

## Frau Dulent on Choreomania:

Definition: An affliction whereby you dance yourself to death not being able to stop.

And I quote:

In Europe, from the 14th to the 17th century, there were various outbreaks of “choreomania.” The term is taken from the Greek word “choros” meaning dance and “mania” meaning madness, although the noted physician and philosopher Paracelsus coined the term “dancing plague.” During outbreaks of dancing plague, people would dance for hours, days, weeks, or even months. Once people started dancing, they couldn’t stop themselves and would fall into a kind of daze or trance.

The truth, as always, is a bit more complicated. Enter the Whirling Dervishes of Turkey

In 1237, a large group of children danced 12 miles from Erfurt to Arnstadt in Germany. It was around this time that the legend of the [Pied Piper of Hamelin](#) originated, leading some to believe the dancing event could have inspired the legend.



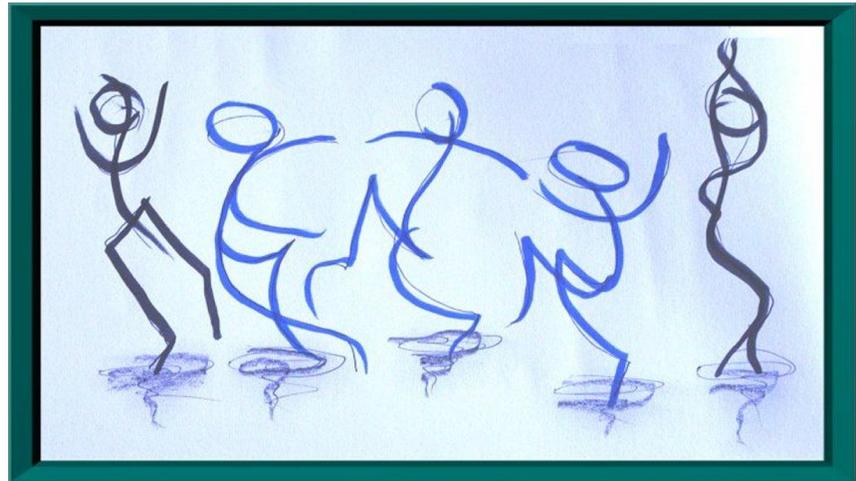
The real name is of course Coriolis-mania where, by definition, the dancers of the northern hemisphere danced themselves to death by way of strictly adhering (or being motivated by) the Coriolis-force having to do with the rotation of the earth.

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The Coriolis force is caused by the earth's rotation. It is responsible for air being pulled to the right (counterclockwise) in the Northern Hemisphere and **to the left (clockwise) in the Southern Hemisphere**. The Coriolis Effect is the observed curved path of moving objects relative to the surface of the Earth.

Because the Earth rotates on its axis, circulating air is deflected **toward the right in the Northern Hemisphere and toward the left in the Southern Hemisphere**. This deflection is called the Coriolis effect.

In Europe, from the 14th to the 17th century, there were various outbreaks of “choreomania.” The term is taken from the Greek word “choros” meaning dance and “mania” meaning madness, although the noted physician and philosopher Paracelsus coined the term “dancing plague.” During outbreaks of dancing plague, people would dance for hours, days, weeks, or even months. Once people started dancing, they couldn’t stop themselves and would fall into a kind of daze or trance.



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The whirling dervishes were founded by **Jelaliddin Rumi (1207-1273)**, known to his followers as Mevlana, 'our master', and they flourished in Turkey until 1926, when they were suppressed by Kemal Ataturk. Sufism, **the mystical branch of Islam**, emphasizes universal love, peace, acceptance of various spiritual paths and a mystical union with the divine. It is associated with the dancing of whirling dervishes, who originated in the 13th century as followers of the poet and Muslim mystic, Rumi.

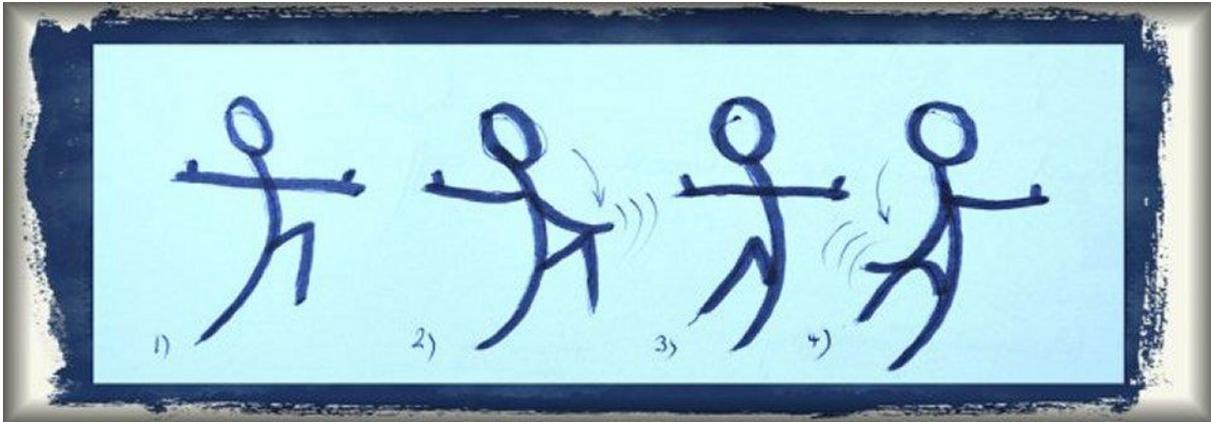
Some dances would simply be confusing and exhausting, while others were described by onlookers as bizarre. The dancers might parade around naked, make obscene gestures, or act like animals; they would scream, laugh, cry, and sing. One source notes how dancers would become violent if they [encountered the color red](#). Such prolonged dancing brought with it a raft of medical conditions: chest pains, convulsions, hallucinations, hyperventilation, and visions. In extreme cases, the dancing could result in death, either through exhaustion, heatstroke, heart attack, or because a participant broke their ribs while leaping about. It was clear that the people dancing were doing so unwillingly. There are many reports of dancers begging churchmen to bless them and release them from the curse, writhing in pain, and screaming for help.

**Sydenham chorea**, also known as St. Vitus dance, is a neuropsychiatric manifestation of rheumatic fever with an incidence varying from 5 to 35%. It may occur alone or concomitantly with other manifestations of rheumatic fever.

<https://www.thoughtco.com/five-dancing-deities-in-mythology-116551>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_dance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_dance)

Six-hundred and forty two years ago, citizens in the German city of Aachen started to pour out of their houses and into the streets where they began to writhe and whirl uncontrollably. This was the first major outbreak of dancing plague or choreomania and it would spread across Europe in the next several years.



To this day, experts aren't sure what caused the frenzy, which could drive those who danced to exhaustion. The outbreak in Germany was called St. John's dance, but it wasn't the first appearance of the mania or the last, according to *The Black Death and The Dancing Mania*, originally published in 1888. In the book, [Justus Friedrich Karl Hecker imaginatively describes the spectacle](#) of St. John's dance as follows:

The "disease" spread to Liege, Utrecht, Tongres and other towns in the Netherlands and Belgium, up and down the Rhine river. In other times and other forms the mania started to be called St. Vitus' dance. During the Middle Ages, the church held that the dancers had been possessed by the devil or perhaps cursed by a saint. Called Tarantism in Italy, it was believed the dancing was either brought on by the bite of a spider or a way to work out the poisons the arachnid had injected.

More modern interpretations have blamed a toxin produced by fungus that grew on rye. Ergot poisoning, or ergotism, could bring on hallucinations, spasms and delusions thanks to the psychoactive chemicals produced by the fungus *Claviceps purpurea*, [writes Steven Gilbert for the Toxipedia](#).

But not all of the regions affected by the strange compulsion to dance would be home to people who consumed rye, [points out Robert E. Bartholomew in an article](#) for the July/August 2000 issue of *Skeptical Inquirer*. Furthermore, the outbreaks didn't always happen during the wet season when the fungus would have grown.



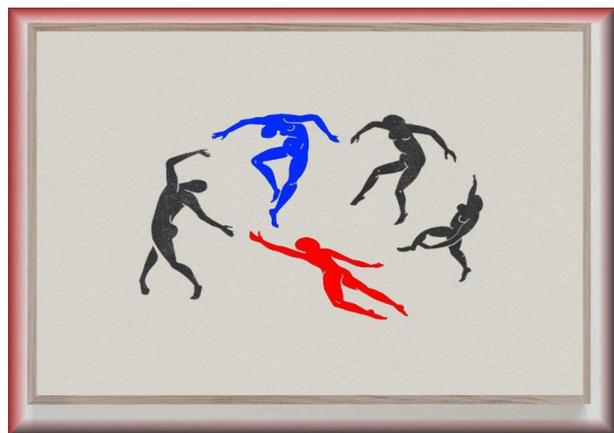
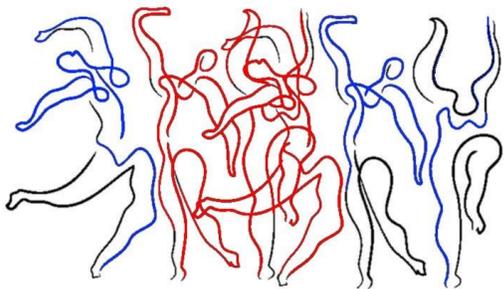
Madness is ultimately what some experts think caused such a bizarre phenomenon. Waller explains that in 1518, the people of Strasbourg were struggling to deal with famine, disease and the belief that supernatural forces could force them to dance. In 1374, the region near the Rhine was suffering from the aftermath of another, true plague: the Black Death. Waller argues that the dancers were under extreme psychological distress and were able to enter a trance state—something they would need to dance for such a long period of time. He blames the dancing mania on a kind of [mass hysteria](#).

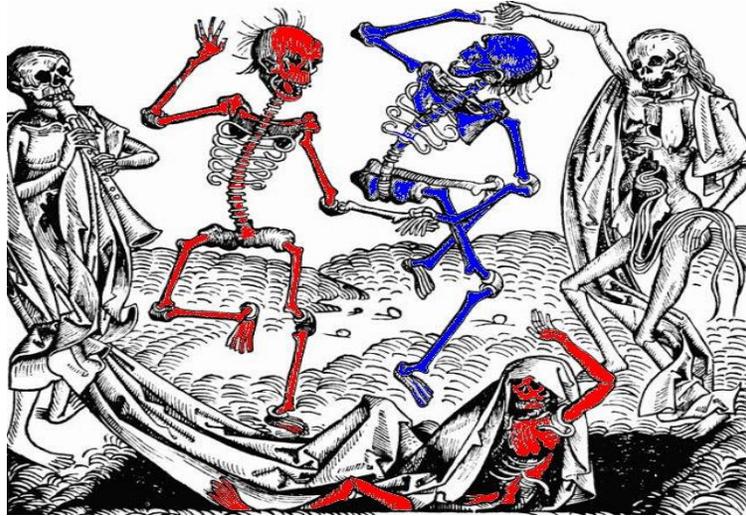
Bartholomew disagrees. He points out that records from the time claim that the dancers were often from other regions. They were religious pilgrims, he posits. He writes:

The behavior of these dancers was described as strange, because while exhibiting actions that were part of the Christian tradition, and paying homage to Jesus, Mary, and various saints at chapels and shrines, other elements were foreign. Radulphus de Rivo's chronicle *Decani Tongrensis* states that "in their songs they uttered the names of devils never before heard of . . . this strange sect." Petrus de Herenthal writes in *Vita Gregorii XI*: "There came to Aachen . . . a curious sect." The *Chronicon Belgicum Magnum* describes the participants as "a sect of dancers."

Once the first dancers started their strange ritual, other people perhaps joined in, claiming to be overwhelmed by a compulsion. Societal prohibitions against such unrestrained behavior could then be cast aside.

Ultimately, the cause of *Choreomania* remains a mystery, but it will never cease to be a fascinating part of European history.





To round things out I have to mention:

There were nine muses, each of which was associated with a different one of the arts. In this lesson, we are going to get to know Terpsichore, and see what role she played in Greek mythology.

## Terpsichore

Boots and cats and boots and cats and boots and cats. Oh yeah. Feel the rhythm? Do you, perhaps, even feel inspired to dance? Well, that could be **Terpsichore** at work!

In Greek mythology, Terpsichore was the **goddess of dance**, also eventually associated with **lyric poetry** and the **chorus** that accompanied Greek theater. She was one of the **muses**, the nine goddesses of the arts and masters of their crafts. It was the muses who gave humans the inspiration to excel at the arts, so when you just get that urge to get up and dance, don't resist. You wouldn't want to offend the goddess.

