

# **The Second Death**

A novel

By

**Eugen O. Chirovici**

## The Dummstein Manuscript

What is known of the history of the so-called *Dummstein Manuscript*, first written in Old High German, but having come down to us in Latin, begins in the seventeenth century, when a copy printed in Munich, with the title *The Terrifying Tales of Monk Martin of the Dummstein Monastery* or *The Story of the Burning of Maid Maya at the Stake*, was included in a rabidly anti-Catholic compendium of Protestant propaganda named *The Deeds of the Devil's Inquisitors*.

It is thought that the manuscript dates from the fourteenth century, as it refers to the wars for succession to the throne of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation waged between Ludwig of Bavaria and Friedrich of Austria, in which the former was victorious. On the other hand, in the family trees of the seigneurs that ruled the land of Filkenstein we find a Count Wernher in this period, although he is not to be found in the crypt of the chapel in the family's castle.

In the Thirty Years War, the castle was besieged, conquered and partly burned, and of the features described in the manuscript only the chapel and the Knights' Tower were preserved until the late nineteenth century. In later plans of the town of Moesch, even these ruins have been wiped from the face of the earth, and today they are known only from the few remaining photographs.

Given that immediately after the events it describes the plague swept through Europe, killing two thirds of the population according to some estimates, it is possible that the original manuscript was preserved unaltered in Dummstein Abbey (now the Roman Catholic college of the same name) and was subsequently translated into Latin.

Given its anti-Catholic hue, it was probably hidden until the beginning of the Reformation, when the Protestants used it as part of their extensive propaganda against the Apostolic Church in general and its “armed wing”, the Inquisition, in particular.

It is the only manuscript to refer to the manner in which the inquisitors – usually Dominican monks – were trained and to the fact that there were certain initiatory rites (later adopted, to a certain degree, by the Jesuits and, more recently, Opus Dei).

The Vatican has always denied the authenticity of *The Dummstein Manuscript*, regarding it as a later work by a Protestant pastor named Valentine de Vinlac (a French Huguenot, who fled to England after the St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre and thence to Holland). Nevertheless, the Latin redaction of the document is bizarre at the very least given these circumstances, especially in the Protestant milieu, all the more so given that study of it reveals scribal copying methods specific to the fourteenth century and in no case subsequent to that period.

Although we have preserved more than ninety per cent of the initial form of the manuscript, certain expressions have been altered slightly, without distorting the original meaning, in order to make it easier for modern readers unfamiliar with terms specific to the Middle Ages.

“But only those that are truly called shall unravel the signs”

*The Hammer of the Witches (Malleus maleficarum)*

Heinrich Institoris, Jacob Sprenger

Strasbourg, 1487

. . . And I write these lines during the feast days of the Nativity of Our Lord and Saviour, in my cell at the Dummstein Abbey, in the land of Filkenstein, where I was born I know not how many summers ago, in the reign of Count Wernher, the fifth of his line.

I have taken up quill and parchment to narrate to you the terrible events of which I was not merely a mute witness, but also the instigator, in some way, when I was young and still lived among the people of the Lord, when I used to see the sunrise and grow drunk on the perfume of the dewy grass, when I used to pray in the refectory and learn from men wiser than myself the course that God has laid down for earthly things.

Many seasons ago, many things took place, four days' walk from here, in the castle of Count Wernher, when I met Maya. Let me tell you from the outset that God has never fashioned a creature more lovely than her. Even now, my heart swells in my breast when I recall to mind the Knights' Tower where they had imprisoned her and where I saw her for the first time: her flaxen locks tumbling over her long throat, in which were tangled straws from the bedding; her shoulders, which her coarse hemp shirt left almost bare; her rosy cheeks; and her eyes, as blue as the heavens and still heavy with sleep's dreams. And her gaze, now frightened, now mischievous, now full of yearning, now

quaking with fury and grief. And the way she whispered my name, as nobody had ever uttered it before and nobody ever will again.

This is how I remember her in my dreams, rather than how she was later, when I had reduced her to a huddled heap wracked by pain and terror, when the clotted blood masked her beauty, and the bruises had replaced the apple-red hue of her skin, when her broken lips could no longer whisper anything but the name of the Virgin, whom she implored to help her, because from mortal men she could expect nothing but pain and more pain, endlessly.

Back then, Maya already existed no more, and whatever remained of her had to vanish as quickly as possible, so that I, the villain, and the castle folk would no longer be reminded, not of her deeds, but of our baseness and infamy.

It was then that I chose the life of a hermit. I took a vow of silence and walled myself up alive in my cell. Since then my lips have not opened except in my sleep, when I am burdened by the dreams that shatter my scanty hours of rest. And it is then that I sometimes call out her name. The Lord has dealt me a punishment worthy of my villainy, dooming that neither the cold of my cell, nor the demons that torment me, nor the stale bread and turbid water with which I nourish my corporeal baseness should shorten my days on this earth. For He was given me these unwanted days and these nights that are longer than eternity, so that I might eternally relive my guilt and eternally remember those moments in which everything I had ever believed in was reduced to nought forever. Not even the Great Plague could kill me, although it killed so many in those days.

But now I feel that the Day of Judgement is nigh, from which none shall escape, and I shall say to Him nothing more than the words that I shall write on this parchment,

whether or not another reads them or else casts them into the fire in the scriptorium along with the trash of the scribes that have botched their letters. It is not in Latin that I write these words, but in the tongue in which I once spoke to her, the woman I slew, in the tongue in which I heard the peasants talk on feast days, in the tongue of my long-dead family, in the tongue of the world from which I have withdrawn in order to die buried alive in this tomb. I can see my hands: they are long and withered, like eagle's claws, and they tell me that the Angel is nigh and that the sand in the hourglass has run out.

The Proverbs say: "There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough, the grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that say not, It is enough." Iron and fire devoured the body of my beloved Maya, and the earth swallowed all trace of her. But the Lord was not there in that dawn, but in Heaven above, to receive her and to soothe the wounds made by men.

And as for me, on the Day of Judgement, no punishment will be too great.