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On the Representation of the Corpse in Lothar of Segni's (Pope Innocent III.'s) *de miseria humanae conditionis* 3, 4

The incarnation of the soul is, especially in Christian culture, often regarded as the origin of all sin. In combination with an increasing interest in the body, death and dying, which is particularly apparent in the early Middle Ages, the aspects of vanity of human beings and sinfulness frequently appear in literature. The writing de miseria humanae conditionis, written by the later Pope Innocent III (1161–1216) during his time as a cardinal, addresses in three books the hopelessness and sinfulness of human life from conception until and beyond death. Following this, the origin of all sin is found in the contamination that occurs when the soul enters the body at conception. De miseria humanae conditionis, and especially the biblical quotations contained therein, have only been discussed briefly until now. This paper aims to close that gap a little by analysing and interpreting one chapter at example. For this purpose, the passage on the decomposition of the corpse was chosen, which is also associated with the calamity of human life. The research is based on the text, which will be examined in a close reading. The primary focus will be on the depiction of the corpse; furthermore, it will be investigated how the biblical quotations are instrumentalised and to what extent the quotes influence the passage. To offer an intermedia view of this motif in the Middle Ages in addition, representations of the corpse from contemporary medieval literature and art are contrasted using the method of wide reading and New Historicism.

Keywords: *contemptus mundi*, death, depiction of the human corpse, *de miseria humanae conditionis*, Innocent III., Lothar of Segni, Middle Ages

Introduction

In European medieval 12th century the corpse – probably in connection with the Christian conception of incarnation as the origin of all sinfulness – is seen

in an ambivalent perspective.[1] Whereas the care of a deceased person, especially one of higher status, was quite precisely defined and had to follow a specific scheme,[2] the dead body per se was usually regarded with a sense of scepticism – one might think of the numerous narratives of revenants from the High and Late Middle Ages, for example.[3]

Lothar of Segni (1161–1216), better known as Pope Innocent III., wrote a Latin treatise on the misery of human existence called *de miseria humanae conditionis* (in short: *de miseria*) during his time as a cardinal (1194–1195),[4] in which he deals with all phases of human life. In the work of three books, the origin of all sin is traced back to the contamination that occurs when the soul enters the body at conception; furthermore, the sinful human life is described until death and beyond. After a description of the misery of human existence from conception to death, including the vices of human beings, the third book is about the happenings after death, including the decomposition of the body.

De miseria as an independent work by Lothar of Segni has so far only been dealt with briefly. In general, the focus is on questions relating to the work as a whole and its meaning;[5] the contents and possible interpretations of individual chapters have not been given any particular attention in research so far. Furthermore, the biblical quotations, which make up a significant part of *de miseria*, as well as their impact on the text, have rarely been discussed.

The fourth chapter of the third book (*de miseria* 3,4) is about the corpse and the process of decomposition.[6] The most striking, interesting aspect of

[1] Schmitz-Esser (2014: 1).
[2] Heckmann (2018: 252).
[3] Schmitz-Esser (2014: 444), Kanerva (2017: 40), Black (2017: 72).
[4] Heckmann (2018: 244).
[5] First and foremost, the contributions of Egger (1997), Kehnel (2005) and Heckmann (2018) should be mentioned. One of Egger's main areas of research is the medieval papacy, which is why his work on Innocent III can by no means be limited to the aforementioned paper. Studies on the treatment of death and corpses in the Middle Ages are more numerous, with special reference to Ariès (²2005) and Schmitz-Esser (2014).
[6] The striking contrast to the idea of the corpse of the saints, which neither decays nor smells, but is pleasantly fragrant and remains intact even after death, cannot be discussed

this chapter is probably that more than half of it consists of biblical quotations. Their impact on the chapter has not yet been investigated. My paper aims to close this gap and to answer the following questions: How is the decomposition of the human body depicted in the third book of *de miseria*, how are the biblical quotations instrumentalised and to what extent do the quotes influence the passage?

As a first step, the work *de miseria*, its audience and reception are introduced. Afterwards, the Latin text and a translation thereof are offered as a starting point for the study. The passage is then analysed using the philological method of close reading. In order to subsequently put the passage into a broader cultural and sociological context and to provide a view of how the corpse was depicted in other writings and media in the Middle Ages, further contemporary treatments of the (decaying) corpse are consulted and contrasted with the text according to the method of wide reading as well as considerations related to New Historicism.[7] At the end of the paper, the results are summarised.

Preliminaries

Audience and Reception of *de miseria*

De miseria is considered – as Egger (1997: 331) phrases – 'one of the major works of medieval *Contemptus Mundi*-literature'.[8] The focus of the trea-

in the context of this paper and is also not treated in *de miseria*. Stüber (1976: 9), although not in connection with the writing *de miseria*, also mentions the contrast between the decaying corpse and the intact body of certain saints. For a discussion regarding the corpse of the saints and their intactness, see Schmitz-Esser (2014: 115–163). The same applies to questions about connections to the Christian belief in resurrection. For a detailed exposition into the Catholic Church's attitude towards resurrection see Botterweck (1957), Ratzinger (1957a), Ratzinger (1957b) and Schmid (1957). Such considerations, however, could certainly provide substantial results and have so far been a desideratum.

[7] For a definition of close and wide reading, see Hallet (2010: 294); for an explanation of the concept of New Historicism see Basseler (2010: 226–227).

[8] 'eines der Hauptwerke der mittelalterlichen *Contemptus Mundi*-Literatur'. For a Definition of *contemptus mundi* in the Middle Ages, s. Gnädinger (1986: 186–187): „Das Nichtachten, Geringachten, ja Verachten alles Diesseitigen und v. a. der weltl. Betriebsamkeit, die Absage und Verweigerung, der Verzicht auf weltl. Aktivität, die Besinnung auf den rechten

tise lies on reflections on human existence – especially on human life in the body.[9] As the writing of a cardinal, *de miseria* has often been considered as received primarily by the clergy and researchers have often argued that it merely offers a view into clerical life. Even if it can be assumed that the text was mainly accessible to the educated classes, the discourses are probably not only addressed to a clerical audience but a broader group of recipients;[10] the large number of manuscripts, prints and translations suggests a high degree of popularity.[11]

De miseria humanae conditionis 3, 4

Before I go into chapter 4 of the third book in more detail, I would like to briefly discuss the content of the previous chapters 1–3: The first chapter of the third book is about the shamefulness of human existence and the constant apostasy towards what is right;[12] even death, occurring at the end of human life, according to *de miseria* 3, 1, seems to be caused by the vileness of human beings.

The second chapter lists the so-called four 'sorrows suffered by the vile in the face of death' (*de miseria* 3, 2: *dolores, qui mali patiuntur in morte*). The first sorrow is suffered during the violent separation of the body and the

Gebrauch der Weltgüter, doch auch eigentl. Weltflucht (*fuga mundi*, *saeculi*), all dies gehört zu dem komplexen Begriff." – 'The disregard, disrespect, even contempt of everything of this world and especially of worldly activity, the rejection and refusal, the abandonment of worldly life. The renunciation and refusal, the renunciation of worldly activity, the contemplation of the right use of worldly goods, but also the actual flight from the world (*fuga mundi*, *saeculi*), all this belongs to the complex concept (of *contemptus mundi*).' See also Wehle (1993: 227), Paravicini Bagliani (2020: 39).

[9] Paravicini Bagliani (2020: 11).

[10] Kehnel (2005: 35–36), Heckmann (2018: 244, 255–256).

[11] From the 13th to the 16th century, there were more than 700 manuscripts of the text. Egger (1997: 330–331), Kehnel (2005: 27). For a compilation of manuscripts see Maccarrone (1995: X–XX). Furthermore, Maccarrone (1995: XX–XXI) lists some prints.

[12] In the edition of Migne (1855), the three chapters are placed at the end of the second book. According to his information, Migne follows a manuscript from 1575. Since the first three chapters deal with the topic of death – as the third book does –, Maccarrone (1955: XXVI) argues that the chapters should be placed at the beginning of the third book and therefore transposes them in his edition, which is used here.

soul, at a time when the body is already completely weakened and starting to die. The second is felt when all the happenings of human life pass once more before their inner eye. The third sorrow is the suffering that comes to the soul when it finally begins to judge rightly (*de miseria* 3, 2, 18–19: *quando anima iam incipit tam iuste diiudicare*). The fourth sorrow cited is that which the soul suffers when it perceives the evil spirits that are going to sweep it away (*de miseria* 3, 2, 22–23: *quando anima adhuc in corpore | posita videt spiritus malignos ad rapiendum se paratos*).

In the third chapter, the moribund are divided into two groups. Each of them sees the crucified Jesus (*de miseria*, 3, 3, 2: *Christum in cruce positum*) in front of him when he dies (so-called *adventus Christi*) – the bad one then feels confusion and despair (*de miseria*, 3, 3, 3: *videt ad confusionem*), the good one joy, because Jesus has redeemed him from sins. Thereafter, in the fourth chapter of the third book, death and especially the process of decomposition are discussed:[13]

> "Exibit spiritus eius, et revertetur in terram suam, in [1] illa die peribunt omnes cogitationes eorum." O quot et [2] quanta mortales de mundane provisionis incertitudine [3] cogitant, sed sub repentino mortis articulo repente cuncta que [4] cogitant evanescunt. "Sicut umbra cum declinat ablatus [5] sum et excussus sum sicut locuste." Exibit ergo spiritus [6] non volontarius, sed invitus, quia cum dolore dimittit que [7] cum amore possedit, ac velit nolit, constitutus est ei [8] terminus qui preteriri non poterit, in quo terra revertetur in [9] terram. Scriptum est enim: "Terra es, et in terram ibis." [10] Naturale siquidem est ut materiatum in materiam [11] dissolvatur."Auferet ergo spiritum eorum et deficient, et in [12] pulverem suum revertentur." Cum autem morietur homo, [13] hereditabit bestias, serpentes et vermes. "Omnes enim in [14] pulvere dormient et vermes operient eos." "Sicut vestimentum [15] sic comedet eos vermis, et sicut lanam sic devorabit eos [16] tinea." "Quasi putredo consumendus sum et quasi [17] vestimentum quod comeditur a tinea." "Putredini dixi: Pater [18] meus es, mater mea,

[13] The text follows the edition of Maccarrone (1955). The translation is my own.

et soror mea vermibus.”“Homo [19] putredo et filius hominis vermis.” Quam turpis pater, quam [20] vilis mater, quam abhominabilis soror! Conceptus est [21] homo de sanguine per ardorem libidinis putrefacto, cuius [22] tandem cadaveri quasi funebres vermes adsistent. Vivus [23] genuit pediculos et lumbricos, mortuus generabit vermes [24] et muscas; vivus produxit stercus et vomitum, mortuus [25] producet putredinem et fetorem; vivus hominem unicum [26] impinguavit, mortuus vermes plurimos impinguabit. Quid [27] ergo fetidius humano cadavere? quid horribilius mortuo [28] homine? Cui gratissimus erat amplexus in vita, molestus erit [29] aspectus in morte. Quid ergo prosunt divitie? Quid [30] epule? quid honores? Divitie enim non liberabunt a morte, [31] epule non defendent a verme, honores non eripient a [32] fetore. Qui modo sedebat gloriosus in throno, modo iacet [33] despectus in tumulo; qui modo fulgebat ornatus in aula, [34] modo sordet nudus in tumba; qui modo vescebatur deliciis [35] in cenaculo, modo consumitur a vermibus in selpulcro. [36]

“Their (= dead human) soul will leave <the body>, and <the body> will return to its earth; on [1] that day all their thoughts will pass away.” Oh about how many and [2] how important things about mundane uncertainty regarding the foresight do mortals deliberate; [3] but at the very sudden moment of death all that [4] they deliberate about vanishes. “I am carried away like a shadow, when it draws to a close, [5] and I am driven away like a locust.” However, the soul [6] will not leave <the body> voluntarily, but reluctantly, because, after all, it gives up under pain what [7] it owned with love; and, whether < every human being> wants it or not, the day is set for him, [8] which cannot be passed by, on which he will return as earth into [9] the earth. Indeed, it is written: “You are earth and to the earth you will return.” [10] Of course, it is natural that <something made of> a certain substance dissolves into this substance again [11]. “So <death> will take away the souls of them, and they will die, and [12] will return back to their dust.” But when a human being dies, he will [13] bequest beasts, critters, and worms. “For all [14] will sleep in the dust, and the worms will cover

them." "Like clothing, [15] so the worm will eat them, and like wool, so will the moth swallow them [16]." "Like putridity I have to be destroyed, and like [17] clothing eaten by a moth." "I said to the putridity: [18] You are my father, my mother, and my sister with the worms." "Human being is [19] putridity, and the worm is the son of human being." What infamous father, what [20] worthless mother, what despicable sister! [21] Human being is received of the blood putrefied by the heat of lust; finally, worms stand by his [22] corpse as if they were part of the funeral procession. While alive [23] the human being brought forth lice and worms, dead he will bring forth worms [24] and flies; while alive he produced excrements and vomit, dead [25] he will produce putridity and foulness; while alive he made one human being fat, [26] dead he will make many worms fat. What [27] then <is> more disgusting than the human corpse? What <is> more dreadful than a dead [28] human being? To whom an embrace was very pleasant while alive, but [29] it will be an offensive look to behold in death. So what good is wealth? What [30] food? What good is honour? For the wealth will not deliver <us> from death, [31] food will not defend <us> from worms, honour will not snatch <us> away [32] from the stench. Whoever just sat honourably on a throne soon lies [33] despised in the grave; who just shone adorned in the palace, [34] will soon be despised, naked on the bier; who just ate delights [35] in the dining room will soon be eaten by worms in the grave. [36]

More than half of *de miseria* 3, 4 consists of biblical quotations (vv. 1–20a). The passages from which the quotations are taken as well as their interpretation in biblical exegesis have an impact on the text. In the following, I shall discuss this in detail and show what effect the quotations might have on the text.

The beginning of the chapter describes how the soul – at the moment of death – separates from the body (*exibit spiritus eius*, v. 1a) and that afterwards the body is buried (*et revertetur in terram suam*, v. 1b). Furthermore, it is pointed out that when the soul leaves the body, all ability to think is gone (*in | illa die peribunt omnes cogitationes eorum*, vv. 1b–2). The sentence is

a quotation from Psalm 146:4 (*Exibit spiritus ejus, et revertetur in terram suam; in illa die peribunt omnes cogitationes eorum*). In this psalm, the transience of the world and all worldly goods are addressed; it is also emphasised that salvation is in God alone.[14] In Hebrew, there is a reference to Gen. 3:3, where Adam is formed by God from earth into a human being. The same word for earth is also found in Hebrew in Psalm 146:4. The human is, thus, placed in the earth from which he was once formed by God.[15] Through the quotation, these biblical passages are recalled here. The chapter on the corpse and decomposition is introduced with a sentence from a Psalm that deals with the transience of human beings in opposition to the omnipotence of God. This influences how the recipient enters the chapter.

In the next sentence (vv. 2b–5a), the idea of the passing away of all thoughts at the time of death is taken up again and expanded on (*O quot et* | *quanta mortales de mundane provisionis incertitudine* | *cogitant, sed sub repentino mortis articulo repente cuncta que* | *cogitant evanescunt*). Here, the quantity and importance of human reflections is highlighted especially with reference to their uncertainty about foresight. What is probably meant is that people think a lot and often about the omnipotence of God and life after death but cannot really know anything about it. It is also emphasised that – continuing the line of argument from the previous sentence – all thoughts in this regard also come to an end in death.

The next verse takes up the subject of the separation of the soul and the body: Here, the soul is depicted as a shadow in the form of a metaphor and is furthermore illustrated to be driven away like a locust (*sicut umbra cum declinat ablatus* | *sum, et excussus sum sicut locuste* vv. 5–6a). This sentence is a quotation of a Psalm 109:23; this is a psalm about someone in need asking God for help and salvation. The first part of this sentence (*sicut umbra cum declinat ablatus* | *sum*) is interpreted by Allen (2002: 105) as follows: 'His worry has made him (=the prayer) a shadow of his former self'. Furthermore, one could think here of the shadows as which the deceased in the

[14] Allen (2002: 377), Neumann (2016: 108, 117, 124).
[15] Hossfeld–Zenger (2008: 817).

underworld were imagined in antiquity (cf. Verg. *Aen*. 12, 952). In addition to this, the shadow could also be understood as pronouncing the forthcoming night; the night in this regard would be illustrating the proximity of the prayer to death.[16] The second part (*et excussus sum sicut locuste*) describes the prayer – and therefore here the dying person – as being driven away like a locust. In Psalm 109 this comparison serves to illustrate the distress caused by the enemies. The suppliant is treated by enemies like an insect that can be easily shaken off; one cannot defend against it.[17] Using the quote of Psalm 109 the crying for help as well as the exposure to hardship are recalled here. Again, death is presented as inevitable and the human being as evanescent.

In the next sentence of the chapter, it is emphasised that the soul does not leave the body of its own accord (*Exibit ergo spiritus | non volontarius, sed invitus*, vv. 6b–7a); there is even reference to the love felt by the spirit towards its mortal remains (*quia cum dolore dimittit que | cum amore possedit*, vv. 7b–8a). Despite the generally apparent aversion to the human body, there is nevertheless an admission that the soul has a close connection to its mortal vessel. The wording (*Exibit ergo spiritus*, v. 6b) recalls the beginning of the chapter (*exibit spiritus eius*, v. 1a) and thus links the sentence, which is not a quotation as itself, into the web of quotations. At the end of this sentence, God's omnipotence is taken up again, when it is said that the day of death for each human being is fixed and cannot be changed (*constitutus est ei | terminus qui preteriri non poterit, in quo terra revertetur in | terram,* vv. 8b–10a). Until the beginning of the clause, this part is a modified quotation from Job 14:5 (*constituisti terminos ejus, qui praeteriri non poterunt*). There, the transience and vanity of human beings as well as the all-embracing power of God over the beginning and end of life are dealt with; God sets the goal and limit of every life.[18] So once more, the text draws on a quotation from a biblical passage in which these themes play an important role. Only the last part of the sentence is not quoted (*in quo terra revertetur in | terram*, vv. 9b–10a) but creating a close connection to the

[16] Hossfeld–Zenger (2008: 190). Cf. Psalm 102:12: *dies mei sicut umbra declinaverunt*. – My days fade away like shadows.
[17] Allen (2002: 105), Hossfeld–Zenger (2008: 190).
[18] Hesse (²1992: 101), Fokkelmann (2000: 375), Witte (2018: 92).

Psalm 146:4 (*et revertetur in terram suam*), which was cited at the very beginning of the chapter (cf. Gen 3:19).[19]

This is taken up again in the following sentence: *Terra es, et in terram ibis* (v. 10b). Again, death as the end of life is presented as a return to the origin of human existence (cf. *et revertetur in terram suam*, v. 1b; *in quo terra revertetur in | terram*, vv. 9b–10). Here, too, one could think of *Gen*. 3:19: After Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree, God banishes them from paradise and condemns them to a life of toil and suffering, which finds its end only in their return to earth, that is, in death.[20] Following this, the burial in earth and the decomposition of the body are described as a natural phenomenon (*Naturale siquidem est ut materiatum in materiam | dissolvatur*, vv. 11–12a). Once more a connection to *Gen*. 3:19 is created.

After that, God's authority concerning human life is one more time mentioned as well as the returning to earth after death (*Auferet ergo spiritum eorum et deficient, et in [12] pulverem suum revertentur*, vv. 12–13a). This sentence is a quotation of Psalm 104:29 (*auferes spiritum eorum, et deficient, et in pulverem suum revertentur*). By *spiritus* can be understood not only the soul as such, but the breath of life that God inhales into human beings at the beginning of life and withdraws from them again at the moment of death.[21] Here too, the power of God and the transience of human life are central motives. At the end of the sentence, man's return to earth is emphasised once more in this chapter. The return to earth can further be understood as a renewed process of creation by God:[22] In death the earthly life ends, but the soul will live on.

Afterwards, a description of the corpse as a feast for reptiles follows (vv. 13b–17a). At first, the human being is, when dying, portrayed as bequesting creepy-crawlies (*Cum autem morietur homo, | hereditabit bestias, serpentes et vermes*, vv. 13b–14a). This passage is taken from the book of Sirach

[19] Gen. 3:19: *donec revertaris in terram de qua sumptus es*. – Until you return to the earth from which you were taken.
[20] Mettinger (2007: 41), Fischer (2018: 257–258).
[21] Hossfeld–Zenger (2008: 84), Schnocks (2014: 138).
[22] Janowski–Krüger (2011: 28).

(*Sir*. 10:13: *cum enim morietur homo, haereditabit serpentes, et bestias, et vermes*). There God is portrayed as the ruler of the world who judges the arrogant as well as the righteous. The vanity of human beings is demonstrated by the fact that they bring forth vermin after death. Moreover, in the same chapter of the Book of Sirach, the human body is depicted as decomposing already during lifetime (cf. *Sir*. 10:9).[23] Again, the omnipotence of God in relation to the transience of human life is discussed.

Following on this, it is described that the buried human in the grave is covered by worms (*Omnes enim in | pulvere dormient et vermes operient eos*, vv. 14b–15a). This passage is an adapted quotation from the book of Job (*Job*. 21:26: *et tamen simul in pulvere dormient, et vermes operien eos*). There it is stressed out that in death all humans are equal and all of them are covered by vermin.[24] Once again the transience of human life is playing an important role too.[25] Furthermore, the return to earth after death is again emphasised as well.

In the next sentence, the worms and other creepy-crawlies start eating up the corpse and are compared to worms eating clothes and moths eating wool (*Sicut vestimentum | sic comedet eos vermis, et sicut lanam sic devorabit eos | tinea*, vv. 15b–17a). It is striking that in the sentence before, the worms were depicted like a blanket covering the corpse (v. 15a) and now they are devouring it as if it was a blanket. The picture given is, thus, turned around. The sentence itself is taken from the Book of Isaiah (*Jes*. 51:8: *sicut vestimentum, sic comedet eos vermis, et sicut lanam, sic devorabit eos tinea*). There it is a matter of fighting against enemies who shall ultimately perish like clothes by worms and wool by moths;[26] especially the transience of the enemies of true believers is highlighted.[27] Here in *de miseria* 3, 4, when the process of decomposition of the corpse is described by this sentence, a negative nuance is given to this representation by the quotation, or at least the negative drawing of human existence is thus supported.

[23] Snaith (1974: 55).
[24] Hesse ([2]1992: 136), Witte (1994: 136).
[25] Witte (1995: 24).
[26] Lubsczyk–Eising (1972: 162), Berges (2015: 135).
[27] Schmidt (2013: 168).

The depiction of the eating up of the corpse is continued in the next sentence (*Quasi putredo consumendus sum et quasi | vestimentum quod comeditur a tinea*, vv. 17b–18a), which is a quotation of the Book of Job (*Job*. 13:28: *quasi putretudo consumendus sum, et quasi vestimentum quod comeditur a tinea*). There, Job himself passes away like 'like rot and a moth-eaten garment' (WITTE 2021: 239).[28] Following on from the previous quotation, this sentence is particularly interesting, especially as in the Book of Isaiah the enemies are to be destroyed like clothes of worms and wool of moths, but here the protagonist himself is in danger of becoming a victim of them. Once more a quotation brings the transience of human life into foreground. The combination of the two quotes of Isaiah and Job demonstrates, once again, that in death all are equal.

The topic of rot is taken up again in the following sentence (*Putredini dixi: Pater | meus es, mater mea, et soror mea vermibus*, vv. 18b–19). Like the previous sentence this is also a quotation out of the Book of Job (*Job*. 17:14: *Putredini dixi: Pater meus es: mater mea, et soror mea, vermibus*). This quotation is taken from Job's fourth speech; at this point the speaker's hopelessness, almost a certainty of death, is conveyed.[29]

The theme of decay continues in the next sentence (*Homo | putredo et filius hominis vermis*, vv. 19b–20a), which is again a quotation of the Book of Job (*Job*. 25:6: *quanto magis homo putretudo, et filius hominis vermis*). There, the human being is drawn as an insignificant, little worm compared to God. In addition, this chapter also points out the sinfulness of all human beings and stresses out God's omnipotence as well.[30]

Following on from the series of quotations on the process of decay, the motif taken from the quotation from the 25th chapter of the Book of Job is continued: If the human being is rottenness and the worm is the son of human beings, then human being is disgraceful at all (*Quam turpis pater, quam | vilis mater, quam abhominabilis soror!*, vv. 20b–21a). This depiction fits well

[28] „Fäulnis und einem von Motten zerfressenen Gewand".
[29] Witte (2021: 263).
[30] Witte (2021: 390).

into the portrayal of miserable human life and its end. From this point on, the text consists no longer of biblical quotations.

The verses 21b–23a offer insight into where the sinfulness of life in the body is attributed to: Life begins at conception in the womb (*Conceptus est | homo de sanguine per ardorem libidinis putrefacto*, vv. 21b–22a), which is described as the result of lust and sexual impulse,[31] and ends in the process of decay that creepy-crawlies and worms are driving (*cuius | tandem cadaveri quasi funebres vermes adsistent*, vv. 22b–23a). The wording here seems striking: The worms which will take a main part in the process of decay are depicted like participants at a funeral (*quasi funebres vermes adsistent*, v. 23a).

In the following section of the chapter, the output of a living person is juxtaposed with that of a deceased person, thus depicting human life, both dead and alive, once again as bringing forth filth and abominations (vv. 23b–27b). The following table serves to illustrate the comparative phrases.

output of a living body	output of a dead body
pediculos et lumbricos (v. 24a)	*vermes	et muscas* (vv. 24b–25a)
stercus et vomitum (v. 25)	*putredinem et fetorem* (v. 26a)
*vivus hominem unicum	impinguavit* (v. 26b–27a)	*mortuus vermes plurimos impinguabit* (v. 27b)

Figure 1: The outputs of a human being, alive and dead

In this comparison, the body as a 'mortal vessel' is presented as something bad and as producing bad things, whether dead or alive: Alive human beings produce lice and worms (v. 24a), dead worms and flies (vv. 24b–25a); alive human beings generate excrement and vomit (v. 25), dead putrefaction and stench (v. 26a); alive human beings make one body fat (v. 26b–27a), dead several worms v. 27b. The subsequent rhetorical questions imply that the corpse is to be regarded as the more disgraceful (vv. 27b–29a); according to the text, there is nothing more disgusting or dreadful than a corpse. The process of decay is also taken up, especially since it is emphasised that while

[31] The author of the text also comments on the impurity of conception in the first book of the treatise: Cf. *de miseria* 1, 5–7.

alive, a person's embrace is very pleasant, but in death even the sight of it is distracting (vv. 29–30a).

The chapter ends in an exposition of all the luxuries and worldly belongings that enrich human life but are ultimately void in death (vv. 30b–36). It is argued that neither wealth nor worldly honours or food are worth anything in the face of death, as they cannot save people from death or the decay that it brings (*Quid ergo prosunt divitie? Quid* | *epule? quid honores? Divitie enim non liberabunt a morte,* | *epule non defendent a verme, honores non eripient a* | *fetore*, vv. 30b–33a). Finally, this is illustrated with examples and the motif of death as an equaliser is also taken up here, as it was already echoed in earlier passages of the chapter with the use of biblical quotations. Wealth in particular is portrayed as void (*Qui modo sedebat gloriosus in throno, modo iacet* | *despectus in tumulo; qui modo fulgebat ornatus in aula,* | *modo sordet nudus in tumba; qui modo vescebatur deliciis* | *in cenaculo, modo consumitur a vermibus in selpulcro*, vv. 33b–36).

The fourth chapter of the third book of Lothar of Segni's *de miseria* starts with representations about the process of dying and the separation of the body and the soul in the moment of death. More than half of the chapter consists of quotations, which give the passage an effect of a biblical message and charge it in its significance. In the second half of the chapter, there are no quotations used. The thoughts expressed in the quotations are nevertheless continued and incorporated into the text. The second part of the chapter focuses on the sinfulness and vileness of human life and death in the body. The transience of human life and the omnipotence of God seem to be striking components of the chapter.

Representations of the corpse in other media in the Middle Ages – a small excursus

To offer an insight into how death and the corpse were dealt with in the Middle Ages in other texts and media,[32] selected examples of representa-

[32] For a comprehensive study on death and the corpse in the Middle Ages, see Ariès (²2005)

tions are to be discussed and compared with the chapter *de miseria* 3, 4 according to the method of wide reading and considerations related to New Historicism.

A disputacioun betwyx þe body and wormes

The Middle English text *A disputacioun betwyx þe body and wormes* (short: *A disputacioun*)[33] can be dated a few centuries after *de miseria* was written.[34] The dialogue between a corpse and the worms that devour it offers glimpse into how the dead body was represented in English literature in the Late Middle Ages. Furthermore, considerations about the decomposition process can be identified. The dialogue can be read as a special form of the numerous dialogues between the body and the soul, a sub-genre of debate-dialogues that seem to have been very popular in the Middle Ages.[35]

The depiction begins with an anonymous pilgrim entering a church where the deceased are buried. The person stops next to one of the graves and suddenly hears voices (vv. 1–29). This is described as a kind of trance or dream. At this point, the narrative perspective switches to the dialogue between the corpse and the worms, which takes up the main part of the poem (vv. 30–204). At the end, there is a short statement from the pilgrim's point of view (vv. 205–218) which presents itself as a kind of admonition to piety.[36]

The poem is about a corpse asking worms not to eat it, referring to the prestige it has received in life. The worms, however, argue that the dead body is their food source. An aspect of disgust towards the corpse resonates here, when the worms say they are glad that they do not have a sense of smell, so that they do not perceive the stench of the corpse.

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and especially Schmitz-Esser (2014).

[33] For the text including transcription into New English see Rytting (2000: 220–232).

[34] Sources date it to early 15th century, but there is no exact year. Rytting (2000: 218), Blum (2016: 108).

[35] Conlee (1991: XII–XX), Ryttig (2000: 217–218).

[36] Rytting (2000: 218).

Figure 2: Transi Tomb of Guillaume de Harcigny

Like *de miseria* 3,4, the decay of the human body after death is presented

Figure 3: Transi tomb of Guillaume Lefranchois Arras

here as an irrevocable certainty. Furthermore, both in *de miseria* 3,4 and in *A disputacioun*, worldly goods are presented as insignificant since they cannot defend human beings from death and its consequences. The poem offers an example of the fact that –in the Late Middle Ages at the latest – the theme of decay was also taken up and discussed in other areas of literary creation. It must be emphasised that in both texts worldly goods and honours are regarded as void after death (cf. *A disputacioun*, vv. 86–106; *de miseria*, 3, 4, 30b–36). In addition to this, the dead person in the grave is in both texts depicted quite figuratively as being devoured by worms (cf. *A disputacioun*, vv. 58–64; *de miseria*, 3, 4, 13b–21a). Moreover, the poem about the body and the worms is probably intentionally moralising just like its modal dialogues

between the body and the soul; moral tendencies can be detected in *de miseria* 3,4 as well, but the author does not seem to present himself as 'religious admonisher'[37] (Kehnel 2005: 37).

Transi tombs

Transi (lat. *transire*: to transgress) are a special type of gisants, which represent the deceased persons lying on the tomb and usually depict the dead as living humans sleeping. Gisants are primarily documented for the High and Late Middle Ages.[38] The gisant of Rudolf of Rheinfelden († 1080) is considered to be the first of its kind.[39] Transi pervert the artful gisants by illustrating the corpse decaying in the coffin. Transi can be assigned to the field of macabre art and are an example of how society in the Middle Ages might have imagined the corpse in the coffin.[40] In some cases, the corpse is already completely skeletonised:

Figure 4: The three living and the three dead; Cathedral of Atri (13th century)

In other cases, worms are depicted, which cause the decay of the dead body:

[37] 'religiöser Mahner'.
[38] Schmitz-Esser (2014: 105–106, 109), Rollo-Koster (2017: 1). Before the 11th century, there are only a few tombs documented, on which the deceased is depicted, but not in the way the dead are represented on gisants. Janken (2017: 84).
[39] Schmitz-Esser (2014: 105–106, 109), Janken (2017: 84),
[40] Schmitz-Esser (2014: 109), Blum (2016: 108).

Transi tombs offer a less detailed description of the process of decay, as in *de miseria* 3, 4 and *A disputacioun*, than a concrete snapshot. As public form of funerary art, Transi are accessible to the general public and could there-

Figure 4: The three living and the three dead; Cathedral of Atri (13th century)

fore provide a source for questions about social attitudes towards death and decay in the Late Middle Ages. Transi graves are probably intended to remind the living visiting the deceased in church of the ephemeral nature of their existence.[41] Both *de miseria* 3, 4 and *A disputacioun* aim to have a similar effect on their recipients. The most striking parallel lies in the motif of decay and its unadorned depiction.

The legend of the three living and the three dead

The legend of the three living and the three dead is a widespread narrative; it can be encountered in many different forms, both in the artistic field and in various texts.[42] The legend seems to have originated in a poem by Adi ibn Zaid (sixth century). In it, the poet reports that he and his companions met dead people who admonished them with the following words: 'We were what you are; you will be what we are'.[43]

The focus of the legend is on the transience of life and the certainty of

[41] Blum (2016: 108).
[42] I can only briefly discuss the motif and show a few examples. See Künstle (1908: 28–30), Pace (1993: 363–367).
[43] Pace (1993: 364).

death.[44] Depending on the depiction of the dead, the image can have different effects. Some of the dead appear as decomposing corpses in coffins, others as moving skeletons. In the Cathedral of Atri we find what is probably the oldest scenic representation of the encounter between the three living and three dead:[45]
Another example is an image from a cave church in Melfi.[46] In comparison with the depictions from Atri, the skeletons there appear far more active; moreover, it is striking that worms seem to be oozing out of the abdominal area of the dead; in this respect, this illustration is closer to the depiction of the corpse from de miseria 3, 4, where also worms and other creepy-crawlies are depicted.[47]

In comparative consideration with the process of decomposition shown in *de miseria* 3, 4, it becomes apparent that the idea of the human body's earthly existence and transience plays an important role in both media. The legend of the three living and the three dead is considered an example of the treatment of death in medieval art and literature, especially from the 13th century on.

Conclusion

De miseria 3, 4 – especially its first half – presents itself as a tightly woven web of biblical quotations. On the one hand, the text is charged with various biblical passages that expand the narrative and particularly highlight the transience of human life in counterpoint with the omnipotence of God.[48] On the other hand, the text offers a completely new narrative around death and the process of decay; the individual sentences are closely linked to each other in terms of composition and content.

[44] Wehle (1993: 227).
[45] Pace (1993: 363).
[46] One can assume that three dead bodies were originally seen there.
[47] Pace (1993: 365–366).
[48] Potential ancient models could not be discussed in this paper. However, an investigation of the depiction of the corpse in *de miseria* 3,4 against the background of ancient representations would top a certain extent be worthwhile.

On the basis of the excursus, it could be shown that there are various descriptions and depictions of decaying corpses through almost the whole Middle Ages. From that point of view, *de miseria* 3,4 seems to be a component of a series of pictorial and written works that shift death and in particular the corpse more into the centre of human considerations.

De miseria 3, 4 offers a graphic, open, and blunt portrayal of how miserably human existence comes to an end below ground and – at a second level – connecting different biblical passages with each other in a new multi-layered way it accomplishes to contrast the omnipotence of God with the transience and vanity of human beings.

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