* narrative, where my concern over losing my older parents was explored and constructed into its storyline. My current work remains linked to my personal values of preserving my family, of sustaining my faith through spirituality, and of expanding my existential understanding towards death. I believe that with this thesis paper, *Danse Macabre: Origin, Evolution, and Execution*, the research gained from exploring the human interpretation of death and the narratively driven elements expounded in its later sections will further my exploration into the spiritually profound.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 EARLY CONCEPTS OF DEATH

The idea of death has always lingered in the minds of man, propelled by the improbabilities of what laid after life: another form of existence, reincarnation, or absolute nothingness. Cultures adapted to the idea of death in a myriad of ways, though never in a way to forget the cyclical force of life and death. This validation towards death insured awareness of the value of one's own life. In such cases, this notion perceived death as the ultimatum of life: in death, every person is equal regardless of status for it eventually comes to everyone. This concept is referred to as *Danse Macabre* or the Dance of Death, in which the dead, depicted as a rotting corpse or a skeleton, escort the living to their finality.² *Danse Macabre's* origins concern the ideas of remembrance through funerary dances, admiration towards the gravedigger, and the didactic lessons in funerary art. All of these aspects acknowledge the power of death, but they transcend its literalness where life is perceived in the hereafter.

The original *Danse Macabre* originated in 1425 in Paris, France, found in the Holy Innocent's Cemetery, with many cultures emulating it later on.³ Imagery depicted numerous figures of various social classes within a hieratical arrangement being greeted by jovial skeletons and corpses who escorted them to the hereafter (Figure 1.1).⁴ The meaning of these figures is further emphasized by the repeated separation between clergy and peasantry while their deathly escorts followed alongside them.⁵ This visual parallelism emphasized death as an equalizer that never discriminated between the societal definitions of the living world.⁶ However, the symbolism in *Danse Macabre*, such as dancing skeletons, predated the 13th century through their prominence in antiquity, such as the clay pottery in Heudeobuville, Eure, and the tomb wall paintings in Cumse.⁷ In fact, the idea of dancing dead originated from the Greek mythology of

the deceased dancing into Elysium.⁸ The contemporary idea of *Danse Macabre*, however, was conceptualized by Jewish and Christian theologies borrowing from the idea of the deceased dancing into death.⁹

Though the word *macabre* is French, its etymology derives from the Arabic prototype meaning 'funeral dance, or 'dance of the buried'.¹⁰ This meaning is manifested in ancient customs, like those of Greek mysticism and Northern Paganism, through the literal act of dancing before or after a loved one's funeral.¹¹ Funerary dances were rampant throughout Europe in the 11th century, despite their condemnation as heresy by Bishop Burchard of Worms.¹² For instance, in Scandinavia, the Frisians of Dithmarschen danced around the coffin of their deceased.¹³ Dancers dressed as the buried, were stationed in the middle of the ceremony where mourners danced joyfully and loudly around him in pairs.¹⁴ Near the finale of the dance, everyone halted and fell into complete silence, and the center dancer performed the act of dying by collapsing to the ground.¹⁵ Such communal practices commemorated the dead's former life while simultaneously acknowledging death as a respected and eventual fate.

The gravedigger also played a prominent role within *Danse Macabre*'s origins. The word's etymology relates back to the Hebrew term *meqaber*, meaning 'he who buries'.¹⁶ Because orthodox Jews never employed professional gravediggers, burial was a communal service carried out by the *Habhura Qadisha* (sacred society).¹⁷ Such groups were granted special access to the deceased as Jewish settlements considered the preparations for burial to be only suitable for Jewish buriers rather than for gentile buriers.¹⁸ The efforts of these voluntary undertakers were represented on the walls of Jewish catacombs through illustrated figures equipped with pick-axes (Figure 1.2).¹⁹ In this respect, *meqaber* emphasized the voluntary gravedigger more than that of an employed one who was paid by the community.²⁰ These Jewish

gravediggers even conducted funerary dances for the deceased, akin to the ones performed by Northern Pagans and Greek mystics.²¹ Moreover, the *meqaber's* dance exemplified the power of Death through a cherished ceremony, which was later adopted in the *Danse Macabre's* ideal of universal equality in death.²² French phrases such as *fantastie macabre* describe the irony of the gravedigger who emulated the living transition between life and death by carrying out the act of burying the deceased.²³ Furthermore, during the 15th century, a prominent member of a brotherhood of German-Jewish buriers, known as an *eximius macaber*, had composed a poem to a grieving family for their beloved deceased.²⁴ The poem was recited at the funeral while dancers performed a ceremonial dance of death.²⁵ As a means of soothing the family through their grief, the poem stated all persons in life, be they the pope or a beggar, all submitted to Death – the ideal of the *Danse Macabre*.²⁶

Death itself is a universal concept experienced by all human beings, and its profound effects led to religious practices and artistic depictions in an effort to understand it. Often when death is depicted in imagery, it's executed through the idea of memory where the dead is celebrated and commemorated through their images honored in the present, and where nostalgia preserves the deceased from obscurity.²⁷ A communion between life and death is proposed as a concept that assures death is not one's final fate.²⁸ The mourners memorialize their deceased through paintings or portraiture as reminders of their former lives. Though under Christian context, the joys of life expressed through materiality are often accompanied by *memento mori* imagery, such as deathly objects like a human skull or an hourglass, to remind the viewer of life's transience.²⁹ However, this Christian idea of human frailty is to encourage the mind to detach itself from materialistic wants and not to perceive them as important to a proper Christian life.³⁰

CHAPTER ONE

The *Danse Macabre* approached death in a similar manner by making a jest of it when its decomposing figures pranced with such liveliness.³¹ Life itself was also mocked, such as the word *macabre* being used in derogatory terms in French, like the phrase *mawais macabés* (Pauper's bodies), in order to describe the corpses of the impoverished.³² *Macabre* also described the melody of a bag-piper's chant in semblance to an undertaker's dirge.³³ Even in Christian theology, the Devil is referred to as a *macabret* because of his ability to snatch the sinful just as the gravedigger leads the deceased to their end in the *Dance of Death*.³⁴

CHAPTER ONE

1.2 THE ART OF *DANSE MACABRE*

Funerary art, physical symbols to the ideals of *Danse Macabre*, perpetuated the knowing of one's death but also of what laid beyond it. Monuments to the deceased served to both commemorate them and to teach the remaining populace of their finality.³⁵ Christian religious groups such as the Puritans held a rigid belief in death.³⁶ To them, the skull was a symbol of judgment and mortality, whereas the cherub served as an optimistic symbol for resurrection.³⁷ In contrast, visuals of decay served as reminders of eternal damnation for sinful viewers.³⁸ The Puritans mingled the skull and cherub into a newfound symbol called the winged skull (Figure 1.3).³⁹ The winged skull blended the didactic reminder of life's fragility with the winged embrace towards Judgment Day with its cherub-like resemblance, often accompanied by engraved markers stating: "Arise ye dead."⁴⁰ Among other mortality symbols, Scottish funerary art incorporated the "deid bell" into their gravesites (Figure 1.4).⁴¹ The bell symbolized the announcement of one's passing.⁴² In a specific case, two monuments found in Cruicetown Church, Ireland, depicted a long cord tied at the top of each bell.⁴³ This detail indicated the functionality of the "deid bell" where it was rung across the community after a person's death.⁴⁴ Accompanying the "deid bell", the hourglass was commonly used as a deliberate reminder on how life slowly approached death with the passage of time (Figure 1.4).⁴⁵

Religiosity furthered the *Danse Macabre* from an affirmation to life and death to an idea of transcendence. The Berlin mural *Dance of Death* (Figure 1.5) reimagined the original's allegory with the incorporation of imagery from the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, in which the indiscriminate equalization of death is shown surrounding Jesus's Cross.⁴⁶ Figures of ecclesiastical positions, such as a preacher, a sexton, and a chaplain, are aligned with deathly

figures who resemble costumed performers rather than literal corpses.⁴⁷ The Crucifixion scene is the center of the arrangement of the laymen and dead figures marching from the rightward in alternating positions.⁴⁸ Berlin's *Dance of Death* incorporates iconography of the Last Judgment by melding the depiction of Death alongside Christ parting with the faithful and the sinful (Figure 1.6).⁴⁹ For example, the clergy are presented to the right or dexter side of Christ – the side of the saved – whereas the sinners are on the left or sinister side – the side of the damned.⁵⁰ The clergy follow Christ, thus move towards salvation, while the laymen move away and thus towards damnation.⁵¹ This parochial approach is unsurprising, though, for the Catholic Church played its role in emphasizing to sinners of the inevitability of death, but also giving hope of redemption through grace before Judgment Day.⁵² *Danse Macabre* imagery was shown in Christian pieces, such as Gislebertus's *Last Judgment*, where its demonic figures escort human sinners to an afterlife of damnation (Figure 1.7).⁵³ A significant example is in the French reading *Le Jour de Judgment*, in which demons cheer for the incarnation of the Antichrist, accompanied by the following verse: "Let us dance on the way! [Death], lead this dance."⁵⁴ This exclamation twists the ambiguity of the *Danse Macabre* as a deliberate proclamation to damnation.⁵⁵ Death joins Christ as equivalent judges of the dead, with the former assuming a stoic demeanor with no bias towards one's social class or gravity of sin.⁵⁶ Instead of aggressively dragging them to hell, as is accustomed of *Danse Macabre* imagery, Death merely points the deceased to either salvation or damnation.⁵⁷ This subtle gesture instills one's submission towards death, and serves as a didactic reminder of life's fragility.⁵⁸ The incorporation of Last Judgment iconography creates an additional layer to the *Danse Macabre* where the events of a person's existence doesn't end in death but continues onwards into the hereafter.⁵⁹ In this respect, the *Danse*

Macabre and the Last Judgment complement one another as transient allegories to mortal life, and facilitate guidelines in achieving a morally centered life and death.⁶⁰



Figure 1.1. Gernan School, Dornum or Dornum, c. 16th cen. Germany



Figure 1.2. Graveller church, Rome, c. 17th cen. Part of the city of Rome

FIGURES



Figure 1.1. German School, *Dance of Death*. c. 16th cen. Germany



Figure 1.2. *Gravedigger mural painting*. c. 2nd cen. The Catacombs of Rome.



Figure 1.3. Gravestone of Rebekah Row, c. 18th cen. United States.



Figure 1.4. Wheeled-cross headstone, c. 16th cen. Edercole, County Monaghan.



Figure 1.5. *Dance of Death*. c. 1490. Marienkirche, Berlin.



Figure 1.6. *Dance of Death* (Detail). c. 1490. Marienkirche, Berlin.



Figure 1.7. Gislebertus, *Weighing of Souls (Last Judgment)*. c. 1135. Cathedral of St. Lazare, Autun.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 FAUSTFALL AND THE FAUSTIAN ARCHETYPE

Artists exposed to the grim, though didactic, principles of *Danse Macabre* can have their work drastically altered. In the case of visual storytelling, comic books, graphic novels, and picture books can utilize their optical elements to engage a readership with the mirth of life and death. Stories of this nature embody the Gothic narrative, where the ominous potential of objects, such as the skulls and hourglasses of *memento mori* artwork, is emphasized through their intended purposes and interactions with human subjects when estranged with supernatural capabilities.⁶¹ This device is called the *thing-power*, which is the unperceived capabilities of nonhuman objects.⁶² Under the thing-power, objects seek to foil the egotism within mankind and reintroduce it with a more ethically and morally feasible means of existing.⁶³ The Gothic narrative, as an agent of *Danse Macabre*, carries out this cause through dystopian allegories depicted in both its visual and literary components. This notion will be explored through the fictional storylines of two Gothic-inspired comic series: *FaustFall* and *Cardinal Junction*. Through their use of the Faustian archetype, the Gothic narrative, and the Byronic hero, these elements will demonstrate the conceptual versatility when inspired by the *Danse Macabre*.

The first of these deathly narratives is the medieval dystopia of *FaustFall* and its ties to the Faustian archetype. Set within a land known as the Countryside, the story focuses on the supernatural degradation of its human populace twisted by strange god-like beings known as Titans. Transformed in the image of their Titans (Figures 2.1-2.2), neighbor is pitted against one another as the Titans Skyward Lord Valdmane and Langseeth the Lamenting compete for dominion over the Countryside. Valdmane's Countrymen slaughter Langseeth's Denizens in continuum, to go as far as crucifying them as sacrifice for their Titan's nourishment (Figure 2.3).

Such deranged behavior exemplifies the inner disharmony found within the Faustian archetype, in which the individual's consciousness is possessed by his ego.⁶⁴ The self becomes so acutely aware and self-absorbed with itself that it degenerates into an antithesis of itself – a divided self, contradictory of its own individuality.⁶⁵ As a result, the divided self is devoid of morality, and taints itself with such encumbering chaos recovery is near to impossible.⁶⁶

The degraded cultures of these opposing parties exemplify the cyclical nature of *Danse Macabre*. Valdmane's Countrymen congregate as a zealot society whose faith is unquestionably bound to the Titan's survival and through their genocidal disposition towards Langseeth's subjects. Their devotion to the Skyward Lord allows them the power to wield lightning and to transform into enormous beasts. These abilities, however, are only earned through ritualistic slaughters and sacrifices. The few who falter in carrying out the Countryman dogma are labeled as Black Dogs. The supernatural prowess bestowed through Valdmane degenerates into a physical curse for a black dog. Unfortunately, the nature of this curse is eternally bound to their soul where even death will not grant them reprieve. Their bodies eventually reach a cadaverous state, yet they are still tied to Valdmane's authority, and will rise from their graves upon his call (Figure 2.4)

Although the Denizens of Langseeth outnumber the Countrymen in population, they are muddled by constant misery and madness (Figure 2.5). Their ranks wander the Countryside as either despondent groups or loners, as they lament the imprisonment of their Titan and desperately, though futilely, attempt to free him. The Denizens resemble the core issue of existing in the Countryside: they are forever trapped in an unnatural cycle of life and death dictated by the Titans.

Valdmane and Langseeth impose these acts as the contractual nature of anyone under their pact. Both the Countrymen and the Denizens, in this respect, exemplify the Other, as outcasts of their own humanity, but worse for their divided self-consciousness can only cooperate with its tribe and never with the opposition.⁶⁷ The divided self, therefore, is incapable of responsibly forming or considering relationships with another self because of its moral inertia.⁶⁸ Such a dilemma is forwarded by the differing selves' egos warring for psychological dominance, and thus stagnate moral growth.⁶⁹ Under this psychological deterioration, the *Danse Macabre* is crudely executed through Valdmane's life sustained by the sacrificed Denizens gathered in his Countrymen's genocidal acts and through the plentiful lives of Langseeth's inept, orphaned subjects.

Death's utilitarian force in the Faustian archetype is morally driven by power.⁷⁰ Moral of this nature is flawed for its toxic meaning eradicates the chance for compassion, and eventually freedom itself.⁷¹ It betrays the equalization in death through prejudicial assaults, and completely disregards the futility in power pursuits, for such things are materialistically transient. Naturally, the Denizens seem too morally inefficient to escape the Countrymen's physical tyranny. The laws of *FaustFall* question this moral dilemma though, for even the Denizens are equally capable of retaliation through their chosen Other, an outcast among them whose misery transcends even their own, as something that is undying, unrelenting, and truly human.

This chosen Other is known as the *Unmaker* (Figure 2.6). Under this role, *FaustFall* introduces another component to its cyclical *Danse Macabre* through its protagonist, the young orphan Lucifer.

CHAPTER TWO

2.2 FAUSTFALL: LUCIFER THE UNMAKER

Lucifer is the deathly center of *FaustFall*, for he exemplifies the destructive force of change through a new generation. Fostered by the Countrymen, he is the quintessential outcast within a system of Faustian Others. Lucifer represents the initial state of the unified self through being able to actualize outside relationships in his existence, unlike of the other inert inhabitants.⁷² His innocence is marked by his naiveté, however, as his early youth expressed an eagerness to aid in the Countrymen's rituals, despite their disdain for him (Figure 2.7). His orphaned status conveys the Faustian archetype through its lack of a proper identity, in which his unified self is considered an estrangement from the Countrymen's divided selves.⁷³ He holds no birthright with the Countrymen nor has their hatred for the Denizens, and is a stranger who struggles to partake in their culture, ignorant of and eventually appalled by their malicious acts. Before their regular deed to sustain Valdmane's life through Denizens' deaths, Lucifer is a witness to this tainted expression of the *Danse Macabre*. His otherness is condemned by the Countrymen, to where his human likeness mirroring theirs further infuriates their association with him.

This prejudice is justified as Lucifer's characterization exerts the thing-power of the object. Lucifer may resemble a typical youth, but the Countrymen regard his presence as a potential contagion (Figure 2.8). The reason for such contempt is Lucifer's ability to witness visions and the unseen, which allows him a personal projection into the Countryside's nightmarish truths (Figure 2.9). His witnessing of the unseen, strange act of Valdmane siphoning the souls of sacrificed Denizens for nourishment justifies the Countrymen's fears of his alien nature. This plot device firmly relates to the Gothic narrative, where the grotesque of

supernatural things evoke a twisted mystique to exposed individuals, such as Lucifer, and are enchanted by its effects.⁷⁴ Through this influence, Lucifer becomes an opposing supernatural phenomenon – an object of the thing-power – who obstructs the rational conceptions of what the Countrymen perceive as their universe, within the Countryside.⁷⁵ The Countrymen portray the human convention of mankind believing itself to be the world's one and only significance, of which is existentially flawed when competed against the thing-power.⁷⁶ Lucifer unknowingly potentiates the death of the Countrymen's dominion, and represents the cyclical might of *Danse Macabre* as the one who will bring life anew through the death of their Skyward Lord.

Lucifer's deathlike potential is actualized through the Countryside's metaphysical dimensions and its ties to the Unmaker. Through the course of *FaustFall*'s storyline, Lucifer is eventually faced by death. He initially forms a friendship with the Wiccan Twins, Mary and Joseph, who portray themselves as a pair of coy, though, cryptic fractural twins (Figure 2.10). In actuality, the twins are secretly fleeing their parents who have amalgamated into an enormous, deranged Denizen (Figure 2.11). The trio plunge into a violent confrontation with it that results in the fatal demise of Lucifer's life (Figure 2.12). However, the *Danse Macabre*'s spirituality interrupts what be another corpse in *FaustFall*'s dystopian narrative. Through Lucifer's death, his life-essence – his very soul – enters the Countryside's hereafter: the Void.

The Void is a shadowy dimension of nothingness which behaves as the metaphysical cistern for all life lost in the Countryside. Its geography is relatively flat and incorporeal, but certain 'points' exist within the Countryside that allows for physical manipulation of the Void. Within the deepest caverns of the Countryside, ancient communities of inhabitants who managed to live alongside the Void reside. Serving as the place of origin for the Titans, their dispositions to the Void vary as both a place of imprisonment and as a useful tool. However, the concept of

life is null while within the Void and thus it behaves as an incredible equalizer to life. Titans such as Langseeth are intimately tied to this aspect of the Void and brandishes it for his own survival. Other Titans such as Valdmane despise the Void and goes to great lengths to hold back its influence, upon the worry he will be dragged back into its shadowy embrace – serving as the death of his own conception.

Within the Void's depths, Lucifer encounters Langseeth's loyalists who flung him into a melancholic experience. They unveil the many souls of former Denizens still awaiting Langseeth's release, who remain devotedly forlorn as an act of their undying faith (Figure 2.13) Lucifer eventually happens upon a startling revelation: the veiled remains of his mother, crucified by the Countrymen (Figure 2.14). Before he can articulate the visage before him, he is promptly greeted by the first Unmaker, who tells of his devotion to bring of Langseeth's freedom but failing to fulfill such a promise (Figure 2.15). The turmoil experienced through this metaphysical journey provokes Lucifer to establish a Faustian pact with Langseeth to save the twins' lives and to seek answers for his mother's death. His body then reanimates in the Countryside as the terrifying Unmaker, livid through his ambition (Figure 2.16).

Lucifer's tragic journey approaching his metamorphosis exemplifies the Faustian archetype's vey for power. Moreover, it demonstrates Lucifer's ability, as an object of the thing-power, to exercise his own will through a myriad of escalating actions.⁷⁷ Lucifer's bestial form as the Unmaker idealizes the Faustian dilemma of when the self eventually devolves into abnormality, and wallows in an amoral state.⁷⁸ Under these conditions, the Faustian archetype is incapable of deciding and performing moral choices due to its ability to discern right and wrong, good and evil, melding into an ambiguous anomaly.⁷⁹ The strange nature of the Unmaker is denoted by his ability to channel the Void through his very flesh, in which it becomes a living

vessel to channel forlorn souls between the Void and the Countryside. These former dregs of the living manifest as a formidable collective who are capable of eradicating any and all life derived from the Void, and serve in combating the animosity of Valdmane's Countrymen.

Although Lucifer, as the Unmaker, is the heroic polarization of the Faustian archetype through his harmonic drive to protect his loved ones and to punish their oppressors. His ferocity embodies the unified self. It must uphold a moral obligation to support the Other - the twins - before truly aligning itself with the Other - Langseeth and his Denizens.⁸⁰ His Countryman roots are questioned when witnessing the crucified visage of his mother, whose crucifixion was surrounded by Denizens' own, thus aligning him with their kind (Figure 2.17). Lucifer, as the Unmaker, invokes the human flaw of *Danse Macabre* through assuming Death's judgment of the living and then carrying out its extinction. In his inability to accept a loved one's death or a foe's life, Lucifer's self is deadlocked by its division and compensates for its immense strife through tyrannical acts over an opponent.⁸¹ The Other before him, such as the twins' conjoined parents or the oppressive Countrymen, are an adversity to be extinguish by him: the new, domineering power.⁸²

However, Lucifer's heroism endangers his self's moral purity. His savagery hinges on empathizing with an Other, or anyone with a proper sense of self, which typically forgoes a destructive ego.⁸³ Lucifer's compassion is coerced by the innumerable spirits of the Void circulating through him. His Faustian pact with Langseeth as well dictates the vindictive slaughter of Countrymen in order to bring the death of Valdmane's existence and his foe's eventual freedom. Lucifer trudges down an uneasy road, as his retribution can easily devolve into meaningless violence, where its bloodlust is mistaken as proper justice.

Vengeance is complicated by the Gothic narrative as it subverts human superiority through a broad, ontological consideration of all objects – living and not – as empirically equal.⁸⁴ This notion does not exclude mankind from existence but rather reinforces its entanglement and influence in other beings.⁸⁵ The Gothic narrative challenges the human concept of reality where mankind is reminded of the terrifying unknowability of what dwells outside of its empirical-materialist scope.⁸⁶ Lucifer is an exemplar of this subject through his transformation into the Unmaker and his capacity to end the Countrymen's dominance.

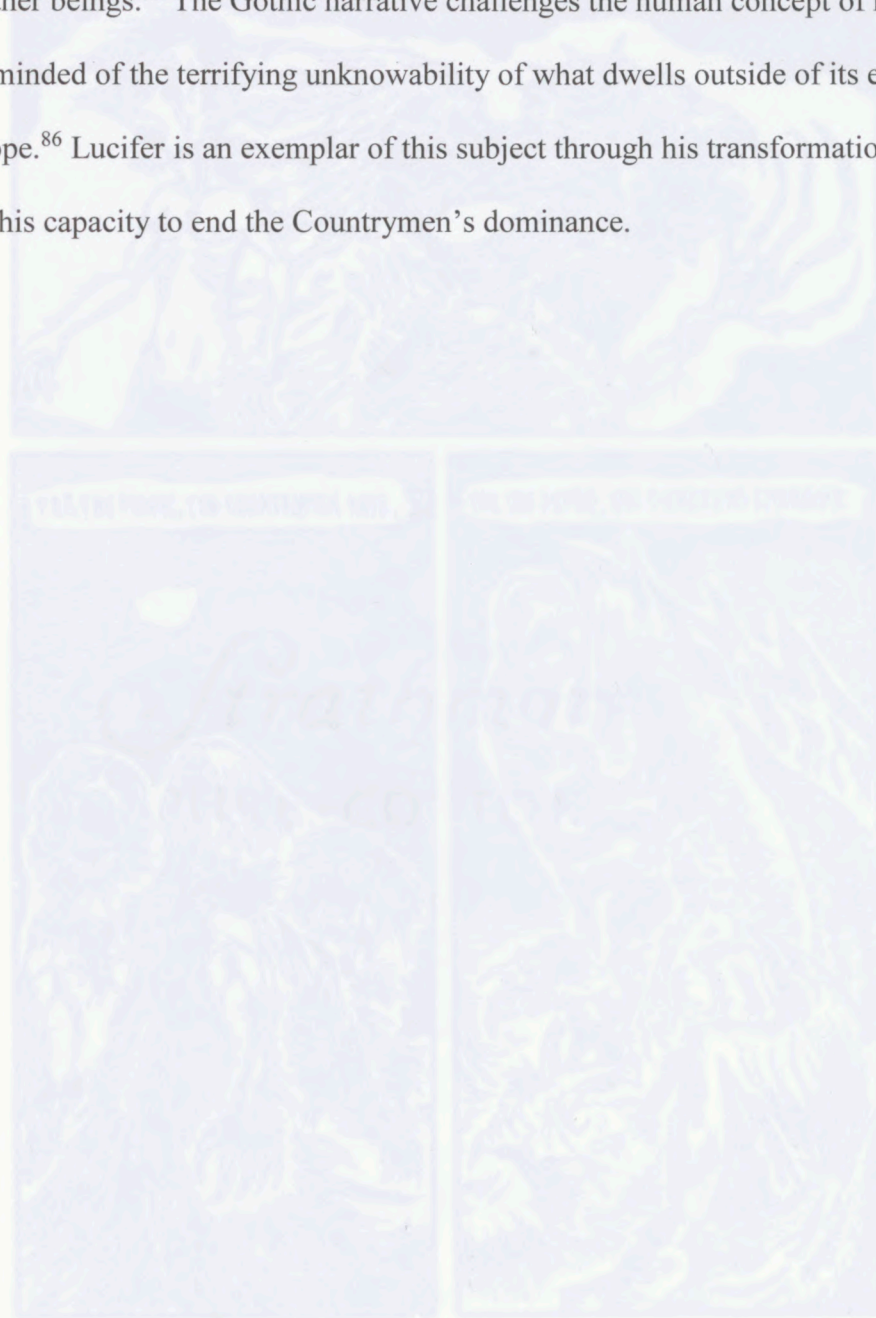


Figure 2.1. Steven Barber. *FauxFall Chronicle #1* (Page). Ink on Bristol, c. 2017.

FIGURES



Figure 2.1. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall Chronicle #1* (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.



Figure 2.2. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall Chronicle #1* (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.



Figure 2.3. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall Chronicle #1* (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.



Figure 2.4. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall Wolf & Witch #2* (Panel). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.

Figure 2.3. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall Chronicle #1* (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.



Figure 2.5. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall Chronicle #1* (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.

Figure 2.6. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall Chronicle #1* (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.

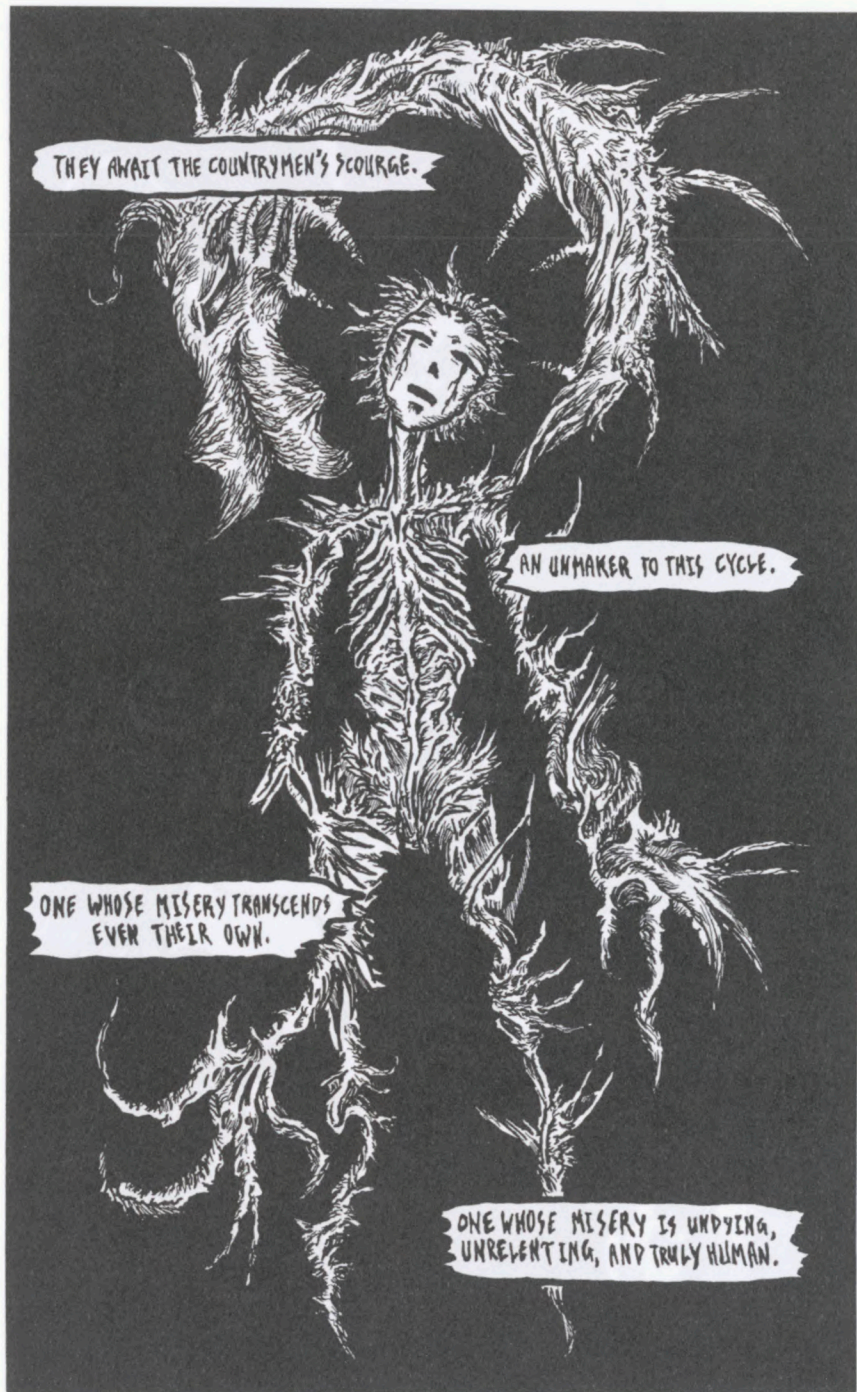


Figure 2.6. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall Chronicle #1* (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.



Figure 2.7. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall* #3 (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.

Figure 2.8. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall* #2 (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2016.



Figure 2.8. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall #2* (Panel). Ink on Bristol. c. 2016.



Figure 2.9. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall #2* (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2016.

Figure 2.9. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall #2* (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2016.



Figure 2.10. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall* #2 (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2016.



Figure 2.11. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall* #3 (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.



Figure 2.12. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall* #3 (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.



Figure 2.13. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall* #3 (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.

Figure 2.14. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall* #3 (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.



Figure 2.14. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall* #3 (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.

Figure 2.15. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall* #3 (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.



Figure 2.15. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall* #3 (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.



Figure 2.16. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall* #3 (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.

Figure 2.17. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall* #3 (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.

CHAPTER THREE

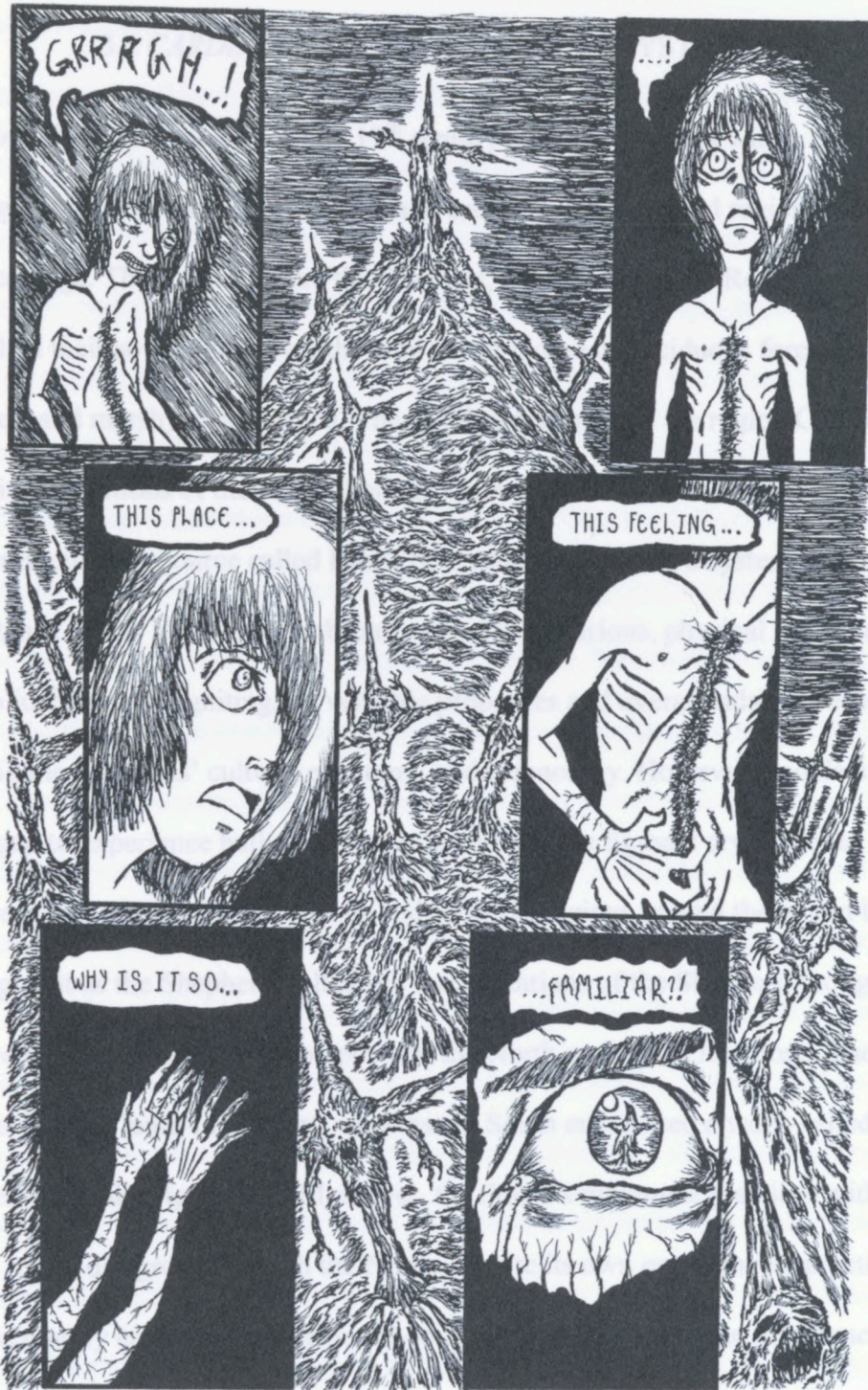


Figure 2.17. Steven Bardon. *FaustFall* #3 (Page). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 CARDINAL JUNCTION: A GOTHIC DYSTOPIA

Cardinal Junction takes place in a 19th century-inspired dystopia where family clans have fled from neighboring lands beset by warfare and settled in a landlocked region away from the surrounding carnage. These families are the Bendicts, the Crowleys, the Royers, and the Strouds. They established their sovereignty over the land's vast biome of deciduous forests, fertile fields, windy hillsides, and marshy swamplands. The families then named the region Cardinal Junction, after the cardinal directions of their neighboring borders. Decades later, the population uncovered a miraculous resource called Black Bile, after mining into a system of subterranean tunnels. The black bile is a malleable substance capable of various, physical reactions, such as liquefying, solidifying, and igniting. Its versatile properties and overabundance became instrumental in the Junctions' culture, economy, and technology. However, people exposed to the matter began to experience hallucinations of an infant-like figment crying out to them. The inhabitants were enthralled by these visions and formed religions around them, and began to refer to the figment as the Shepherd. Although interpretations of the Shepherd brought about a schism between the Junctions' two superpowers: the North and South Junctions. The North envisioned a swaddled lamb-like infant, whereas the South envisioned a wool-veiled skeleton with a shepherd's crook (Figure 3.1). Moreover, the South's inhumane practices with the black bile created a moral disagreement with the North, despite its own questionable practices. Their differences eventually erupted into a centuries-long civil war fought in the East Junction, where the black bile was weaponized to brutal effect. Six-hundred years later, the civil war has become one fought through proxy, with the East being utterly devastated and warped by the black bile, the North and South locking their borders, and the West becoming the only refuge not ill-

affected by the black bile. The black bile's influence dictates the Cardinal Junction and many of its inhabitants were mutated by its supernatural properties, which persists into continuum.

This summary exhibits *Cardinal Junction's* ties to the Gothic narrative through exercising its three principles: the castle, the portrait, and the book.⁸⁷ For instance, the castle represents a perplexing environment where one is entrapped in a confined space that infinitely extends beyond its materialist intentions.⁸⁸ The Junctions offered geographical isolation from warfare, but its eventual chaos degraded it into a prison where civil war persists well into its present. Therefore, the Cardinal Junction, as a Gothic setting, becomes a place of dread for the people bewildered by its labyrinthine conflict.⁸⁹ The black bile, in addition, represents the portrait: which exhibits a lively presence through mundane objects, such as clothing or tools, where the past disrupts the present with a haunting influence.⁹⁰ Because of the black bile's versatile uses, its presence outlasted past generations through the populace's continual dependency. This as well exemplifies the portrait's uncanny power to fetish objects.⁹¹ A fetish object exerts a religious experience subversive from a person's rational sense of self.⁹² This essentially means an outside power can dissuade its subject away from such banal constrains.⁹³ For example, the schism incited by the polarizing interpretations of the Shepherd anomaly.

The North's belief in a swaddled lamb-like infant interprets the Shepherd as a naive, innocent entity. They perceive its intrusive presence as accidental – much like an abandoned baby. Their society promotes a sense of moral obligation to worship the Shepherd as one communal family, following from worshiping in life to direct caretaking in the hereafter. The North envisions their Shepherd as a lamb to further its innocent guise, in which it behaves as a sacrificial lamb. Such a chimeric blend compels Northerners to sympathize for the Shepherd as a martyr figure. Their perception of the Shepherd celebrates death through life, as a benevolent

memento mori reminder of its fragility through worshipping the visage of a crying, needful infant.

In contrast, the South's belief in a wool-veiled skeleton with a shepherd's crook is more indicative of a grim reaper figure. Although this is spliced with a Jesus-like leadership through its shepherd's garb and crook. Southern interpretations of the Shepherd encourages a metamorphic ideal in which Southerners are to embrace the black bile's deathly properties. Through integrating the bile into their lifestyles, its destructiveness is perceived as a natural process within the Junctions. There is no separate paradigm of life and death within the Southern Junction. Moral and ethical obligations are shunned in favor of melding the black bile further into their society. Through such doctrine, they mimic the pious conditions of their Shepherd and assume a place by its side by becoming a physical parallel.

The religious practice with the black bile also relates to the book. Through the book, a forbidden artifact from places beyond the literal and factual understanding of a civilization's knowledge is introduced.⁹⁴ The book, or rather the black bile, is a taboo that is condescending of accepted practices and principles, and imposes its subjects to explore unthinkable avenues of knowledge.⁹⁵ However, such individuals are either corrupted or maddened by the mind's fundamental rejection to accept such forsaken truths.⁹⁶ The black bile, therefore, operates as both the portrait and the book by directly controlling numerous facets of the individual's life, which intensifies its toxicity.⁹⁷ This is exemplified through either the North Junction's priority to communalize the worship of the Shepherd as a lifetime goal or the South Junction's amoral practice of embracing the black bile's lethal capabilities as a sociocultural necessity. For an outsider peering into these societies, their methodologies are arguably cult-like but necessitate respect and fear given the deathly resource each promotes.

Black bile, in concept, is exemplary of *Danse Macabre* through its grotesque properties and its sociocultural history. Despite its universal utility, the black bile is highly destructive when affecting organic material. Flora and fauna, such as in the East, are consumed in a hard crust and essentially smothered by its solidification (Figure 3.2). The bile's environmental effects are best thought as a petrification process where any organic life is literally mummified in the hard, black crust. Its effects on the human body also resemble those of plants and wildlife: organic petrification followed by potential death. However, many groups in the Junctions learned to manipulate the material's deadly properties as a bodily augmentation, even as far as to be metaphysically mutated. Less invasive instrumentation was also conducted, such as the invention of a flintlock-inspired firing mechanism that utilizes the bile's phase changing capabilities, known as the Bilelock System (Figure 3.3). The black bile's association with the Shepherd is also integral to its prominence and persistency within the Junctions' societies, considering the religiosity surrounding the entity. As a result, the history of its hallucinogenic effects fell into obscurity and are instead accepted as an instrument for a person's ordinary lifestyle. This is both directly and indirectly implemented into the greater population by the bile's inclusion into architecture, clothing, and technology.

Further aspects of the *Danse Macabre* are also exemplified through the South Junction's diabolic customs. Residing within murky swamplands where the humidity enshrouds the landscape in a heavy fog, settlements in the South are splintered between many hamlets and a singular township of wealthy aristocracy. The Stroud family rules within the town as the Junction's unquestionable oligarchs, typically referred to as the Coven. However, the region's theology commands the near entirety of its populace, where the ideals of their wool-veiled Shepherd coordinate the residents into strange, ritualistic practices, black rites, and deranged

crafts. Concepts such as birth and death are synonymous to where the living desire to become walking examples of the dead.

One such case is the Callus (Figure 3.4). Described as the bodily calcification of an individual when overly and consistently exposed to black bile, the body undergoes a grotesque mutation. The black bile encrusts the person's entire body in a hard, sinewy shell resembling that of a corpse's dried husk. They are most prominent in the Coven's service and viewed as a pinnacle of social status. In truth, the individual becomes mentally deranged and delusional when a Callus, due to having persistent overexposure to black bile on their person. This leads to the progressive petrification of his innards as the black bile makes its way through the pores. However, hosts are often too distracted by its hallucinogenic properties to take notice or to express personal concern for their own well-being.

Another custom practiced by the Coven is the use of stillbirth. Because of the Shepherd's infantile projection, those in the Southern Coven will expose willing pregnant members with copious amounts of black bile and effectively cause their newborns to be calcified upon birth, referring to them as Stone Babies (Figure 3.5). One would expect the mother to be appalled by the fate of their child, but often she too has calcified her body in black bile prior to going into labor. The stone baby is a boon within Southern culture, in which the newborn's life is lost in favor of becoming a deathly tool of worship. Mothers in the South who do not give birth to stone babies or do not seek pregnancy are ostracized by the community, and are segregated deeper into the swamplands. Regularly, though, mothers who successfully give birth to a stone baby, whether she herself survives or not, is honored by the Coven. Their stone offspring are then preserved in a jar of liquid black bile and enshrined alongside other stone babies for future communions with the Shepherd (Figure 3.6). Considerably morbid to the layman, a Southerner,

especially of the Coven, value the stone babies as exemplary vessels of melding life and death as a singular process. It is in their hopes that utilizing such stillborn will achieve their long-sought audience with the Shepherd.

The Junctions' civil war also brought about accidental horrors through abusively weaponizing the black bile. Among these disasters are the Locksmiths. They are lanky aberrations covered in shrouds and tatters, carrying large shacks adorned in hand-crafted padlocks (Figure 3.7). In truth, the Locksmiths are the former inhabitants of the East Junction whose remains were reanimated and twisted by the black bile. Their mannerism are brutish at best, only expressed through maniacal speech and cackles, especially upon approaching their horrified targets. Often victims are enslaved and forced to wear black bile masks, which leaves them under constant threat of solidification if they dared to revolt. They are, however, ruled by a rather intelligent Locksmith named Hamilton Lusk (Figure 3.8). Referred to as Lord Hamilton, he is a terrifying foe of both the Northern and Southern forces who tread into the East Junction. Hamilton's leadership is rather significant though, for he is one of the few existing settlers from six-hundred years ago. Hamilton's existence has perpetuated through the centuries due to ingesting a substance known as Phlegm.

Phlegm is a bodily secretion from organic matter petrified by black bile. Described as a stringy, spotted pus, phlegm leaks from tumor-like protrusions developed by bile-encrusted corpses after the compound has fully assimilated with its host (Figure 3.9). The reason for this chemical reaction is left to interpretation, but most inhabitants believe it to be a form of divine rejection from the Shepherd. Phlegm is an unexplored though shunned substance within the Junctions, and only those who are truly deranged partake of it, such as the Coven and

Locksmiths, which brought out its infamy. Ingestion of phlegm provides similar hallucinogenic effects to the black bile, although more akin to a horrible psychedelic experience.

Those who survive its poisonous effects describe visions of an unending tide of ligaments and limbs, swirling in a sea of black waters, as cries of screaming sheep congest the air, like an undying act of butchery. They refer to this dimension as the Black Sea. Interpretations of these testimonies shunned further research into the phlegm, albeit for the Stroud family and the deranged practices of the East's Locksmiths. Such factions are enamored with these deranged visions in hopes to seek a higher truth through their horrific effects. Although Locksmiths are naturally attuned to the phlegm, despite its virulent effects, like the deterioration of physical limbs. Hamilton, for example, incubates phlegm within his body in order to establish a connection with the Black Sea, and with it can conjure terrifying phantoms as a means of self-defense. For the Strouds, they believe the Black Sea to be the Shepherd's domain, or at least a dimension where it exists, and fervently seek passage through implementing the phlegm into their black bile rites. The Black Sea is a quasi-afterlife, for it gathers spiritual entities into its collective, but this is incidental. Passage between the Junctions and the Black Sea is alarmingly synthesized, in which any living or non-living thing may experience its presence, or enter its realm, if they have ingested copious amounts of phlegm.

CHAPTER THREE

3.2 *CARDINAL JUNCTION*: AGATHA THE BYRONIC HEROINE

Despite *Cardinal Junction*'s abundance of deathly concepts, the virtue for life still perseveres through its protagonist, Agatha Jackson Crowley. Agatha is the 16-year-old daughter of the Crowley family, an infamous clan of militiamen cursed to suffer abrupt deaths in wartime. To this regard, Agatha portrays the Byronic hero, a literary role the English poet Lord Byron created for his oriental tales and dramatic romances.⁹⁸ The Byronic hero is characterized by brooding facial features, such as a dark brow, black hair, melancholic eyes, and an aversive smile.⁹⁹ Agatha's appearance idealizes these traits through her innocent though worried eyes, unruly black hair, and meek smile (Figure 3.10). These features are often emphasized by a demeanor afflicted by past emotional trauma and psychological discord.¹⁰⁰ For Agatha, this strife is found through the death of her father, Jack Walter Crowley. She exercises her longing for him through wearing one of his old military uniforms and yearning to retrieve her family's saber, formerly wielded by Jack (Figure 3.11). This gesture is relevant to the Gothic portrait, for the living relative's fixation on an object of the deceased, such as an heirloom or a painting, invokes a miserable sense of nostalgia.¹⁰¹ This is especially emphasized when the portrait of the deceased is directly connected to the life of its obsessive viewer.¹⁰²

Although Agatha's longing for her father stems from her mother's passing. Her mother died giving birth to Agatha, which left Jack grievously depressed, despite his daughter's survival. As a result, he remarried to another woman, Cassidy Royer, only a few years after. He, however, promptly died a few years later on the battlefield. Cassidy then took custody of young Agatha, but neglected her in favor of obsessing over the old Royer family manor, and eventually abandoned her altogether. This marked the step-mother as a target of immeasurable disdain. Of

course, such scorn is characteristic of the Byronic hero whose oversensitive disposition varies between contempt and remorse.¹⁰³ Agatha's hatred for her step-mother is merely a distraction from the personal blame she attributes to her parents' passing. Her self-condemnation is projected through centering herself as the cause of their deaths. This is common of Byronic heroes, for they are miserable souls whose turmoil is insular from all others but themselves.¹⁰⁴

Agatha's psychological struggle undergoes a transformation through the initial story of *Cardinal Junction*. She, alongside a friend of the Crowley family, Boyd Asher Irving, break into the decrepit Royer Manor to retrieve her family saber. They eventually discover the saber in the cadaverous clutches of Agatha's step-mother, Cassidy Royer. Upon its retrieval, Cassidy unveils herself to be very much alive but as one of the Coven's Calluses, and assaults Boyd while Agatha escapes the manor in a maddened state. Boyd manages to fend off Cassidy, but she then gives chase for Agatha. Sequestered in a ruined homestead, Agatha laments her cowardice and her familial loss as Cassidy approaches her hiding place. Agatha, however, manages to unsheathe the family saber but is assaulted by a burst of black bile spores, and inhales the deadly particles. Cassidy attacks Agatha and forces her through a grueling experience of both physical torment and black bile overdose. This ridicule illustrates the Byronic hero's gravest quality: the death wish.¹⁰⁵ Death is attracted to Agatha in this moment, but she somehow manages to persevere, and persists as an exemplar of life.¹⁰⁶ This is noted by Hamilton from afar, who observes Agatha's body undergoing a metaphysical mutation. His eventual ambush in their confrontation allows for Agatha to undergo this supernatural transformation.

The turmoil of familial loss erupts from Agatha in the form of an ability called the Shadow. It is an extremely rare side-effect of the black bile, inherited only by the Crowley lineage. The ability is characterized by shadowy, hair-like spores that sprout from the host's

scalp, nape, and ligaments (Figure 3.12). Under the effects of the Shadow, a host's agility and speed are enhanced tenfold, capable of striking from long distances within seconds. Another unique property of Shadow is its ability to infiltrate other biles, such as penetrating and manipulating the black bile of a Callus's shell. These combative properties, however, pale to Agatha's psychological shift while under the effects of the Shadow. As a Byronic heroine, Agatha's tenacity becomes her greatest weapon. Her capacity to trudge through her traumatic thoughts and physical agony strengthens the Shadow's influence over her. Agatha's metaphysical mutation is less of an external augmentation than it is an internal evocation.

This conjuring of the Shadow ability relates to the black bile's greatest macabre secret: it behaves as a material gateway for wayward spirits. The sociocultural, sociopolitical, and religious cataclysms propagated by the black bile is from its connection with stray spirits known as Dust. These spirits influence the minds and bodies of the Junctions' peoples, through accidental and intentional actions. The North and South sway the social paradigm of their civilizations through allowing such spirits to congest within their living environments, where the Dust can manipulate and transform the persons, objects, and space. As their namesake implies, the Dust are the incorporeal collective of lost souls who dwelled before and after the Cardinal Junction's foundation. They range from feeble specters (Figure 3.13) to foreboding phantasms (Figure 3.14). Nevertheless, their influence over the Junctions exceeds the perception of the greater populace, whereas only those deeply rooted to the black bile, such the Coven, the Locksmiths, and the Crowley family, know of their presence. Individuals who have ingested the black bile eventually expire, and their consciousness is funneled into the Dusts' collective.

Agatha, empowered by the Shadow, is compelled by a particular group of Dust known as the Murder. The Murder, thematically inspired by the mirthful degenerates of Edgar Allan Poe's

King Pest (Figure 3.15), are six Crowley ancestors synchronized as a singular anomaly whose sole purpose is to manipulate the events of the Crowley family tree. They originated from subsequent Crowleys who safeguarded their consciousness from the majority of other Dust, and assimilated into their own collective entity. The Murder are the honest ideal of the *Danse Macabre* as they surmounted the dread of death through entering its embrace and transcending its cold notion of nothingness by instigating their own afterlife. They remain distant of the dehumanization exhibited in most other Dust, and instead impose their own human personality by behaving as a lively as they did in life. Still, their supernatural connection with the Crowleys is turbulent. The Murder is a subconscious force in this regard, as they pry and coerce radical decisions within a Crowley's mindscape. In Agatha's case, they proclaim her to be their cherished property, and retaliate against any interloper seeking her life. This symbiotic relationship assures Agatha greater survivability before death, for the Murder perpetuate their ego through her actions and safeguard her as their beloved host. Opponents such as Cassidy, or any other, are punished by the equivocal nature of *Danse Macabre* and are scattered into the greater expanses of the hereafter.

Figure 3.2. Steven Bardon. *Cardinal Junction #2 (Panel)*. Ink on Bristol, c. 2018.

FIGURES



Figure 3.1. Steven Bardon. *Cardinal Junction #1* (Panel). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.



Figure 3.2. Steven Bardon. *Cardinal Junction #2* (Panel). Ink on Bristol. c. 2018.

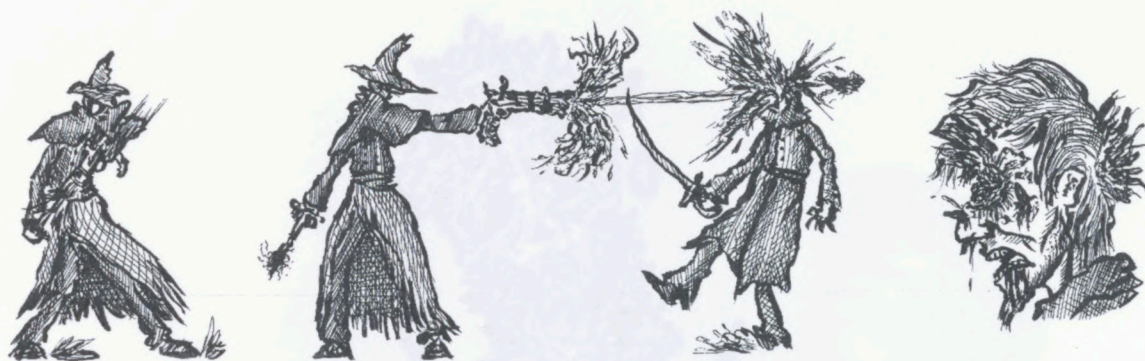


Figure 3.3. Steven Bardon. *Bilelock System*. Ink on Bristol. c. 2018.

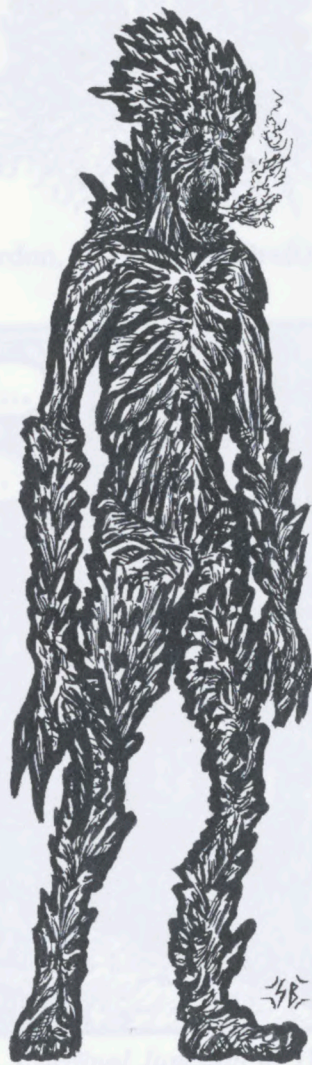


Figure 3.4. Steven Bardon. *Callus* (Character Design). Ink on Bristol. c. 2018.



Figure 3.5. Steven Bardon. *Stone Baby* (Draft). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.

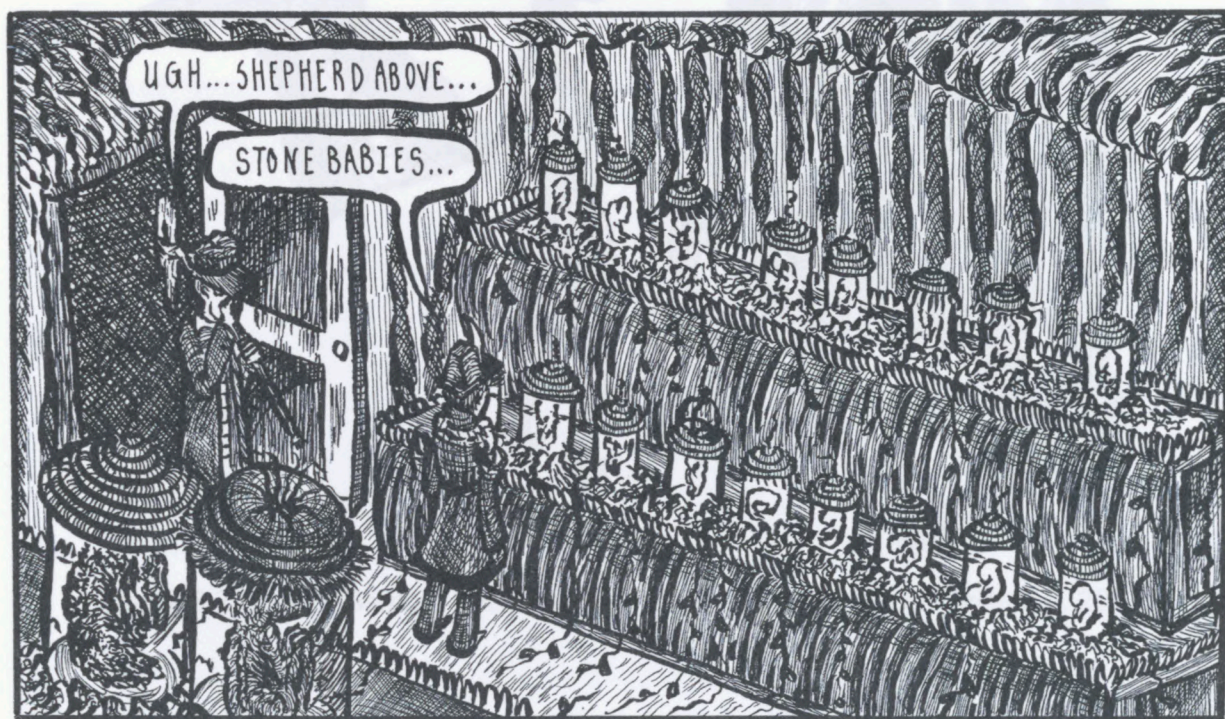


Figure 3.6. Steven Bardon. *Cardinal Junction #1* (Panel). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.

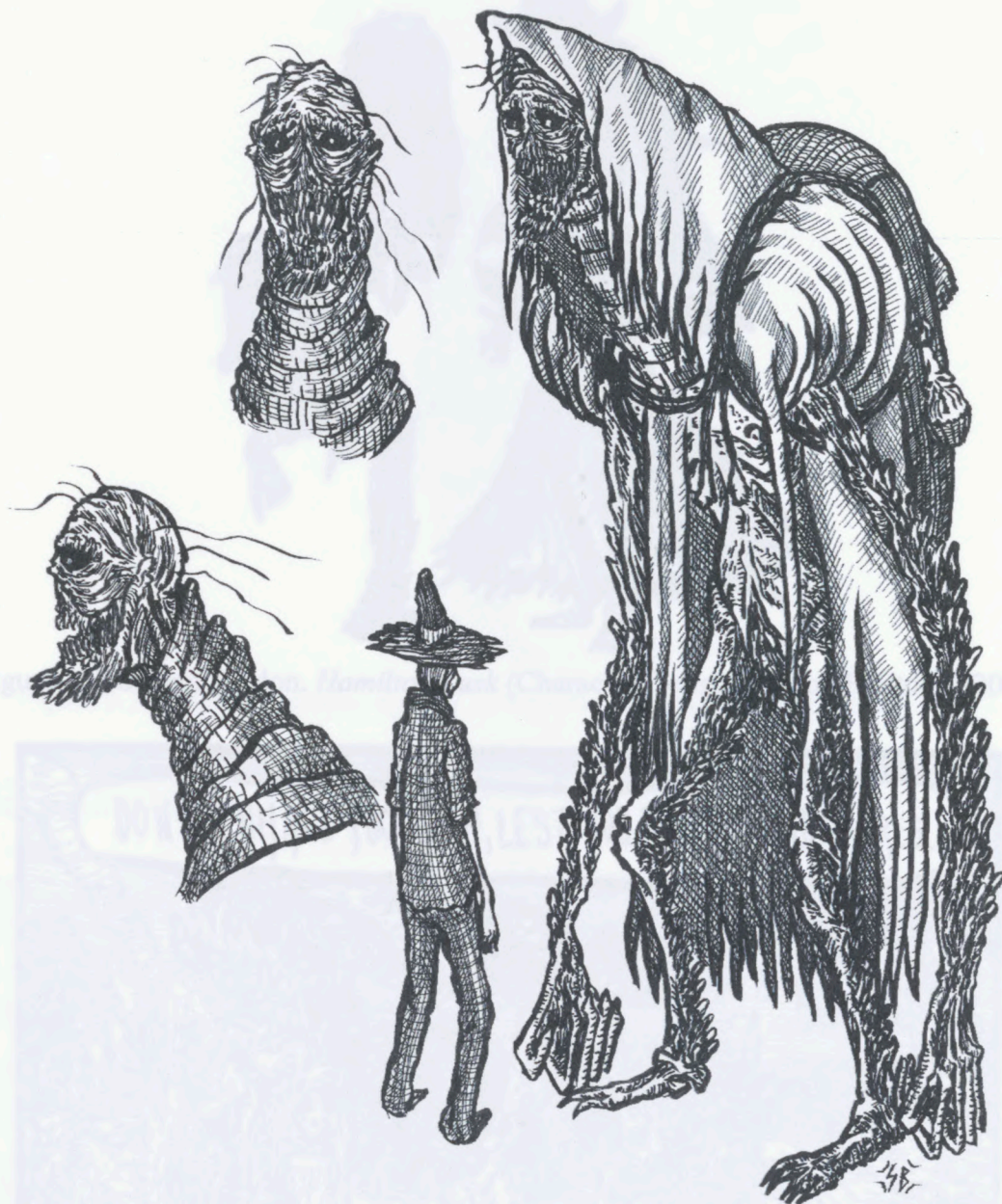


Figure 3.7. Steven Bardon. *Locksmith* (Character Design). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.

Figure 3.9. Steven Bardon. *Caroline Jackson #2 (Puzzle)*. Ink on Bristol. c. 2018.



Figure 3.8. Steven Bardon. *Hamilton Lusk* (Character Design). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.



Figure 3.9. Steven Bardon. *Cardinal Junction #2* (Panel). Ink on Bristol. c. 2018.

Figure 3.11. Steven Bardon. *Cardinal Junction #2* (Panel). Ink on Bristol. c. 2018.



Figure 3.10. Steven Bardon. *Agatha* (Character Design). Ink on Bristol. c. 2017.



Figure 3.11. Steven Bardon. *Cardinal Junction #3* (Panels). Ink on Bristol. c. 2018.

Figure 3.11. Steven Bardon. *Cardinal Junction #3* (Panels). Ink on Bristol. c. 2018.



Figure 3.12. Steven Bardon. *Agatha (Shadow)*. Ink on Bristol. c. 2018.



Figure 3.13. Steven Bardon. *Dust*. Ink on Bristol. c. 2018.

Figure 3.15. Alfred Kubin. *King Pest*. Line etching after drawing. c. 1911.



Figure 3.14. Steven Bardon *Dust*. Ink on Bristol. c. 2018.



Figure 3.15. Alfred Kubin. *King Pest*. Line etching after drawing. c. 1911.

CONCLUSION

The *Danse Macabre* acknowledges the power of death, but human interpretation transcends its literalness in which life is perceived in the hereafter. When paired with the Faustian archetype, the Gothic narrative, and the Byronic hero, these elements demonstrate one's conceptual versatility when inspired by the *Danse Macabre*. Within the idea of the *Danse Macabre*, people of all walks of life profess their futility to the universe when acknowledging their inevitable deaths. Whether the notion of an afterlife is believed or rejected at by the individual, death is at the forefront as a tangible, yet profound experience. Concurrent life must expire to allow its newer generation to carry on creation until they too must resign from existence like their predecessors to make way for their successors.

The idea of an afterlife is optimistic, however. It encourages the commemoration of the dead through a spiritual lens dependent on prayer and funerary rites. The Christian faith was especially enthusiastic about this notion through incorporating *memento mori* symbols, such as hourglasses and skulls, as a major theme in their artwork. Death was more than a natural conclusion of life to the faithful, for it was a passage into life anew – one of a spiritual existence without the physical limitations of a corporeal existence, such as pain and decrepitude.

Of course, interpretations of the afterlife can be as arguably obtuse as the thought of dying. People of faith accept it more willingly than non-believers. This is why *Danse Macabre* artwork aided in constructing context for death, through conveying the dead escorting the living to their graves. Such fantastical scenes emotionally engage the viewer by witnessing the unbiased act of dying as a process communally shared and understood by all people.

Supernatural narratives such as the dystopias of *FaustFall* and *Cardinal Junction* emphasize the tragedy left through a loved one's death, for such mortalities wish for a hereafter.

Through these dramatic events, the cycle of *Danase Macabre* illustrates h the protagonists' yearning for their deceased parents and propel their actions forward before deathly opposition. The *Danse Macabre* becomes a heroic center for each series' protagonists through their eventual evolution as an object of life, much like Lucifer's resurrection as the Unmaker or Agatha's evocation of the Shadow. Spirituality is crucial within their world-scapes as the afterlife exercises a direct influence on the mortal world. Whether through becoming a vessel for forlorn souls or ingesting strange substances to perceive a grim otherworld, these characters partake of both life and death when surmounted by a formidable force. The unbiased threat of death promotes their survivability through welcoming the influence of spirits existing within the hereafter as a boon. Such a consideration memorializes the deceased as a significant instrument in augmenting the protagonists' capacity to thwart their deathly circumstances and to excel as heroes of life.

The *Danse Macabre* conveys an initially unnerving allegory where the reach of death is inexorable, but its incorporation into a person's mindset can temper such harshness. For instance, familial bonds are the moral core of *FaustFall* and *Cardinal Junction* as the characters acknowledge the departed with grieving affection. They perpetuate the Judeo-Christian ideal of a hereafter where the loss of a loved one is eased by the existence of a life after death. Death is accepted as a respected inevitability within the natural cycle of creation by those knowing of the *Danse Macabre*. Life waltzes with the dead so it too may meet death, though in faith there will be former lives awaiting its arrival on the other side.

- ¹ Hidetaka Miyazaki, dir, *Bloodborne*, 2014; Tokyo, Japan: FromSoftware, 2015, Video game.
- ² Elina Gertsman, "The Berlin "Dance of Death" as the "Last Judgment"" *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 24, no. 3 (2005): 10
- ³ Ibid
- ⁴ Ibid
- ⁵ Ibid
- ⁶ Ibid
- ⁷ Robert Eisler, "Danse Macabre," *Traditio* 6 (1948): 194
- ⁸ Ibid
- ⁹ Robert Eisler, "Danse Macabre," *Traditio* 6 (1948): 195
- ¹⁰ Robert Eisler, "Danse Macabre," *Traditio* 6 (1948): 198
- ¹¹ Robert Eisler, "Danse Macabre," *Traditio* 6 (1948): 197
- ¹² Ibid
- ¹³ Ibid
- ¹⁴ Ibid
- ¹⁵ Ibid
- ¹⁶ Robert Eisler, "Danse Macabre," *Traditio* 6 (1948): 200
- ¹⁷ Ibid
- ¹⁸ Robert Eisler, "Danse Macabre," *Traditio* 6 (1948): 200
- ¹⁹ Robert Eisler, "Danse Macabre," *Traditio* 6 (1948): 201
- ²⁰ Robert Eisler, "Danse Macabre," *Traditio* 6 (1948): 202
- ²¹ Robert Eisler, "Danse Macabre," *Traditio* 6 (1948): 206
- ²² Ibid
- ²³ Robert Eisler, "Danse Macabre," *Traditio* 6 (1948): 224
- ²⁴ Robert Eisler, "Danse Macabre," *Traditio* 6 (1948): 211
- ²⁵ Ibid
- ²⁶ Ibid
- ²⁷ Éva Bús, "'Death's Echo' and 'Danse Macabre': Auden and the Medieval Tradition of Death Lyrics," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)* 14, no. 1 (2008): 87
- ²⁸ Ibid
- ²⁹ Éva Bús, "'Death's Echo' and 'Danse Macabre': Auden and the Medieval Tradition of Death Lyrics," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)* 14, no. 1 (2008): 88
- ³⁰ Ibid
- ³¹ Éva Bús, "'Death's Echo' and 'Danse Macabre': Auden and the Medieval Tradition of Death Lyrics," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)* 14, no. 1 (2008): 90
- ³² Robert Eisler, "Danse Macabre," *Traditio* 6 (1948): 224
- ³³ Ibid
- ³⁴ Ibid
- ³⁵ Harold Mytum, "Mortality Symbols in Action: Protestant and Catholic Memorials in Early- Eighteenth-Century West Ulster," *Historical Archaeology* 43, no. 1 (2009): 162
- ³⁶ Ibid
- ³⁷ Ibid
- ³⁸ Ibid
- ³⁹ Ibid
- ⁴⁰ Ibid
- ⁴¹ Harold Mytum, "Mortality Symbols in Action: Protestant and Catholic Memorials in Early- Eighteenth-Century West Ulster," *Historical Archaeology* 43, no. 1 (2009): 170
- ⁴² Ibid
- ⁴³ Ibid
- ⁴⁴ Harold Mytum, "Mortality Symbols in Action: Protestant and Catholic Memorials in Early- Eighteenth-Century West Ulster," *Historical Archaeology* 43, no. 1 (2009): 174
- ⁴⁵ Ibid

- ⁴⁶ Elina Gertsman, "The Berlin "Dance of Death" as the "Last Judgment"" *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 24, no. 3 (2005): 10
- ⁴⁷ Ibid
- ⁴⁸ Ibid
- ⁴⁹ Ibid
- ⁵⁰ Elina Gertsman, "The Berlin "Dance of Death" as the "Last Judgment"" *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 24, no. 3 (2005): 11
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- ⁵³ Elina Gertsman, "The Berlin "Dance of Death" as the "Last Judgment"" *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 24, no. 3 (2005): 11
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- ⁵⁵ Ibid
- ⁵⁶ Elina Gertsman, "The Berlin "Dance of Death" as the "Last Judgment"" *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 24, no. 3 (2005): 11
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- ⁵⁸ Ibid
- ⁵⁹ Ibid
- ⁶⁰ Elina Gertsman, "The Berlin "Dance of Death" as the "Last Judgment"" *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 24, no. 3 (2005): 12
- ⁶¹ Campbell, Ramsey, and China Miéville. *The Age of Lovecraft*, 65
- ⁶² Campbell, Ramsey, and China Miéville. *The Age of Lovecraft*, 69
- ⁶³ Ibid
- ⁶⁴ J. M. Van Der Laan. "Faust's Divided Self and Moral Inertia." *Monatshefte* 91, no. 4 (1999): 456
- ⁶⁵ Ibid
- ⁶⁶ J. M. Van Der Laan. "Faust's Divided Self and Moral Inertia." *Monatshefte* 91, no. 4 (1999): 457
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- ⁷² J. M. Van Der Laan. "Faust's Divided Self and Moral Inertia." *Monatshefte* 91, no. 4 (1999): 456
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- ⁷⁵ Campbell, Ramsey, and China Miéville. *The Age of Lovecraft*, 69
- ⁷⁶ Campbell, Ramsey, and China Miéville. *The Age of Lovecraft*, 70
- ⁷⁷ Campbell, Ramsey, and China Miéville. *The Age of Lovecraft*, 66
- ⁷⁸ J. M. Van Der Laan. "Faust's Divided Self and Moral Inertia." *Monatshefte* 91, no. 4 (1999): 458
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- ⁸³ J. M. Van Der Laan. "Faust's Divided Self and Moral Inertia." *Monatshefte* 91, no. 4 (1999): 457
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¹⁰⁰ Charles J. Clancy. "Aurora Raby in "Don Juan": A Byronic Heroine." *Keats-Shelley Journal* 28 (1979): 29

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DANSE MACABRE: ORIGINS, EVOLUTION, AND EXECUTION

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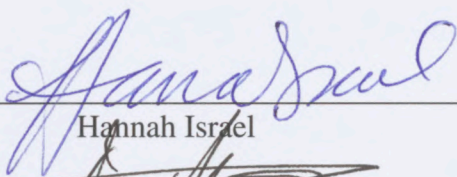
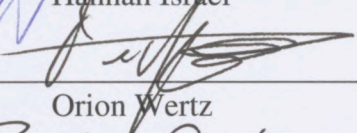
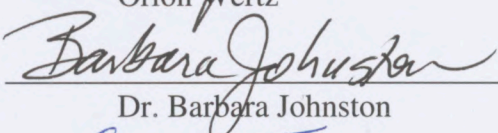
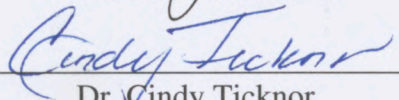
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A Thesis Submitted to the

HONORS COLLEGE

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for Honors in the Degree of

BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS
STUDIO (DIGITAL ART)
COLLEGE OF THE ARTS

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