



## The Editor

Award-winning author Nancy Kilpatrick has published 18 novels, including the popular Power of the Blood vampire series. She has also edited 13 anthologies, including *Evolve: Vampire Stories of the New Undead*; *Evolve Two: Vampire Stories of the Future Undead*; and *Danse Macabre: Close Encounters With the Reaper*. *Vampyric Variations* is the sixth collection of her short stories.

Kilpatrick lives and writes in Montreal, Quebec.

She is available for blog tours and interviews.

# DANSE MACABRE

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH THE REAPER

edited by Nancy Kilpatrick

## The Anthology

This anthology could be the most unusual and original collection of stories you'll ever read! Twenty-six literary reflections embody the themed, classical artwork devoted to the spectrum of humanity's intriguing interactions with the Angel of Death in all his/her/its manifestations.

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“Kilpatrick is a romantic in the best sense. She believes in the darkest of beauties and seeks them out relentlessly. Kilpatrick has assembled a welcome repast for readers seeking sanguine fiction that is not content, for the most part, to rely on familiar tropes or modern genre trends.” — Insmouth Free Press



### Nancy Kilpatrick interview:

by Doug Knipe ([www.scifiguy.ca](http://www.scifiguy.ca))

SFG: If you could have lunch and conversation with any vampire fiction writer living or dead, who would it be and why?

NK: Probably Lord Byron. He wrote the fragment that “The Vampyre” is based on. That is the first short story in English. The fragment was taken up by his physician John Polidore, turned into a full story and published. Why Byron and not Polidore? And why “The Vampyre”, which isn’t an amazing story, just the first? Because that story of the callous and cruel vampire Lord Ruthven is based on Byron.

SFG: What are your thoughts on the rising popularity of urban fantasy and paranormal fiction over the past decade?

NK: It’s what’s happening, to be sure. It’s selling and I think the reason is, much of this is horror lite. People can read paranormal fiction, which is often detective paranormal or romance paranormal and frequently find a vampire, or they can read urban fantasy which is reality based but takes off from Life As We Know It. These are easy reads and fun reads and they are trendy at the moment. Like all trends, they will wane. As will the Twilight series. And something else will come along to take the place of what’s popular today. But I think vampires, for example, have a bit of life left in them, so to

speak. They show no sign of dying the true death so we can expect more. And with Evolve as a kind of roadmap of what’s possible, the vampire can move into realms he/she has not previously inhabited. Personally, I believe the vampire is eternal.

SFG: You wear both a metaphoric editors and author hat. Tell us about Nancy Kilpatrick the editor and Nancy Kilpatrick the author.

NK: Can your spell check detect bi-polar? In truth, though, I don’t find these two jobs at odds, although they do require different parts of the brain and different work habits. I like doing both. Editing is fun because I get a chance to relax and read and assess work with an overview theme in mind. Writing is also fun because I get to play and be creative and see where I end up.

I’m someone who likes doing a lot of different things anyway. I’ve always been like this, and I will get bored quickly if I have to do the same thing over and over again, or for too long. I write both short stories and novels and also non-fiction. I’ve co-written a stage play. And radio scripts. I’ve written comic books. I’ve edited books and a CD-ROM. I teach writing courses and have edited novels and non-fiction books privately. I’ve ghost-written four non-fiction books. I even used to write ad copy years ago. Essentially, I’ll try anything because I’m curious and I like to be challenged. That’s why I wrote those two Jason X novels, to see if I could do science fiction mixed with horror well. I’m the perfect person to approach with an innovative project because that’s what I like, what hasn’t been done before.



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## Introduction

by Nancy Kilpatrick

We, the living, have always exhibited a fascination with Death. We can't help ourselves. Death is, after all, one of our two most personal experiences, the other being Birth.

Back in the 14th century, when the world was in the grip of the Black Death, people were immersed in demise. From then until the 19th century, the plague was an on-again, off-again reality that, when most virulent, effected communities on a daily basis. The Black Plague decimated the population of Europe by approximately fifty per cent.

Whenever catastrophe strikes humanity, the arts always prove themselves invaluable. Through the metaphor of art, people come to terms with the inconceivable. Events that traumatize us individually and/or collectively evoke a need to make sense of what happened and the arts allow deeper connections to be made, aiding our ability to cope.

The Dance of Death (English); Danse Macabre (French); Totentanz (German); Danza Macabra (Italian); La Danza de la Muerte (Spanish); Dansa de la Mort (Catalan); Dans Macabru (Romanian); Dodendans (Dutch); Dança da Morta (Portuguese), these are but some of the names for what has been called 'plague art', visual artwork, sometimes accompanied by text, that grew out of the Medieval collective experience. Most commonly known as Danse Macabre, the visual aspect of this art depicts one or more skeletons — the formerly living — leading the dying from this earthly plane to another realm. These skeletons achieve this by inviting people to dance their way to the end of life, a rather charming approach to a date with mortality, if you think about it.

The initial Danse Macabre paintings appeared on the interior walls of the Le Cimetière des Innocents in Paris in 1424 (artist unknown), accompanied by poetry. This was not a cemetery as we know them today but a fenced-in bone yard, where remains were tossed onto an ever-expanding pile. During the Black Plague, so many succumbed — the cause of the plague unknown at that time — that everyone knew someone who had capitulated to this disease: family, friends and neighbors, bakers, priests, Queens.

Danse Macabre took hold of the collective consciousness because in the midst of all this expiration, one truism

emerged: Death comes to us all. No one is spared, from the beggar to the King, the merchant to the Pope. Death is the one great equalizer. And the bereaved can find some solace in that fact.

Early Danse Macabre art showed mostly males leaving this mortal coil, but soon artists were pencilling females into tableaux, for instance, milk maids, nuns, prostitutes, dowagers, mothers and their daughters. A wide spectrum of mortals were caught in a personal interaction with the Angel of Death, who was encouraging them to 'dance'. Meanwhile, the mortal was: stalling for time; attempting a bribe; pleading their case; hoping to trick the reaper grim, etc. And despite Welsh poet Dylan Thomas' warning: "Do not go gently into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.", the occasional person was shown dancing willingly.

Mortals in Danse Macabre artwork are, naturally, portrayed with emotion. Death, on the other hand, is usually seen as an impersonal skeleton, merely doing a job, neither just nor unjust. This artwork was taken as a memento mori, "Remember, you will die". The motif is a reminder that by being aware that Death waits in the wings until the music starts, Life should be viewed as precious, experienced vividly; each moment counts.

Knowledge of human anatomy was sketchy but became more sophisticated over the centuries. Earlier skeletons are barely recognizable as such. They appeared as hairy, fleshy, wrongly shaped, with crucial parts missing, and creatures that live in the earth added to their bones as special effects — it's a wonder some could stand, let alone play an instrument, which they sometimes did as accompaniment to the dance they were trying to entice mortals to! Many looked more like the skeletons of monkeys, rather than humans. But despite the primitive quality of the earliest artwork, it's surprising how often their bony skulls managed to hint at cuteness or cunning, cruelty or caginess, cynicism or chivalry. They could be laughing at us or weeping for us but the underlying sense is that Death has seen it all before, and will again.

The first Danse Macabre artwork from the 14th century did not survive when the Parisian cemetery was demolished (once science discovered germs and realized the dead should be burned or buried and not left out in the open). Those images were, though, reproduced in a book, woodcuts designed by Hans Holbein the Younger.

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This type of art was then recreated throughout Europe over the next 500 years, each country putting its singular spin on the final dance. Suffering the ravages of time, most of this special visual artwork has been destroyed, but some have survived. Manuscripts with original images or reproductions of existing images fared better than the actual art. But there are still approximately 50 pieces that can be found, the earliest dating from the mid-15th century.

Danse Macabre: Close Encounters with the Reaper sprang from my long-term interest in and appreciation of this primitive but poignant art. I have traveled to many countries, and some hard-to-get-to spots, hunting for what remains, treasuring these very human imaginings of what happens when we die.

The idea came to me to see if it was possible to translate the Danse Macabre concept from a visual art form to a literary art form. I wanted to edit an anthology that conveys two concepts through a series of stories presenting a range of interactions with the Grim Reaper. The first: that Death is the great equalizer. The second: what I believe is also imbedded in the artwork, but perhaps not so obviously — are human beings able to, as the artwork intimates, affect death? Physicists have discovered that certain sub-atomic particles are affected by the observer. Is it possible that Death, this evanescent reality of existence, regardless of the form taken and despite

## Marketing Plans

- Review copies sent (July).
- Ads: Online, LOCUS magazine, On Spec magazine, and the World Science Fiction Convention program. (September, October, November).
- Book launch events in Calgary, Chicago, Toronto. (August, October, November).
- Blog tour and interviews. (September - November)
- Direct mail postcard campaign to libraries, bookstores, readers. (September).

seemingly dispassionate by nature, might in some way be influenced by us just as we are undoubtedly influenced by it?

The writers in this remarkable and unusual anthology 'got it'. They cranked their imaginations up a notch or two and envisioned tales which reflect a wide spectrum of humanity. There are fascinating interactions with Thanatos, outcomes not necessarily expected. These talented writers have managed to create powerful and very human tales that certainly are not all grim. It's a volume that tries to convey an existential dance with words, twirling readers through graceful twists and turns and clever and unexpected spins, with the hope of leaving you charmed by the pas de deux.

Death has and likely always will remain a mystery. But one thing mortals can be certain about: the Danse Macabre is a very personal dance, one it might be possible to manage with grace, style and perhaps even a few jaunty pirouettes.

### CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS:

Tom Piccirilli - Loveland, CO, USA  
Nancy Holder - San Diego, CA, USA  
Lisa Morton - North Hollywood, CA, USA  
Brian Hodge - Boulder, CO, USA  
Lucy Taylor - Pismo Beach, CA, USA  
Bev Vincent - The Woodlands, TX, USA  
Morgan Dempsey - Santa Clara, CA, USA  
Dan Devine - Lansdowne, PA USA  
Lorne Dixon - Phillipsburg, NJ, USA  
Ed Erdelac - Valley Village, CA, USA  
Stanley S. Hampton, Sr. - North Las Vegas, NV, USA  
Erin Underwood - Marblehead, MA, USA

Tom Dullemond - Morningside, QLD Australia  
Lawrence Salani - Caringbah, N.S.W. Australia

Gabriel Boutros - Beaconsfield, QC, Canada  
Brad Carson - Delhi, ON, Canada  
Suzanne Church - Kitchener, ON, Canada  
Sabrina Furminger - Vancouver, BC, Canada  
J. Y. T. Kennedy - Ardrossan, AB, Canada  
William Meikle - Catalina, NL, Canada  
Timothy Reynolds - Calgary, AB, Canada  
Angela Roberts - Laval, QC, Canada  
Bill Zaget - Toronto, ON, Canada

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