

# The Dance of the Seven Deidly Sinnis

By William Dunbar

Of Februar the fifteen nicht,  
Full lang before the dayis licht,  
I lay in-till a trance;  
And then I saw baith heaven and hell:  
Me thocht, amangis the fiendis fell,  
Mahoun gart cry ane dance  
Of shrewis that were never shriven,  
Aganis the feast of Fasternis even<sup>1</sup>,  
To mak their observance;  
He bade gallantis ga graith a guise<sup>2</sup>,  
And cast up gamountis<sup>3</sup> in the skies,  
That last came out of France.

Heilie<sup>4</sup> harlottis on hawtane<sup>5</sup> wise  
Come in with mony sundry guise,  
Bot yit leuch<sup>6</sup> never Mahoun;  
Whill pniestis come in with bare shaven neckis,  
Than all the fiendis leuch, and made geckis<sup>7</sup>,  
Black Belly, and Bawsy Brown.

'Lat see,' quod he, 'Now wha beginnis';  
With that the foul Seven Deidly Sinnis  
Begouth to leap at anis<sup>8</sup>.  
And first of all in dance was Pride,  
With bare wild back and bonnet on side,  
Like to mak vaistie<sup>9</sup> wanis<sup>10</sup>;  
And round about him, as a wheel,  
Hang all in rumpillis to the heel  
His kethat<sup>11</sup> for the nanis:  
Mony proud trumpour with him tnippit  
Throw skaldand fire, ay as they skippit

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<sup>1</sup> February 16.

<sup>2</sup> Made ready a masquerade.

<sup>3</sup> Capers.

<sup>4</sup> Full of disdain.

<sup>5</sup> Haughty.

<sup>6</sup> Laughed.

<sup>7</sup> Jeering motions.

<sup>8</sup> At once.

<sup>9</sup> Waste.

<sup>10</sup> Dwellings.

<sup>11</sup> Cassock.

They girn'd with hideous granis.

Than Ire come in with stunt and strife  
His hand was ay upon his knife,  
He brandeist<sup>12</sup> like a beir<sup>13</sup>:  
Boastenis, braggenis, and hargaienis,  
Eftir him passit in-to pains  
All bodin in feir of weir;  
In jackis and scryppis<sup>14</sup> and bonnettis of steel<sup>15</sup>,  
Their leggis were chainyit to the heel,  
Frawart<sup>16</sup> was their affeir<sup>17</sup>:  
Some upon other with brandis beft<sup>18</sup>,  
Some jaggit otheris to the heft,  
With knivis that sharp culd shear.

Next in the dance followit Envy,  
Fill'd full of feid<sup>19</sup> and felony,  
Hid malice and despite;  
For privy batrent that traitor trem'lit.  
Him followit mony freik<sup>20</sup> dissem'lit,  
With feigned wordis white;  
And flatterenis in-to menis<sup>21</sup> faces;  
And backbitenis of sundry races,  
To lie that had delight;  
And rounanis<sup>22</sup> of false leasingis;  
Alas! that courtis of noble kingis  
Of them can never be quite<sup>23</sup>.

Next him in dance come Covatice,  
Root of all evil and grund of vice,  
That never culd be content;  
Caitivis, wretches and okkeraris<sup>24</sup>,  
Hud-pikis, hurdanis and gadderanis<sup>25</sup>,  
All with that wanlo<sup>26</sup> went:

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<sup>12</sup> Swaggered.

<sup>13</sup> Boar.

<sup>14</sup> Bags.

<sup>15</sup> Covered in chain armour.

<sup>16</sup> Forward.

<sup>17</sup> Demeanor.

<sup>18</sup> Struck.

<sup>19</sup> Ill-will.

<sup>20</sup> Folk.

<sup>21</sup> Men's.

<sup>22</sup> Whisperings.

<sup>23</sup> Quit.

<sup>24</sup> Userers.

<sup>25</sup> Misers, hoarders, and gatherers.

Out of their throatis they shot on other  
Het molten gold, me thocht a fudder<sup>27</sup>,  
As fireflaucht<sup>28</sup> maist fervent;  
Ay as they toomit<sup>29</sup> them of shot,  
Fiendis fill'd them new up to the throat  
With gold of all kin prent<sup>30</sup>.

Syne Sweirness<sup>31</sup>, at the second bidding,  
Come like a sow out of a midding,  
Full sleepy was his grunyie<sup>32</sup>:  
Mony sweir bumbard<sup>33</sup> belly-huddroun,  
Mony slute daw<sup>34</sup> and sleepy duddroun<sup>35</sup>,  
Him servit ay with sounyie<sup>36</sup>;  
He drew them furth in-till a chainyie<sup>37</sup>,  
And Belial, with a bnidle-reiayie,  
Ever lasht them on the lunyie<sup>38</sup>:  
In dance they were so slaw of feet,  
They gaif them in the fire a heat,  
And made them quicker of cunyie<sup>39</sup>.

Than Lechery, that laithly corse,  
Berand<sup>40</sup> like a baggit horse<sup>41</sup>,  
And Idleness did him lead;  
There was with him ane ugly sort<sup>42</sup>,  
And mony stinkand foul tramort<sup>43</sup>,  
That had in sin been deid.  
When they were entnit in the dance,  
They were full strange of contenance,  
Like turkass<sup>44</sup> birnand reid;  
All led they other by the tersis,

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<sup>26</sup> Warlock.

<sup>27</sup> A great quantity.

<sup>28</sup> Wild-fire.

<sup>29</sup> Emptied themselves.

<sup>30</sup> Every sort of impression.

<sup>31</sup> Sloth.

<sup>32</sup> Snout, face.

<sup>33</sup> Many a lazy glutton.

<sup>34</sup> Dirty slattern.

<sup>35</sup> Sloven.

<sup>36</sup> With care, unwillingly.

<sup>37</sup> Chain.

<sup>38</sup> Loins.

<sup>39</sup> Apprehension.

<sup>40</sup> Neighing.

<sup>41</sup> Stallion.

<sup>42</sup> Company.

<sup>43</sup> Dead body.

<sup>44</sup> Pincers.

Suppose they fycket with their ersis,  
It micht be na remead.

Than the foul monster Gluttony,  
Of wame<sup>45</sup> unsatiable and greedy,  
To dance he did him dress:  
Him followit mony foul drunkart,  
With can and collep<sup>46</sup>, cop and quart,  
In surfeit and excess;  
Full mony a waistless wallydrag<sup>47</sup>,  
With wamis unwieldabie, did furth wag<sup>48</sup>,  
In creish<sup>49</sup> that did inress;  
Drink! ay they cryit, with mony a gape,  
The fiendis gaif them het<sup>50</sup> leid to laip,  
Their lovery<sup>51</sup> was na less.

Na minstrellis playit to them but doubt,  
For gleemen there were haldin out<sup>52</sup>,  
Be day, and eke by nicht;  
Except a minstrel that slew a man,  
Swa<sup>53</sup> till his heritage he wan,  
And enter'd be brief of nicht.

Than cried Mahoun for a Hieland padyane<sup>54</sup>;  
Syne ran a fiend to fetch MacFadzen,  
Far northward in a neuk;  
Be<sup>55</sup> he the coronach had done shout,  
Ersemen so gadderit him about,  
In Hell great room they tnt.  
Thae termagantis, with tag and tatter<sup>56</sup>,  
Full loud in Erse begouth<sup>57</sup> to clatter,  
And roup<sup>58</sup> like raven and rook:  
The Devil sa deavit<sup>59</sup> was with their yell,

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<sup>45</sup> Belly.

<sup>46</sup> Drinking-vessel.

<sup>47</sup> Shapeless weakling.

<sup>48</sup> Totter.

<sup>49</sup> Grease.

<sup>50</sup> Hot.

<sup>51</sup> Portion of food.

<sup>52</sup> Kept out.

<sup>53</sup> So.

<sup>54</sup> Pageant, show.

<sup>55</sup> By the time that.

<sup>56</sup> In perfect rags.

<sup>57</sup> Began.

<sup>58</sup> Croak.

<sup>59</sup> Deafened.

That in the deepest pot of hell  
He smoorit<sup>60</sup> them with smoke.

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<sup>60</sup> Smothered.