

### Dancing plague of 1518

The dancing plague of 1518, an event in which hundreds of citizens of Strasbourg (then a free city within the Holy Roman Empire, now in France) danced uncontrollably and apparently **unwillingly** for days on end; the **mania** lasted for about two months before ending as **mysteriously** as it began.

In July 1518, a woman whose name was given as Frau (Mrs.) Troffea (or Trauffea) stepped into the street and began dancing. She seemed unable to stop, and she kept dancing until she **collapsed** from **exhaustion**. After resting, she **resumed** the **compulsive frenzied** activity. She continued this way for days, and within a week more than 30 other people were similarly **afflicted**. They kept going long past the point of **injury**. City authorities were alarmed by the ever-increasing number of dancers. The civic and religious leaders **theorized** that more dancing was the solution, and so they arranged for guildhalls for the dancers to gather in, musicians to accompany the dancing, and professional dancers to help the **afflicted** to continue dancing. This only **exacerbated** the **contagion**, and as many as 400 people were eventually **consumed** by the dancing **compulsion**. A number of them died from their **exertions**. In early September the **mania** began to **abate**.

### Vocabulary:

**willing** - *adj.* disposed or inclined toward; not brought about by coercion or force; *noun* the act of making a choice

**mania** - *noun* an irrational but irresistible motive for a belief or action; a mood disorder; an affective disorder in which the victim tends to respond excessively and sometimes violently

**mysterious** - *adj.* having an import not apparent to the senses nor obvious to the intelligence; beyond ordinary understanding; of an obscure nature

**collapse** - *noun* a mishap caused by something suddenly falling down or caving in; an abrupt failure of function or health; the act of throwing yourself down; a sudden large decline of business or the prices of stocks (especially one that causes additional failures); *verb* lose significance, effectiveness, or value; break down, literally or metaphorically; cause to burst; fold or close up; collapse due to fatigue, an illness, or a sudden attack; suffer a nervous breakdown; fall apart

**exhaustion** - *noun* the act of exhausting something entirely; extreme fatigue; serious weakening and loss of energy

**resume** - *noun* a summary of your academic and work history; short descriptive summary (of events); *verb* take up or begin anew; return to a previous location or condition; assume anew; give a summary (of)

**compulsive** - *adj.* strongly motivated to succeed; caused by or suggestive of psychological compulsion; *noun* a person with a compulsive disposition; someone who feels compelled to do certain things

**frenzy** - *noun* state of violent mental agitation

**afflict** - *verb* cause bodily suffering to and make sick or indisposed; cause pain or suffering in; cause great unhappiness for; distress

**injury** - *noun* an act that injures someone; an accident that results in physical damage or hurt; any physical damage to the body caused by violence or accident or fracture etc.; a casualty to military personnel resulting from combat

**theorize** - *verb* form or construct theories; construct a theory about; to believe especially on uncertain or tentative grounds

**exacerbate** - *verb* exasperate or irritate; make worse

**contagion** - *noun* the communication of an attitude or emotional state among a number of people; an incident in which an infectious disease is transmitted; any disease easily transmitted by contact

**consume** - *verb* engage fully; serve oneself to, or consume regularly; use up (resources or materials); spend extravagantly; destroy completely; eat immoderately

**compulsion** - *noun* using force to cause something; an urge to do or say something that might be better left undone or unsaid; an irrational motive for performing trivial or repetitive actions against your will

**exertion** - *noun* use of physical or mental energy; hard work

**abate** - *verb* become less in amount or intensity; make less active or intense