



“So shall yoe bee”

Encountering the Shrouded Effigies of Thomas Beresford and Agnes Hassall at Fenny Bentley

Aimee Caya

Abstract

The Beresford Monument from the Church of St Edmund at Fenny Bentley in Derbyshire is a funerary monument that has received relatively little attention from scholars due to its unusual imagery and the lack of documentary evidence regarding its creation. The alabaster monument depicts Thomas Beresford (d. 1473) and Agnes Hassall (d. 1467) as fully shrouded three-dimensional effigies. Incised around the base of the monument are enshrouded representations of their twenty-one children. This paper analyzes the impact that veiling the bodies of Thomas Beresford and Agnes Hassall has on the effectiveness of the monument as a commemorative tool and situates the shrouded effigies within their broader visual and social context at the turn of the sixteenth century. Rather than dismiss the unusual imagery of the Beresford Monument as an expedient solution selected by sculptors who did not know what Thomas Beresford and Agnes Hassall actually looked like, this paper argues that shrouding the effigies was a deliberate commemorative strategy meant to evoke specific responses in the monument’s viewers. Although there is little concrete information about the tomb’s commission, contextualizing it by examining the monument in concert with other aspects of late medieval culture—including purgatorial piety, macabre texts and imagery, and *ex votos*—can provide a richer understanding of the object’s potentiality for its beholders. The anonymizing aspect of the shroud ultimately enabled viewers to identify freely and easily with the individuals depicted on the monument, which would have encouraged them to pray for the souls of Thomas and Agnes, thus perpetuating their memories and reducing their time in purgatory.

About the Author

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There was perhaps no better center of community in late medieval England than the parish church. The paintings, sculptures, textiles, and stained glass that decorated these buildings provided a shared corpus of imagery that helped to forge communal identity by visualizing ties to ancestors or by propping up the cult of a local saint.¹ This paper will focus on an alabaster tomb from one such parish church, the Beresford Monument from the Church of St Edmund King and Martyr at Fenny Bentley in Derbyshire (Figure 1). The most striking feature of the tomb is the pair of fully shrouded effigies on the

top, identified as Thomas Beresford (d. 1473) and his wife, Agnes Hassall (d. 1467). Thomas and Agnes’s featureless effigies have perplexed and distressed a number of writers over the years. For example, in his 1878 publication *Notes on the Churches of Derbyshire*, J. Charles Cox explains: “The effect is most repulsive and ghastly and we should think that the idea must have occurred to the sculptor who wished to conceal his lack of skill in chiseling the human face or figure.”² Derek H. Buckley provides a slightly more sympathetic view in his 1987 book *The Parish Church of Fenny Bentley and its Church of St Edmund King and Martyr*:

*Many people have wondered why the figures are shown in their shrouds, it has even been suggested that this was because the tomb was carved a century after their death and as the sculptor did not know what they looked like, he took the easy way out and put them in shrouds. But surely, effigies up to about the sixteenth century were never accurate in any case. It seems much more likely to me that it was simply an indication that earthly splendor had passed away, and that we all appear the same before our Maker.*³

Although Buckley’s treatment of the tomb is more charitable than Cox’s, both of their attempts to explain the striking choices made in the Beresford Monument are dissatisfying.

In what little scholarly writing it has prompted, the Beresford Monument has largely been defined by what it is not or by what it lacks, creating an impression that the monument is not merely peculiar, but also in some sense a failure: it does not present any likeness of Thomas Beresford or Agnes Hassall; it does not exhibit particularly fine or sensitive carving; it does not conform to the more familiar iconographic traditions of the *transi* tomb, the *gisant*, or the shroud brass; it does not tell us when it was made or who commissioned it, and—particularly for nineteenth-century authors like Cox—it is unsettling and distasteful. The goal of this paper is to approach the Beresford Monument on its own terms, focusing not on what it fails to do but rather on what its unusual imagery can tell us about the place of the viewer in the economy of salvation and how such monuments were able to negotiate the relationship between the dead and living in complex and often ambiguous ways. I suggest that shrouding the effigies of

¹ I would like to thank Professor Elina Gertsman for her guidance in the development of this paper. Many thanks to Sarah Reiff Conell and her colleagues at the University of Pittsburgh for their excellent work organizing the Motivating Monuments symposium in 2018, and for their insightful questions regarding this project. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Professors Jacqueline Jung and Shirin Fozi for sharing their own questions and astute observations at the symposium. Thanks are also due to Jacqueline Lombard and Katie Loney at *Contemporaneity* and to the three anonymous reviewers for their perceptive comments and suggestions on this paper. I would also like to acknowledge Fern Dawson from Lincoln Cathedral, Chris Hughes from York Minster, and the Reverend Gordon Plumb for their generosity in allowing me to reproduce some of the images in this article.

² J. Charles Cox, *Notes on the Churches of Derbyshire*, vol. 2 (London: Bemrose and Sons, 1878), 467.

³ Derek H. Buckley, *The Parish Church of Fenny Bentley and its Church St. Edmund King and Martyr* (Derby, England: J.M. Tattler and Son, 1987), 8.

Agnes Hassall and Thomas Beresford was a deliberate commemorative strategy intended to elicit responses from the tomb's beholders that were understandable and even expected within the context of late medieval devotion.



Figure 1

The Beresford Monument, ca. 1465–1550. Alabaster. Church of St Edmund King and Martyr, Fenny Bentley, Derbyshire. (Photo: author)

The Beresford family had an estate near Fenny Bentley at Newton Grange and appears to have been an active patron of the Church of St Edmund, although Thomas and Agnes's children have been tied to other churches in Derbyshire as well.⁴ Alabaster effigial monuments became popular in England beginning in the fourteenth century, and so the choice of material is unsurprising for a family of their station.⁵ Indeed, the stone for the tomb most likely came

⁴ Godfrey Beresford, who was the eldest child of Aden Beresford—himself the eldest of Thomas and Agnes's sons—has an incised alabaster tomb slab near the high altar of Crich church in Derbyshire, about fifteen miles from Fenny Bentley. Thomas and Agnes's youngest son, James, studied canon law at Cambridge and eventually became a canon and prebendary at Lichfield Cathedral—about thirty miles from Fenny Bentley. James was buried in Lichfield Cathedral on July 13, 1520, but I have not found any description of his tomb. "Family Origins" and "Notable Beresfords," The Beresford Family Society, accessed May 22, 2019, <http://beresfordfamilysociety.org>

⁵ Alabaster first became a popular material for sculpture in England in the fourteenth century, when it was used for several prominent tomb effigies, including those of King Edward II at Gloucester Cathedral (c. 1330); the son of Edward II, John of Eltham (d. 1336) at Westminster Abbey; and Edward III's son, William of Hatfield (d. c. 1340) at York Minster. John Blair and Nigel Ramsay, *English Medieval Industries: Craftsmen, Techniques, Products* (London: Hambledon and London, 2001), 30–31 and 36. For more on the growing popularity of alabaster as the material of choice for elite tombs in England, see Rachel Dressler, "Identity, Status, and Material: Medieval Alabaster Effigies in England," *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* 5, no. 2 (2015): 65; Kim Woods, "The Fortunes of Alabaster: A

from the nearby quarry at Chellaston, one of the main sources of English alabaster in the Middle Ages.⁶ Atop the Beresford Monument, the effigies of Thomas and Agnes lie side-by-side, their winding sheets gathered together at the tops of their heads and the bases of their feet, completely concealing their features from view. It is nonetheless clear from the silhouettes of their bodies beneath the gathered cloth that both Thomas and Agnes have their arms folded at their waist. An inscription on the base of the monument provides basic biographic information—mostly about Thomas—and several lines regarding the transience of life and the importance of preparing for death.⁷ Beneath the inscription are incised representations of their twenty-one children—all fully enshrouded. All of these figures are identical, and none is named in the inscription aside from Hugh, as he was buried alongside his parents after his death in 1524. The quartered arms of the Beresford and Hassall families also appear on the base, and the cornice above is incised with bells, bows, and depictions of armor.

There are two likely explanations for the Beresford Monument's relative absence from modern scholarship. The first being that the Church of St Edmund at Fenny Bentley—like many other English parish churches—underwent significant renovations during the nineteenth century, leaving the tomb bereft of much of its original context.⁸ Even more critically, the lack of concrete information about the circumstances of the Beresford Monument's creation has contributed to its neglect by scholars. There are no surviving records that identify a patron or provide the date that the monument was installed at the Church of St Edmund. Because all of the figures on the tomb are shrouded, scholars cannot rely on costumes or hairstyles to date the monument, as is often the case with other tombs.⁹ The monument may have been commissioned around the time of Agnes Hassall's death in 1467, but was probably not fully completed before the death of Hugh in 1524, as his burial is mentioned in the inscription on the tomb's base. Formal characteristics on the monument also indicate that the tomb's decoration was made piecemeal over a period of time, as Paula Frosch convincingly proposes.¹⁰ The drapery of the shrouds is handled quite differently between the two effigies, and there are marked discrepancies in the way the fabric is gathered at the heads and feet.¹¹ Furthermore,

Historiographical Analysis," in *From Major to Minor: The Minor Arts in Medieval Art History*, ed. Colum Hourihane (University Park, PA: Penn State Press and the Index of Christian Art, 2012), 91–94.

⁶ Alabaster is a fine-grained form of gypsum. Although the most desirable coloration was pure white, it was often veined with red or green. The quarry at Chellaston was known to have red- or copper-colored veining, as seen in the monument at Fenny Bentley. The principle quarries in the Middle Ages were in Staffordshire and Derbyshire. Blair and Ramsay, *English Medieval Industries*, 30–31 and 36.

⁷ The full inscription with a translation can be found in the Appendix.

⁸ The Beresford Monument was relocated from the chancel to a nineteenth-century side chapel, and given the alterations made to the chancel itself it is difficult to say with certainty how viewers would have approached it or what church furnishings would have served as its immediate visual context. Any wall paintings that may have decorated the Church of St Edmund have been lost, as have any textiles—such as the altar cloth and vestments.

⁹ See Nigel Saul, *Death, Art, and Memory in Medieval England: The Cobbham Family and their Monuments, 1300-1500* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Rachel Dressler, *Of Armor and Men in Medieval England: The Chivalric Rhetoric of Three English Knights' Effigies* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

¹⁰ Paula Frosch, "Mind Thee to Die: The Beresford Monument at Fenny Bentley," *Journal of the Church Monuments Society* 15 (2000): 31–32. On the practice of making tombs some time after the death of the individual commemorated, see Jessica Barker, "Stone and Bone: the Corpse, the Effigy, and the Viewer in Late-Medieval Tomb Sculpture" in *Revisiting the Monument: Fifty Years Since Panofsky's Tomb Sculpture*, ed. Ann Adams and Jessica Barker (London: Courtauld Books Online, 2016), 124–25.

¹¹ Frosch, "Mind Thee to Die," 31–32.

each effigy sits on its own, independent rectangular base, one of which has chamfered edges while the other has a square edge all the way around. These variations suggest that the effigies were carved by two separate sculptors, who may or may not have been employed in the same workshop. Given the decline in the English alabaster industry amid the changes brought about by the Reformation in the later sixteenth century, it seems unlikely that the Beresford Monument was made much later than the mid-sixteenth century.¹² Laurence Beresford (d. 1577) has been set forward as a possible patron for the Beresford Monument, and may have been the one responsible for completing its construction.¹³

Although precise dating for the tomb remains impossible, the above evidence suggests that it was erected between ca. 1465 and ca. 1550, possibly as the result of multiple campaigns. Despite the admitted difficulty in reconstructing a conclusive history for the Beresford Monument, it is still possible to hypothesize how its viewers may have interacted with it by considering the monument's relationship to other types of tombs and late medieval macabre imagery. Many other monuments, especially in the parish churches of England, survive without the benefit of thorough documentation and provenance, but to ignore them because of these lacunae prevents us from presenting a full picture of history. It is imperative, in my opinion, to include such objects in our discussions of medieval culture in order to better understand the diversity of visual strategies at play—in this case, the various means by which viewers were encouraged to engage with commemorative monuments in the late medieval period.



Figure 2

Tomb of Bishop Richard Fleming (d. 1431). Lincoln Cathedral. (Photo: author)

¹² Anne Harris, "From Stone to Statue: the Geology and Art of English Alabaster Panels," forthcoming in *Art and Devotion in Medieval England*, ed. Stephen Perkinson and Jessica Brantley (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications); Blair and Ramsay, *English Medieval Industries*, 39–40; Dressler, "Identity, Status, and Material," 70.

¹³ Frosch, "Mind Thee to Die," 32.

Viewer Reception and Context: Medieval Tombs and Purgatorial Piety

It was by no means unusual to see a macabre representation of the commemorated individual on late medieval English tombs. *Transi* tombs, like that of Bishop Richard Fleming at Lincoln Cathedral, are composed of dual effigies: on top is the idealized body of the commemorated with all the markers of the deceased person's office, while down below is a representation of a rotting cadaver or skeletal corpse whose shroud has fallen away (Figure 2).¹⁴ The effigy on the upper level can be read as a likeness of the living individual—with at least a perceived claim to physiognomic accuracy. Although Buckley is by no means incorrect when he dismisses the likelihood of any real concern over facial likeness in this period, markers of identity including gender, costume, and/or coats of arms were nonetheless important tools for conveying a sense of the individual.¹⁵ By contrast, the sculpted cadaver on the lower level of the *transi* tomb portrays the body of the commemorated individual divested of the signs of its office, reduced to decaying matter in a performance of humility. The Beresford Monument, however, does not present any indicators of likeness and completely hides the deceased's bodies from the gaze of the beholder, indicating that a different commemorative and devotional strategy is at play.

Monumental brasses were another common mode of commemoration in late medieval England: an incised brass plaque would be set into a flat slab of stone that could be installed in a church's pavement or walls, or into the top of a table tomb.¹⁶ One popular type of monumental brass was the shroud brass, which depicted the body in some stage of decay, only partially covered by its winding sheet. One particularly striking example of this phenomenon is the early-sixteenth-century brass of Ralph Hamsterley, set into the chancel floor of St Andrew's Church in Oddington, Oxfordshire (Figure 3). The Hamsterley shroud brass depicts a worm-infested skeleton emerging from the folds of its shroud, with a banderole issuing from its mouth to indicate speech. Such a shroud brass has far more in common with the effigies of Thomas and Agnes than any *transi* tomb, in that the deceased individual is depicted without any visual indicators of individual likeness and all identifying information is concentrated in the inscription. Both the Hamsterley brass and the Beresford Monument accomplish the broad goal that Buckley describes: they represent the equalizing nature of death, which comes for everyone regardless of their station.

¹⁴ On *transi* tombs, see Kathleen Cohen, *Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol: The Transi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. California Studies in the History of Art vol. XV (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Erwin Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture: Four Lectures on Its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini*, edited by H.W. Janson (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1964), 56–64; Elina Gertsman, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages: Image, Text, Performance* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 23 and 29–32; Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London: British Museum Press, 2001), 140–49; Barker, 115.

¹⁵ Buckley, *Parish Church*, 8. See also, Thomas Dale, "The Individual, the Resurrected Body, and Romanesque Portraiture: The Tomb of Rudolph von Schwaben in Merseburg," *Speculum* 77, no. 3 (July 2002): 707–43.

¹⁶ Blair and Ramsey, *English Medieval Industries*, 101. For more on monumental brasses, see Jerome Bertram, *Monumental Brasses As Art and History* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1996); Herbert W. Macklin and John Page-Phillips, *Macklin's Monumental Brasses* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1978).



Figure 3

Shroud Brass of Ralph Hamsterley, ca 1515. St Andrew's Church, Oddington, Oxfordshire.
(Photo: author)

But where both *transi* tombs and shroud brasses present the corpse emerging from its winding sheet, the sculpted dead of the Beresford Monument remain completely concealed from the beholder's gaze, hidden by their impenetrable alabaster shrouds.¹⁷ Notably, the fabric not only denies the viewer access to the likenesses of Thomas and Agnes but also hides the visual evidence of decomposition so prominently displayed by *transi* tombs and shroud brasses.¹⁸ When the viewer encounters the effigies of Thomas and Agnes, at first glance they appear as they would have at the time of their burial. In the fifteenth century, manuscript illuminations accompanying the Office of the Dead often included scenes of anonymous shrouded bodies being interred in the churchyard, which bear a remarkable likeness to the effigies on the Beresford Monument.¹⁹ And yet, this illusion—that Agnes and Thomas are recently dead, simply awaiting burial—is inevitably shattered not only by the dates prominently featured in the tomb's inscription, but also through repeated exposure to the monument for the local community that made use of the church. Although the passage of time does not seem to have affected the bodies of Thomas and Agnes, who still appear robust and weighty beneath their shrouds, the viewer can never truly be sure of the condition of the bodies underneath. These are not the visibly desiccated corpses of *transi* tombs or shroud brasses, clearly long dead, or the recently resurrected dead so often shown climbing out of sarcophagi on church tympana or in wall paintings, like those at the Church of St James at South Leigh in Oxfordshire. These stone effigies of Thomas and Agnes do not reveal the state of their bodies; indeed, their winding sheets afford them a liminality not seen in the other types of tomb monuments—the natural process of decay and the passage of time that it implies go unrepresented but are not fully disclaimed. Just as the living viewers still await the Second Coming and the resurrection of the dead, so, too, are the bodies of Thomas and Agnes seemingly fixed in this intermediary state, waiting for the promised moment when they will emerge from their shrouds, their bodies transformed into their final, perfected state, their patience rewarded.²⁰

Although the fate of the body after death was of tremendous concern throughout the medieval period, beginning in the late twelfth century theologians began to formulate an intermediary stage between death and the resurrection that came to be known as purgatory, which was focused on the fate of the soul.²¹ Purgatorial doctrine was not finalized by the Catholic church until the sixteenth century, despite its prominence in religious practice for

¹⁷ One of the anonymous reviewers of this paper asked what connection, if any, was made between the shrouds from tombs like the Beresford Monument and the shroud of Christ. Unfortunately, given how ubiquitous the shroud is in images of death (both in sculpted tombs and manuscript illuminations) from this period, such an inquiry would require a great deal of thought and research that lies outside the scope of this paper. It is nonetheless a worthy question for future scholars to interrogate.

¹⁸ Elina Gertsman and Aimee Caya, "The Sensory Aesthetics of Death," in *A Cultural History of Death 850-1450*, ed. Ashby Kinch (New York: Bloomsbury, forthcoming).

¹⁹ See, for example, the *Grandes Heures de Rohan* fol. 182r, 15th cent, BnF Latin 9471. Binski, *Medieval Death*, 55.

²⁰ There is perhaps something to be said for the significance of alabaster's physical properties here: alabaster is a very soft stone that was known to be vulnerable to the elements. Although it became popular for use in interior monuments and small-scale interior sculpture, alabaster would dissolve if placed outside and exposed to moisture. In some sense, the fabric of the church that protects the monument from physical decay may also parallel the assurance of bodily continuity that Christianity offered the faithful in the form of physical resurrection at the Second Coming. On medieval understandings of the resurrection of the dead, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

²¹ Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 4.

several centuries prior.²² Generally speaking, a judgement would be made at the time of an individual's death, at which point there were three possible outcomes: the truly good (martyrs and saints) were admitted directly to heaven; the truly bad were sent immediately to hell; and the overwhelming majority of souls, who were guilty of venial sins, were sent to purgatory, where they could undergo penitential trials that would eventually allow them to enter heaven.²³ A soul's sentence in purgatory could be lessened through the intercession of the living, who could offer prayers (called suffrages) on behalf of the dead.²⁴ Although purgatorial doctrine extended the timeline of redemption for the soul, it was not possible to engage in self-improvement after one's death; as such the living were responsible for caring for the dead over an extended period of time, becoming stewards for their souls and their bodies.²⁵

The infrastructure of purgatorial piety, and suffrages in particular, created a *quid pro quo* system in which the living and the dead relied upon one another in order to achieve salvation.²⁶ One practice that developed in response to this societal need was masses for the dead.²⁷ It became possible to annex a space in the church for the celebration of such memorial masses, and to endow those spaces with specialized clergy whose duty it was to perform them regularly.²⁸ Church records show that James Beresford, one of Thomas and Agnes's sons, endowed such a chantry at the Church of St Edmund in Fenny Bentley in 1512.²⁹ By caring for the dead through memorial masses and the offering of suffrages, the living in turn amassed what Paul Binski refers to as a "credit system" that would shorten their own stay in purgatory when the time came.³⁰ As such, the goal of many tomb monuments in the later Middle Ages was to elicit prayers from the living on behalf of the dead, to the benefit of both groups.³¹ Some tomb inscriptions are blatant in their demands, requesting prayers for the dead person's soul and (in some cases) promising a specific indulgence in return for said prayers. For example, the memorial brass to Joan Cobham in the chancel of St Mary Magdalene at Cobham in Kent, dated to ca. 1300, includes an inscription that reads: "Dame Joan de Cobham lies here, God have mercy on her soul, whosoever for her soul prays, pardon will have of forty days."³²

The Beresford Monument is not quite so transparent in its demands on the living. Not once in the inscription on the tomb are the living asked to pray for the souls of Thomas and

²² Ibid., 41.

²³ Ibid., 4.

²⁴ Ibid., 134; Binski, *Medieval Death*, 27;

²⁵ Binski, *Medieval Death*, 25–28; Ashby Kinch, *Imago Mortis: Mediating Images of Death in Late Medieval Culture* (Boston: Brill, 2013), 143–44.

²⁶ Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, 12 and 46.

²⁷ Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death: from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 49.

²⁸ Binski, *Medieval Death*, 27.

²⁹ Frosch, "Mind Thee to Die," 34.

³⁰ Binski, *Medieval Death*, 25.

³¹ Dressler, *Of Armor and Men*, 63–64; Kinch, *Imago Mortis*, 145–81.

³² "Dame ione de kobeham gist isi, deus de sa alme eit merci, kike pur le alme priera, quaraunte iours de pardoun avera." Binski, *Medieval Death*, 113. For more on the Cobham brasses, see Nigel Saul, *Death, Art, and Memory in Medieval England: The Cobham Family and their Monuments, 1300-1500* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Agnes, and they are promised no specific remittance of their own future purgatorial sentence. Instead the viewer is forcefully reminded of his or her own impending mortality, first in the vernacular—"As you now are so once were we, And as we are so shall you be"—and then again in a Latin inscription, which translates as: "Clay, bubble, smoke, dust, shades, we are. We fly, From life even while we speak: Puff! go we must! Man, if thou art wise, learn this - 'Mind thee to die.'"³³ The inscription as a whole not only preserves the memory of Thomas Beresford and Agnes Hassall, but also reminds the viewers that they are the soon-to-be-dead and should thus prepare for their own fates, which will undoubtedly be similar to those individuals represented on the tomb. Furthermore, by including these warnings in both the vernacular and in Latin, the tomb was guaranteed to reach a fairly broad segment of society, unlike the learned Latin inscriptions on ecclesiastic *transi* monuments such as those of Bishop Fleming at Lincoln Cathedral and Cardinal La Grange at the Church of St Martial in Avignon.³⁴

Medieval Macabre Imagery and the Process of Identification

The warnings and admonitions in the Beresford Monument's inscription would have been familiar from other tropes in late medieval macabre culture, particularly the Dance of Death and the Encounter Between the Three Living and the Three Dead.³⁵ The Dance of Death is a procession in which personifications of Death alternate with living figures, who are arranged according to a social hierarchy, and depicts the moment in which Death comes for each of them (Figure 4). Many versions, like the famous murals at the Cemetery of the Holy Innocents in Paris, include verses that present a dialogue between Death and his victims, in which the living are forced to recognize the inevitability of their own demise, regardless of their circumstances in life.³⁶ For example, in an English version of the Dance of Death, written by John Lydgate in the fifteenth century, the Verba Auctoris says: "For dethe ne spareth / hye ne lowe degre [...] Deth spareth not / pore ne blode royal."³⁷ This warning, that death comes for

³³ The language of the inscription on the Beresford Monument is relatively formulaic and has much in common with inscriptions on *transi* tombs. For example, the translated inscription from the *transi* tomb of Cardinal La Grange at Avignon reads: "We have been made a spectacle for the world so that the older and the younger may look clearly upon us, in order that they might see to what state they will be reduced. No-one is excluded regardless of estate, sex, or age; therefore, miserable one, why are you proud? You are only ash, and you will revert, as we have done, to a fetid cadaver, food and tidbits for worms and ashes." The *transi* tomb of Archbishop Chichele at Canterbury (d. 1443) has an inscription that reads, when translated: "Whoever you may be who will pass by, I ask for your remembrance, you who will be like me after you die: horrible in all things, dust, worms, vile flesh." Both inscriptions reproduced in Binski, *Medieval Death*, 143.

³⁴ Binski, *Medieval Death*, 145. See also Anne McGee Morganstern, "The La Grange Tomb and Choir: A Monument of the Great Schism of the West," *Speculum* 48, no. 1 (1973): 52–69; Gertsman, *Dance of Death*.

³⁵ Although it does not survive, the wall painting of the Dance of Death from the cloister of Old St. Paul's in London seems to have been the most famous in medieval England. There are surviving wall paintings of the Dance of Death at the Guild Chapel in Stratford-on-Avon and Eton College Chapel. There is a painted rood screen at Hexham in Northumberland with Death and a Young Man, and wall paintings of the same subject at Newark-on-Trent in Nottinghamshire and the Hungerford Chapel in Salisbury Cathedral (the Salisbury example is now lost). Elina Gertsman, *Dance of Death*, 9; Clifford Davidson, *The Guild Chapel Wall Paintings at Stratford-upon-Avon* (New York: AMS Press, 1988), 19–20; Howe et al., *Wall Paintings of Eton* (London: Scala, 2012), 55; Roger Rosewell, *Medieval Wall Paintings in English and Welsh Churches* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), 83–84.

³⁶ The murals from the Cemetery of the Holy Innocents were destroyed in the seventeenth century but were preserved in a series of woodcuts published by Guyot Marchant in the fifteenth century. Gertsman, *Dance of Death*, 7–8.

³⁷ Original text from *The Dance of Death of John Lydgate*, Huntington Library, ms. Ellesmere 26/A.13, fols. 1r-12v, reproduced in Gertsman, *Dance of Death*, 202.

all, is then repeated by Death and the various living figures, who are invariably forced to concede that they are powerless to escape their fate.

The Encounter Between the Three Living and the Three Dead was also both a literary and visual phenomenon, in which three noblemen, decked out in their finery and out hunting or hawking, come across three cadavers (Figure 5). A dialogue between the two groups ensues, in which the dead admonish the living and encourage them to improve their ways before they, too, become nothing more than fetid corpses. The text of the Encounter Between the Three Living and the Three Dead sometimes identifies the dead as the ancestors of the living—especially in English examples—and often includes a refrain similar to the couplet on the Beresford Monument: “As you are now, so once were we, as we are so shall you be.”³⁸



Figure 4

Hans Holbein (German, 1497/98-1543), *Dance of Death: The Old Man*. Woodcut. The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1929.165, Gift of the Print Club of Cleveland.



Figure 5

“The Three Living and the Three Dead,” *The De Lisle Psalter*, ca. 1308-40. Parchment. London, The British Library, Arundel MS 83 II, f.127r.

³⁸ Gertsman, *Dance of Death*, 23–26; Kinch, *Imago Mortis*, 70 and 123. See also, *Vifs Nous Sommes, Morts Nous Serons: La Rencontre Des Trois Morts Et Des Trois Vifs Dans La Peinture Murale En France* (Vendôme: Cherche-Lune, 2001).

In both the Dance of Death and the Encounter Between the Three Living and the Three Dead, the viewer is meant to identify with one or more figures in the scene at hand. A viewer finds his or her double in the Dance of Death because they share the same outward markers of personhood, for example gender and occupation (Figure 4).³⁹ In the Encounter Between the Three Living and the Three Dead, the beholder identifies with the living noblemen in the narrative, who in turn identify with (and converse with) their own cadaverous doubles, who have been stripped of all signifiers of class (Figure 5).⁴⁰ Ultimately, late medieval viewers would have been trained to approach macabre images like these with the understanding that they ought to empathize with a figure within a composition and map the moralizing message onto their own bodies. The choice to represent Thomas Beresford and Agnes Hassall fully enshrouded facilitated such a process of identification by removing any visible markers of individual and corporate identity. The shrouded bodies have no recognizable gender or occupation and no physical features that might impede their audience's ability to empathize with them. In this way, they act much like the Three Dead, as bodies stripped of their worldly attributes who present themselves to the living in order to issue a warning: prepare for death and have compassion for the dead. Although the detailed inscription on the Beresford Monument identifies Thomas Beresford and Agnes Hassall as individuals, the effigies—the most prominent part of the monument—lack any markers of individuality, allowing them to act as generic allegories just as easily as they can act as commemorative images of specific people.

Beyond the macabre, another type of medieval image encourages the beholder to connect a generic-looking body to a specific person: the *ex voto*. Wax *ex votos* were frequently used to commemorate the miraculous intercession of a saint on behalf of the faithful by creating a simulacrum of a healed body part, as shown in a series of panels from the St William window at York Minster that depict the miraculous healing of a man's leg and his subsequent offer of a wax simulacrum of that leg to the saint's shrine (Figure 6). Suspended from a rod directly above the devotee are other *ex votos*, in the form of a lady's head, a leg, a hand, and a heart. Wax *ex votos* were typically left at saints' shrines in medieval churches, which were often located at the eastern end near the main altar—also the most desirable location for elite stone tombs like the Beresford Monument. It is therefore possible that alabaster effigies and wax *ex votos* came into visual dialogue with some regularity within their original contexts. Both tomb effigies and wax *ex votos* are portraits in the sense that they refer to specific individuals, but neither possesses the kind of mimetic individuality that modern viewers expect of a portrait.⁴¹

³⁹ Elina Gertsman, "The Dance of Death in Reval (Tallinn): The Preacher and his Audience," *Gesta* 42, no. 2 (2003): 143–59.

⁴⁰ Susanna Greer Fein, "Life and Death, Reader and Page: Mirrors of Mortality in English Manuscripts," *Mosaic (Winnipeg)* 35, no. 1 (March 2002): 69–81.

⁴¹ Christopher Wood, "The Votive Scenario," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 59/60 (Spring/Autumn 2011): 223. On *ex votos*, see also Ittai Weinryb and Fatima Bercht, *Agents of Faith: Votive Objects in Time and Place* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).



Figure 6

A pilgrim offering an *ex voto* at the Shrine of St William, from the St William Window, ca. 1414. Stained glass. York Minster. CVMA nVII 22b. © Chapter of York: reproduced by kind permission. Photo © Revd. Gordon Plumb.

There is, furthermore, a material affinity between alabaster and wax—they are both ideal for simulating flesh because their milky-white color and translucency can resemble skin; and they are both soft, malleable materials. Rachel Dressler has even made note of the “waxy” quality of alabaster, arguing that “alabaster’s slight waxiness might convey flesh more effectively than a smoothly polished marble surface.”⁴² Alabaster, although it is stone, is so soft when first quarried that you can carve it with a fingernail, and will in fact melt away if placed outside at the mercy of rainwater.⁴³ Likewise, wax is incredibly soft and easy to carve or mold, and melts when exposed to heat. One distinctive characteristic of *ex votos* may further explain and contextualize the seemingly anonymous quality of the Beresford effigies: wax *ex votos* of hands and feet were often made from standardized molds and so looked identical to one another, but were nonetheless understood to refer to specific individuals—see, for example, the distinct similarity between the two leg votives in the image from the St William Window. Just as the visually anonymous effigies of Thomas and Agnes commemorate specific people, so too do those two identical *ex votos* correspond to specific devotees (and even specific events in their lives). Both the votive and the effigy refer to an individual and preserve his or her memory in spite of their generic appearances; as Christopher Wood writes, “Someone was here, the wax foot says.”⁴⁴

As such, the lack of physiognomic specificity in the Beresford effigies in no way prevented them from indexing particular people, and certainly allowed viewers to empathize with those figures without hindrance. All that separates the shrouded effigies of the Beresford Monument from their living viewers is that temporal gap between life and death; but even that, as the audience is reminded by the inscription, is merely a fleeting difference, as death will certainly

⁴² Dressler, “Identity, Status, and Material,” 77.

⁴³ Harris, “From Stone to Statue,” 7 and 12.

⁴⁴ Wood, “Votive Scenario,” 223.

come for them, too. The sculptors who created these effigies transformed them into loci of potentiality—rife with meaning perhaps, in part, *because* they defy expectations. Shrouding the sculpted bodies of Thomas Beresford and Agnes Hassal highlights the ambiguity of their physical state in the time between their death and future resurrection while also encouraging viewers to consider their own fates and obligations to the dead in that interim period. The Beresford Monument, moreover, encourages its beholders to think about identity and the anonymizing power of death in a more ambiguous and troubled way than more traditional *transi* tombs or shroud brasses. The peculiarity of the monument encourages viewers to look closely, to think about what they see, and to contextualize the sculpture within their broader experience. In doing so, the tomb ensures that Thomas and Agnes continue to be remembered by the beholders who read the inscription that forces them into kinship with the dead: "As you now are so once were we, And as we are so shall you be."

Appendix

Inscription from the Beresford Monument

(reproduced in Frosch, "Mind Thee to Die")

Here lyes the corps of Thomas Berisforde Esquire the Sonne of John Berisforde late Lorde of Berisforde in the covntie of Stafford Esquire and Agnes his wife the daughter and heire of Robert Hassall in the covntie of Chester Esquire who had issue XVI sonnes and five daughters. Thomas departed this life the XXth day of Mrch in the yeare of ovr Lord God 1.4.7.3. and Agnes departed this life the XVI day of Mrch in the years of ovr Lord God 1.4.6.7. here alsoe lyethe corps of Heughe third Sonne of the sayd Thomas and Agnes.

'As you now are soe once were wee
And as wee are soe shall yoe bee.

'Quern tegat hoc marmor si forte requiris amice,
Nobile Beresford tv tibi nomen habes,
Lvce patrvm clarvs, proprio sed lvmine maior,
De gemina merito nomina lvce capit.

'Largvs, dotvs, amans, alvit, colvit, recreavit,
Mvsas, ivs, vinctvs, svmpitibus, arte, domo,
Militae Excellens, strenvvs dvx, fortis, et avdax,
Francia testatvr, cvria testis Agen.

'Nunc tacet in tvmvlo resolvvtvs pvlvis in isto
Lvtvm, bvlla, fvsvs, pvlvis, et vmbra svmvs.
Dvm loqvimur moriamvr svbito vanescimvs omnes,
Si sapiens homo sis, disce memento mori.'

Translation

Here lies the corpse of Thomas Beresford Esquire the son of John Beresford late Lord of Beresford in the county of Stafford Esquire and Agnes his wife the daughter and heir of Robert Hassall in the county of Chester Esquire who had issue 16 sons and five daughters. Thomas departed this life the 20th day of March in the year of our Lord God 1473 and Agnes departed this life the 16th day of March in the year of our Lord God 1467. Here also lies the corpse of Hugh third son of the said Thomas and Agnes.

As you now are so once were we
And as we are so shall you be.

'Friend, if you ask me whom this marble hides,
 Thou hast thine answer, Beresford's high name.
 By his father's light he shines, his own besides:
 From this twin source he well deserves his fame.
 Generous, learned, kind, he nursed, upheld, renewed,
 Letters, right, captives, with purse, skill and home:
 Mighty in war, what dash, strength, fortitude,
 Let France, let Agincourt, as witness come.
 Now lies he in this tomb, a heap of dust.
 Clay, bubble, smoke, dust, shades, we are. We fly
 From life even while we speak: Puff! go we must!
 Man, if thou art wise, learn this: Mind thee to die.

(Middle English translation my own, translation of the Latin by Rev. R.K. Bolton, reproduced in Frosch, "Mind Thee to Die.")



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