











**National College of Art and Design**

Faculty of Design.

Department of Visual Communication.

**Hieronymus Bosch and the dressing of the Devil,  
the Northern European vocabulary.**

by Colin O' Neill.

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## Introduction





In this essay I will explore pictorial representations of the Christian Devil, from its formation, until the death of possibly the greatest of artists who focussed on this theme, Hieronymus Bosch. I will trace the origins of the Devil in its most well known form, i.e. the horned, tailed demon, and examine why this form became the most stable one, and how society related to it. I will then examine Bosch's work in relation to the traditions that formed the demon. The popularity of the devil as a form of artistic expression implies that a spiritual agenda of great importance was present at the time. When studying this area two points must be kept foremost in our thoughts. We must ignore the modern image of the devil that has become so diluted it is now almost a parody of its original form and, secondly, we must remember that people seeing these works during the middle ages did not consider (as we do), Hell as a metaphor; it was an item of faith. Belief in God demanded belief in a devil. The devil's existence was a truth which every European Christian for over fifteen hundred years professed to believe. God was not the all-forgiving, personalised figure He is today. He was a righteous king and was expected to react harshly to those who ignored his teachings.

When a society defines a godhead, it must quickly formulate its devil. These two icons form either end of a moral scale. In order for something to be classified as 'evil' it must be measured against what is considered 'good'. Good defines bad and vice versa. This scale or 'moral code' exists in all societies. As a godhead's characteristics change, the devil changes in relation to it. If the God becomes more powerful, the devil becomes more prominent and horrific. If the God becomes more forgiving and personalised, then the devil becomes diluted. I will examine the origins of the demonic form in the Christian tradition in the first two chapters. Chapter one studies the biblical 'signs' of evil, the serpent and Lucifer, and traces their origins in other cultures. Chapter two focusses on four forms that we can discern traces of today, Pan, Dionysus, the Satyr and the Wild Man.

Religious painting at this time was pure visual communication. Artists were commissioned by patrons to illustrate biblical scenes and make them communicate to the people. We shall see how this communication was developed in Chapters three





and four. Chapter three details the development of a religious vocabulary in writing and painting. Chapter four concentrates on Bosch as the master of a form of spiritual communication that was developed at this time.

The study is limited to the Northern European Artists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The topic has existed as long as religion itself, and has enjoyed many periods of popularity through the years: in Italy in the thirteenth century, inspired by the writings of Dant ; in the interest in Lucifer and the grotesque in the nineteenth century in the work of Beardsley etc; and in a more modern form today in horror film and certain genres of music. Each period put the forms to different uses, but the Northern Europeans more than most, placed emphasis on communication to the people, and kept the focus on the devil as an intrinsic part of Christian belief.

As all the forms dealt with are in one way or another symbolic of certain religious concepts it is useful to clearly define the terms we use when discussing symbols:

an icon is any visual image which resembles it's subject. The image is the 'signifier' and the subject which it represents is the 'signified'

a conventional sign is one whose message or symbolism exists as the result of a pre-agreed or assumed meaning

(F. Bazler, Semiology and Interpretative analysis, 1988)









**Chapter one :**

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**Christianity's first demons**

Lucifer, the fallen angel  
and the serpent,  
the influence of Greek myth.



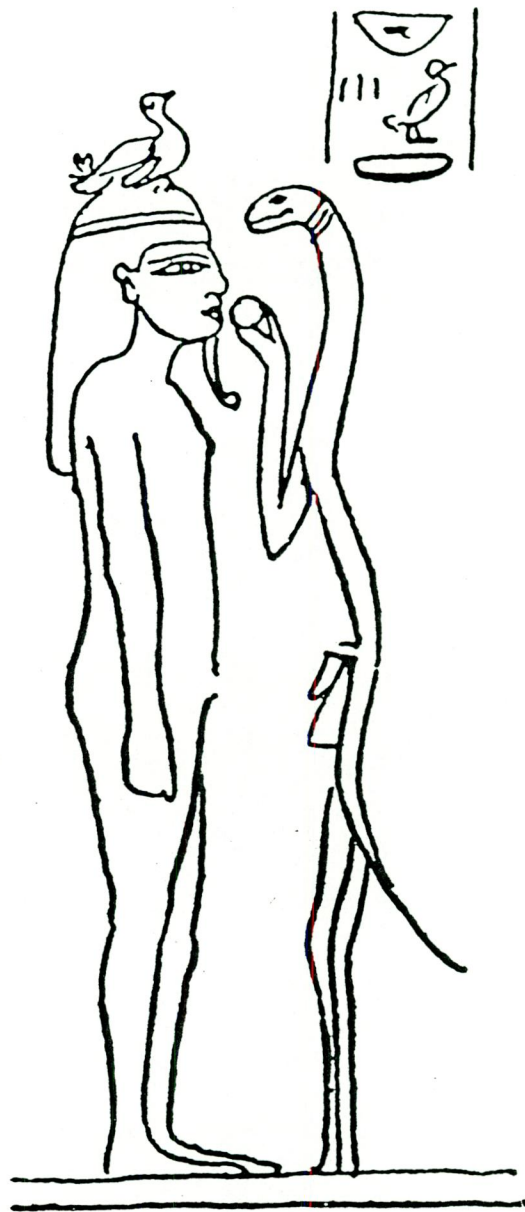


The form of the devil has gone through many changes. It must symbolise what is evil or immoral to each different society it serves, and since these societies had different ideas of what constituted bad and good they manipulated their devil to suit. Since the devil in question here is the Christian manifestation of evil, the form carries the same essential message, along with specific regional characteristics of importance to each society, that sin can only lead to eternal damnation, and since in Christian doctrine all are born in sin, they are born damned. This can only be avoided through living a life devoted to the worship and practice of the word of God. Although this concept has always stood at the heart of Christianity, as we shall see it has varied in importance to the people. If we attempt to discover contemporary images of Satan as lord of evil, they are hard to find. Although much contemporary creative work is concerned with good and evil and the soul or spirit these have become highly personalised concepts. We, as a society, have lost the concept of an all-powerful single entity. Although Church teaching and the Bible tell us it exists, our demons now are personal ones. This is a modern development, the history of depictions of the Devil details a different concept. To early Christian and Medieval society the Devil was a factual being, in command of an army of demons tempting men to commit acts of evil, and torturing them eternally for this. This temptation and torturing can be seen as the strongest concept related to the Devil, but the earliest depictions of this evil show a different form. The Bible details the serpent in the garden of Eden as the first tempter, and it is from here that I shall start to trace the development of societies' devil from.

The earliest surviving image of an evil entity in the Christian tradition comes directly from the Bible, Genesis 3, "the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature". The earliest surviving pictorial representation is a third century fresco in the catacombs of St. Peters and Marcellus, in Rome. (Hughes 1968, p. 215). This depicts the serpent tempting Eve. The story of Adam and Eve was rooted in tradition. The snake as tempter was used as far back as Egyptian times. Here it was also used in conjunction with the female form and fruit. (Hughes 1968, p.82) (ill. 1). Hughes proposes the serpent as a phallic image, and the fruit as the forbidden pleasures of the flesh. The female/serpent relationship also has a tradition in Gnostic mythology where Cotterell (1986, p.46) quotes Saturninus a Gnostic ascetic who







1. Serpent as tempter (Egyptian).



wrote that the female form "is without foreknowledge, wrathful, double-minded, double-bodied, a virgin above and a viper below". This concept will be discussed in detail later in reference to Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights. For now it goes to show how Christianity's demons were simply developments of other culture's forms. When studying this it must be remembered that these are not the earliest visual representations of evil, but representations of evil's first appearance on earth in the Christian tradition. It also must be accepted that these images were taken to be actual, that is to have truly existed in the forms shown. The images lived on in the minds of those who viewed them, and gave them something 'concrete' to fear. In these works the basic form of the paintings were understood to be illustrations of the holy Bible, something not to be taken lightly. It should also be stated that the serpent was not in fact the Devil, rather a manifestation of evil. The earliest surviving image of the Devil dates from the sixth century, and is in the human form of Lucifer, the fallen Angel. This is also a biblical concept. A group of rebel angels, led by Lucifer, were expelled from Heaven for the sins of pride and jealousy, and left to roam the earth. They were, according to Cotterell, jealous of Adam being made a son of God and were left to make whatever life they could for themselves on the earth, where they chose to tempt man and exploit his weaknesses (1986, p.46). So these were the first Christian concepts of a devil, but how do we relate them to the horned, tailed demon that was to become the most stable form of devil?

The fundamental concepts of Christianity relate to everyone. It is an attempt to answer the questions that everybody must ask themselves at one point or another; who are we?, how did we get here?, and what happens when we die?. Its power is also due to the fact that it incorporated many other religions' feasts, doctrines and most importantly, Gods and Demons. In this way it was powerful enough to overthrow the majority of existing godheads and replace them with its own. When the devil was being formulated, a single entity was not arrived at from biblical reference alone. Rather the two existing strands, the serpent and Lucifer, were woven together with many other influences. These two forms surfaced regularly as they were the embodiment of two of the fundamental sins against Christ, lust and jealousy, but were more often mixed with other concepts.





Although today we take the world of Greek mythology to be fascinating, inventive fiction there is no reason why we should take it any less seriously than the doctrine we are taught as Christians. In fact, the story of Lucifer's expulsion from Heaven includes the expulsion of other angels who became infatuated by the sensual charms of woman on earth. The offspring of these relationships were the Titans, mentioned in Genesis and prominent in Greek myth. (Cotterell, 1986, p. 46).

According to Hughes (1968, p. 215) Christianity inherited its understanding of the language of symbolic forms from the Greeks. Just as Christianity traditionally places its Hell underground, the Greeks believed in monstrous demons that lived in a land to the South West, which we know today as India. There was, in 77 A.D., an account written by Pliny the Elder describing this Classical predecessor of Hell. Its population included many beings that were to influence the Christian demons, creatures "without heads standing upon their necks, who carry eyes in their shoulders ... a kind of people called Sciopedes that have but one leg apiece" etc. Pliny's account seems to have taken freely from previous reports by two other Greek writers, Ctesias and Megasthenes, both of whom travelled to India, whereas Pliny did not (Hughes, 1968, p.216). In Ctesias' account a creature called Martikhora was reported, made up of the head of a man the body of a lion and the tail of a scorpion, who lived in the desert and ate travellers (Hughes, 1968, p.220). Although these reports may seem fantastic to us today, it is worth noting that both of the earlier Greek reports contained reference to 'wondrous beasts' still present today. A race with a "hardened, enlarged bottom lip" and another group with "necks lengthened to resemble the Ostrich" (Hughes 1968, p.219). Both these tribes and their ritual customs are still in existence today, so we may presume that a percentage of the creatures reported had a factual basis.

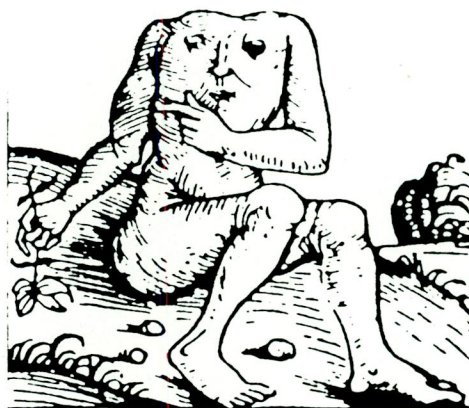
These reports were considered seriously, and copied often, with many subtle enhancements, until they had become, by the late 9th century "self ramifying myth"(Hughes, 1968, p.221). The immense impact of these writings can be seen in much early medieval work and eventually were accepted as part of the Christian scheme of depicting demons. Take, for example, Pliny's headless figure mentioned earlier; this was given the name 'gryllos', and has been detailed in Heinz Mode's Fabulous Beasts and Demons (1975, p. 228 ). The author distinguishes two different manifestations of this form; firstly, those in which the head stands directly on





the feet and, secondly, beings with multiple heads in other parts of their body. These figures appear in many forms in the landscape of Hell almost constantly from the 10th century and were very popular in Italy and Northern Europe (ill. 2-3). Christianity also incorporated 'myths' from much closer to home. Pagan cults such as that of the earth goddess were given their counterparts in the teachings of the Church, i.e. the virgin birth. Pagan feasts were also incorporated, one even being given over to the celebration of the Birth of the Son of God. But other cults were too strong to incorporate satisfactorily, and possibly the strongest Pagan deity was transformed into the Christian incarnation of evil. This was the role given to the Pagan god of Nature.





2. Gryllos (Indian).







3. Gryllos (European).





## Chapter two:

### **Pagan deities and medieval myth**

The demonic traditions

'animal amalgamation'

'nature run riot'

'animal instincts'





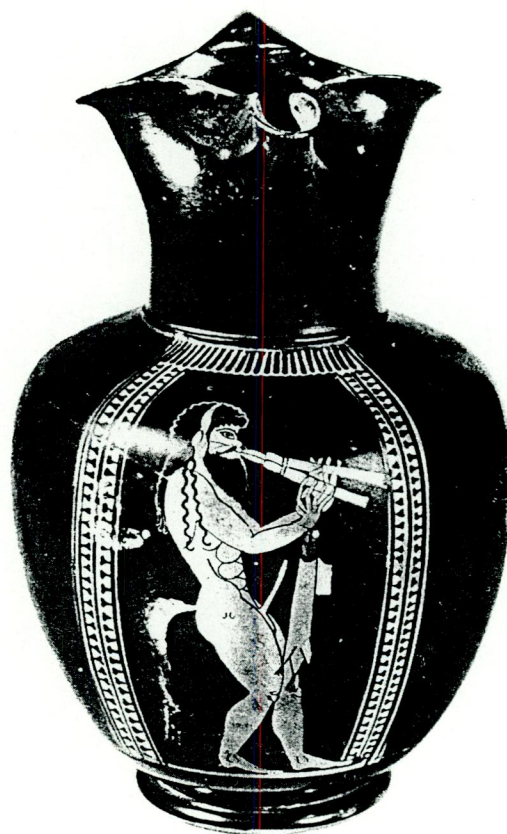
We have seen how Greek mythology was influential to the development of Christian demons, and later I will return to their wild amalgamations of man and animal, but probably the most important contribution to the devil as we know it today evolved from a mixing of Greek and later Pagan traditions. The Bible contains many echoes of the classical tradition. We have already dealt with the Titans, but Isaiah 13:20-22, details the day of last judgement and tells us that when Babylon is destroyed,

Wild beasts will lay down there, and it's  
houses will be full of howling creatures;  
there Ostriches will dwell and there  
Satyrs will dance. Hyenas will cry in it's  
towers and Jackals in the pleasant places.

The beast we are concerned with here is the Satyr. This form originates again in Greek and Roman lore. The Satyr is half-man, half-goat. In his Dictionary of World Mythologies (1986), Arthur Cotterell describes the Satyr as "bestial in their desires and behaviour, portrayed as either horses or goats, and usually associated with Dionysus, the potent god of vegetation, wine and ecstasy". Hughes (1968, p.234) detailed their nature and appearance, describing them as horned, hoofed and goat-legged with "a frisky stub of a tail and thick hair on their flanks ... good for nothing and mischeiveous". Their worst crimes seem to have been drunkenness, stealing fruit, "trampling down grape trellises and immoderate lust" (Hughes, 1968, p.235). They were not demonic, rather more slothful, lusty and greedy creatures. But they were destined to be incorporated into Christian demonology, due to their appearance, and their association with Dionysus.

Dionysus was a fertility god, animal-like in appearance. He was a horned figure usually attended on by groups of wild women, called Maenads, who wore animal skins. He seems to have been closely related to Pan, a Greek fertility god, whose main concern was the fecundity of cattle. He inherited some characteristics of the horned gods of the near east, as well as the large population of goats which inhabited arcadia, his original home. His responsibility for the procreation of animals soon resulted in his becoming a phallic god, and representations of him often include an erect and sharply pointed penis (ill. 4). Pan, like the Satyr, was a wood dweller and, like Dionysus, was capable of instilling a wild fear or hysteria which





4. Attic Red Figure Vase painting, showing Pan





resulted in those feeling it to regress to their animal instincts, or 'panic'. It is quite possible that these three forms had the same origins. They were the development of the Paeleothic fertility religions and survived all over Europe. "Especially in Northern Europe the old ... religions were the most serious alternative to the worship of Christ" (Hughes 1968, p. 240). This tradition presented many problems for the Christians. The worship of Dionysus even included tales of him bringing the dead back to life, so powerfully fertile was he. These cults were totally opposed to Christianity on many points. Their focus was on procreation under no constraints. They can be seen to relate to the Serpent in their phallic symbolism and ability to make people lose control of their senses, and revert to their animal instincts. The serpent offered knowledge to Adam and Eve. This, interpreting knowledge in the biblical sense, to have knowledge of a person referring to the act of sexual intercourse, emphasises the sexual aspect. The relation of the classical forms to the serpent proposed them as perfect forms to express this, the essence of sin on earth. It is too simplistic a view to propose that their popularity alone caused the Christians to adopt these forms as their demons, although this has been the case in some studies. The serpent can be seen as a representative of Pan, Dionysus and the Satyr and all they embody, in the Garden of Eden. Therefore, in Christian doctrine, these forms are evil. So when Christianity came face to face with these forms, they offered powerful representations of what they held to be the essence of sin. These forms were devils.

The existence of the devil in early Christian teaching is somewhat confusing. There is the serpent in Eden, Lucifer the proud rebel angel, but there also existed many other forms, again mostly literary. The Bible tells of 'Asmodeus', a monster figure, mostly human, but with wings, horns lions paws for hands and birds claws for feet. There is also Abaddon 'prince of the furies' and 'Angel of the bottomless pit' (Revelations 9: 7-10). Other writings from the beginnings of Christianity speak of 'Diabolis', Gods creation whose sole purpose was the torment of sinners. These are all embodiments of the same evil, and presumably are derived from folk legends and myths, designed to provide recognisable forms to those coming to Christianity from other religions. But these are all literary forms, in art before the tenth century, the demon was either the serpent or more often Lucifer the angel, "like a God, flying on the air surrounded by demons who appear as angels of light", St. Ephraim,





5. Pan and Dionysus had very similar facial expressions. This sculpture from the British Museum shows very well the arrogant, sardonic, sensual features that were to influence much later representations of evil. The enlarged orafaces emphasise the sensual aspect.





4th century A.D. (Hughes, 1968, p.244). The conversion from this form to one resembling Pan, Dionysus and the Satyr took place around the end of the ninth century. Then suddenly and comprehensively a new demon appeared. Lucifer was still the Antichrist, but no longer what we now consider 'the devil'. This change of form was recorded extensively. Raoul Glaber, a monk from a monastery in St. Leger recorded early in the eleventh century that :

I saw at the end of my bed a little monster  
in a human shape. He had, as far as I could  
see a pockmarked neck, a thin face, very black  
eyes and a wrinkled, low forehead. His nose  
was flat, his mouth enormous with swollen  
lips. He had a short, sharp chin, a goats beard,  
erect and pointed ears, tangled hair standing  
up on end, the teeth of a dog and a pointed  
head. He was pigeon breasted and humpbacked

his clothes were filthy, and he hopped about. (Hughes, 1968, p.248)

This description incorporates many familiar elements: the goat's beard, enormous mouth swollen lips etc. are all resemblant of the Pagan fertility Gods, but it also brings new elements into the picture. Firstly, the size (for the first time we are presented with a small demon); secondly, the tangled hair, standing on end. These elements seem to have been borrowed from the traditional Romanesque demon (ill. 6) . Evil was now dressed in rags with unkempt hair, and skipped about. Although this form was prominent in Romanesque carving, it seems odd that it should, in so small a space of time, become so commonplace. As Hughes has shown (Heaven and Hell in Western Art, 1968, p.252) a Christian council was set up in 956 A.D. to tighten up any weak areas of the Churches doctrine. This was the council of Cluny, and it seems reasonable to assume that they were in some way responsible for this change. The poles of Christianity had been further widened. God was to become more righteous and powerful and the Devil in turn would become more horrific and more prominent. A more concentrated and focussed set of forms was developed.

From the late 900s we find a demonic form that can be related to the devil we know today. Once the Antichrist and the serpent forms were given different roles, and the Romanesque imp promoted, developments came quick and fast. The pointed clumps







6. Romanesque Demon





of hair soon mutated into horns, the facial characteristics were expounded to echo the sensual and sardonic features of Pan and Dionysus. The goatish aspects were emphasised. Greek myths and reports from travellers were then further incorporated into the new monstrous form. This is not to say that once this form was arrived at it was a stable presence, that not the case, but it provided a formula and a focus around which a society of demons, evil doers and tempters was developed. The tradition of incorporating animal properties was to become very prominent. This stretches back to the Egyptians through Greek and Roman religions. It is based on different elements of animals being amalgamated, to produce a new monstrous form, which was then considered to have all the properties of those animals that serve to form it. These animal amalgamations usually walked on two legs emulating humans in a strange and frightening way. This concept, which I will refer to as 'animal amalgamation' for the rest of the essay, is a subsection of a larger concept which I will refer to as 'nature run riot'. Strange animal forms are products of nature out of control, and the control of natural forces would have been, in early Christian and Medieval times, of great importance for two reasons. Firstly, society was suspicious of nature. Towns of medieval times were usually surrounded by wild, untamed forest, filled with real and imagined creatures which would have been very frightening. This is an important aspect to the popularity of belief in demons. Imagine night falling on an isolated Medieval town, silence hanging heavy in the air, only to be broken periodically by the sounds of wild animals from the woods outside the town walls. It is little wonder that Dant  included a dark wood in his literary mapping of Hell. As Huizinga says in his Waning of the Middle Ages (1924, p.45 ),

The contrast between silence and sound,  
darkness and light ... was more strongly  
marked than it is in our time. The modern  
town hardly knows silence or darkness in  
their purity.

The society of the middle ages had to battle constantly with nature in it's 'purity'. The wood was to become the most vivid symbol of nature in it's wildest form (Hughes 1968, p. 171). On Adams expulsion from Eden God punished him by having him "work hard on the rebellious soil" (George Every, Christian Mythology, 1970,p.34), thus beginning man's battle with nature. Secondly, freaks of nature were



attributed a moral or symbolic meaning. They were taken to be portents, wild beasts, the result of some hellish mischief. As Hughes has shown, the literature of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries abounds with manuals on the interpretation of these portents.

The freak was feared because it was a  
manifestation of evil, a drop thrown up  
the cauldron of irrationality that bubbled  
underneath civilisation.

(1968, p. 225)

These freaks were usually deformed animals (ill. 7) but also included the earlier reports of Indian creatures from Pliny. They were attributed a moral message; the pigmies of Pliny's account were taken to personify humility because of their small stature etc. Animals usually had more demonic connotations, in relation to the animal amalgamation tradition, and were taken very seriously. These forms, belonging to a class of beings regarded as being menacing, when attributed a moral or allegorical meaning naturally came to represent sin or evil. (Hughes, 1968, p. 226). This was to find its fullest flowering in the work of the Northern European painters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

There was another form which was also to have influence on the form of the devil, one that was very popular in Medieval myth, that of the Wild Man. This form also has reference in the Bible

He was driven from among men, and  
his body was wet with the dew of  
heaven till his hair grew as long as  
eagles feathers and his nails were  
like birds claws

(Daniel: 4, 33)

The wild man, or Wodewose, as he was known, was a man rather than a man/animal amalgamation, but he was man stripped bare of his civilisation, beast-like. As Hughes has shown (1968, p.254) the state of the fallen man strongly echoes that of both Lucifer and Adam, who had both rejected the teachings of God and had been







7. The Monstrous Pig of Landsers, Albrecht Durer.

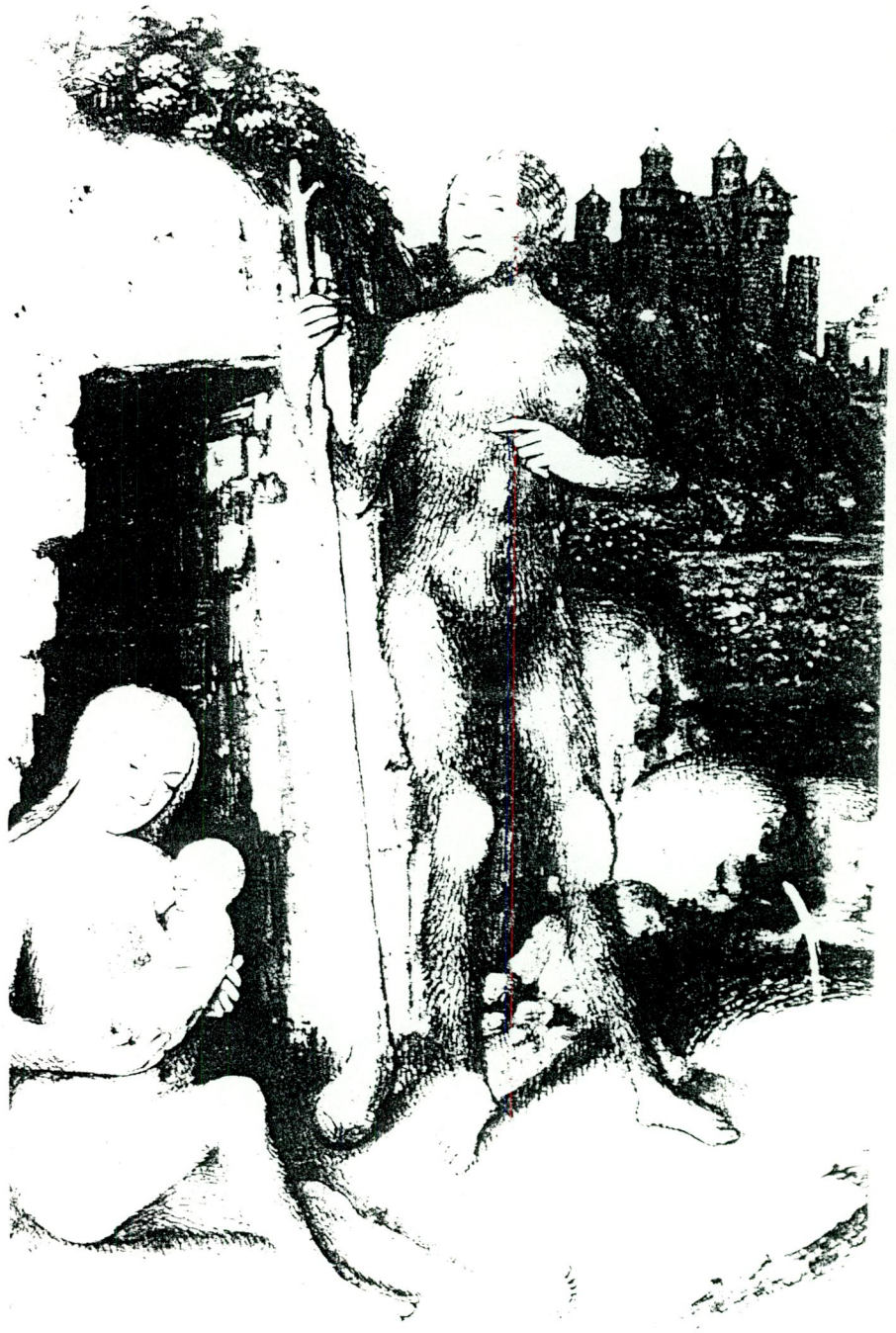


forced out of a state of grace. In relation to this the form of the wild man has an inbuilt moral message, but the wild man in Medieval lore had never been in the position of either of these. His species had always inhabited the woods and in this way relates to the other inhabitants of the forest Pan, Dionysus and the Satyr. The wild man is usually represented as a large, muscular, dim creature, covered in thick hair. His heavy coat implies a strong aggressive character, one under the rule of his animal instincts (ill. 8). The wild man came to express quite concisely a range of symbols. He was man stripped bare of his civilisation, with no control over his actions, implying no spiritual or religious life. His focus was solely of this world. He is the personification of the remnants of the 'cave man' within us all. He is humanity brought back to the base of the evolutionary ladder to us, and man without control or reason to Medieval society. Hughes says of the Wild Man that "he was all libido", libido being the energy within us that drives us to seek gratification. (Psychology, J.P. Dwovetzky, 1982, p. 421).

These forms all have certain formal elements in common but, most importantly, they all embodied and concisely expressed, in a language familiar to the majority of the people, that which Christianity saw as evil: the Wild Man, lack of self control, no spiritual focus; Dionysus/Pan, lust; the Satyr, indulgence; the Serpent as tempter offering knowledge of creation, which would eventually lead to pride, the cause of Lucifers expulsion from Heaven. On a more human, personal level they represented nature and man out of control. The traditions noted here set the framework for the flourishing of depictions of the devil in art.







8. A Wild Man.





### **Chapter 3**

#### **The development of the Northern European vocabulary:**

Luther, Van Eyck, Cranach, Bruegel





As we have seen the worship of the ancient fertility gods was quite popular in Northern Europe, and so it is not surprising that when Christianity became firmly established and these deities became demons this area produced many artists who had a firm background knowledge of the symbolic power of these forms. From here came probably the greatest religious iconographers in the demonic tradition. This is also due to the tradition of the moralising of freaks and animals. This concept was very popular in the literature of Northern Europe. Compilations of proverbs, anecdotes and moral tales taken from the scriptures or classical writing were published regularly (Hughes, 1968, p.226). These would have served as more accessible forms of the Biblical message. In this way the teachings of Christianity spread to all people, and were easily digested and understood in relation to their everyday lives. Possibly the best known and most influential of these is Sebastian Brant's Ship of Fools, published in 1494. This is an allegorical tale, depicting humanity's existence on the world as a voyage on a ship and the population as the fools. This was a profoundly aware commentary on what the author saw as the stupidity and shortsightedness of man. It was to have a great effect on the artists of the time. Also published around this time was an updated account of Pliny's descriptions of the wild creatures of India mentioned earlier, and the Vision of Tundale, an account by an Irish priest of a journey through Hell. All these works, along with Dante's Inferno, were to have a great impact on the visual representations of life after death and the life of the soul on earth. They also enhanced the traditions of interpreting both everyday and unusual occurrences as symbols relating to either Heaven or Hell. Other manifestations of this interest include the outdoor performance of farces, morality plays, mysteries and miracle plays. These public performances were staged by the many theatrical societies of the time, which were often related to religious orders. These shows were entertaining, frightening and, most importantly, accessible to all, revealing scenes of devilry, temptation and penance, and were accorded a value almost equal to that of holy books (Hughes, 1968, p.227). This combination of literature and theatre was destined to have influence on painting, and it inspired the works of two of the greatest Northern European spiritual or moral painters, Bruegel and Bosch.

Europe around this time was greatly concerned with religious matters. In Germany in 1517, Martin Luther started the religious revolution now known as the





reformation. Christianity had produced a population so virtuous and Godfearing and so concentrated on their faith that a large section split, disenchanted with the actions of the Pope. Bosch died in 1516, one year before the split, but he, as much as Luther or any of the numerous Protestant painters who followed him, knew the folly of man's ways on earth. Considering the vast amount of literature concerned with life after death, man's stupidity, dictionaries of demons etc., it could be seen as only a matter of time before this, combined with the devout beliefs of the Christian population, would again force the poles of Christianity to be widened. The Church, that which offered hope and belief to a population saturated with images of man's stupidity, death and torment, was seen to be untrue to it's own teachings. The selling of indulgences was simply the last straw. For years artists had been attacking the Church for it's hypocritical behaviour (ill 9), and little wonder. Priests lived openly with women and often fathered children. One German indulgence seller, John Tetzel, advertised to his audience with the jingle "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs" (The Great Artists, C. Gregory, (ed.), vol 2, no.44, p.1307). Luther's teachings of course offered more than just opposition to the Churches hypocrisy, but this was one of the main 'selling points' of his teachings. The Church had, through art and literature, spread it's message very clearly but unfortunately, it's priests and bishops did not display the same devotion to their tasks as the writers and artists did to theirs.

Luther's 95 Theses are useful as a reference here, focusing as they did on the personal relationship with God, as we are concerned with an art aimed at the people, relating to their everyday life and it's spiritual aspects. Luther feared Hell and the coming of Judgement Day as much as any of his contemporaries, and driven by this he sought comfort in the bible. This can be seen as the desired effect. The church operated a system of enforcing people's beliefs that echoes the poles of morality mentioned earlier. This is most succinctly expressed in this quotation from the Imitation of Christ by Thomas A Kempis, "It is good that, if the love of God does not restrain you from sin, the fear of Hell at least should restrain you". From his reading, Luther developed his own personal interpretation of God's salvation. This he called the doctrine of 'Justification by Faith alone', based on the belief that "salvation is given to the individual believer by God, through His grace, rather than as a reward" (The Great Artists, C. Gregory, (ed.), vol 2, no.44, p.1307). This was







9. Nun being seduced by a devil.



obviously at odds with the established Christian dogma, but can be seen as the result of relating Christian teaching to the person directly. Imagine the despair of the people seeing the foolishness of man depicted in art and literature being acted out all around them. The acts of Martin Luther powerfully illustrate this despair and his tremendous devotion to his faith. The weight of moralistic art and literature cannot be discounted in the development of this climate.

In order to illustrate this concept of relating religion to life through art, I will discuss the work of two Northern European painters, Jan Van Eyck and Lucas Cranach. Cranach's work can be seen to powerfully express this concept, but the origins of this tradition lie in events that took place further back in history. At the end of the 14th century Van Eyck pioneered the use of oil for the binding of pigments, as opposed to the traditional egg tempera. This allowed the artist more time to work on the painting before drying occurred, enabling the artist to produce a more detailed and realistic image (The story of Art, E.H. Gombrich, 1984, p.178). This resulted in a more simplistic composition, with less crowding of figures, and yet a more realistic representation which was vital to the development of powerfully communicative painting, both secular and religious, which therefore related strongly to people's lives. One of Van Eyck's greatest works is his wedding portrait of the Arnolfini. Gombrich suggests that Van Eyck was asked to record the betrothal as a witness. Here was a style of painting realistic enough to stand as a legal document as proof of an act actually having taken place. The wall bears the inscription of the witness in Latin, "Jan Van Eyck was present". Now for the first time in the European tradition, art could be interpreted and, more importantly, related to as the truthful and accurate depiction of a real event. This was to have a profound effect on secular and religious painting.

Religious painting specialised in documenting events from which its audience is detached by geography, time and spiritual distance. In order to make these events seem 'real' the painters related them to the everyday existence of the people. Lucas Cranach lived in Germany between 1472 and 1553. He was born into the traditions of moralising, intense devotion and belief etc. mentioned earlier, and they naturally had an effect on his work. He had an intense devotion to his faith and was acquainted with Martin Luther (The Great Artists, C. Gregory, (ed.), vol 2, no.41, p.1307).







He produced many fine religious paintings, depicting Biblical and classical legends as well as secular scenes and portraits. In his engraving (ill. 10) we see one of the most popular biblical themes, the temptation of St. Anthony. Cranach presents a powerful vision of the saint being borne aloft by demons. This was traditionally seen as one of the strongest tests of faith for the saint, to retain his composure and belief while being carried through the skies by hoards of vicious, attacking demons. Cranach's demons show all the characteristics noted in the first part of this essay, the insane amalgamation of animal forms, specifically those of the goat which are powerfully utilised. The demon standing on the saint tugging his beard, and the demon looking out of the picture at the extreme left of the image both display goat-like features. But this engraving is also of interest because it can be interpreted as relating to what is possibly the strongest form of temptation known to man, sexual temptation. This would then become a potent example of relating the Bible to the everyday life of people at the time. If the picture is 'read' in an anti-clockwise direction we can discern three levels of connection, three separate areas where the work relates to the viewer. Starting with St. Anthony we see first a depiction of a traditional religious theme. This connects with the viewer through their knowledge of the bible. Then, moving down to the left, we see a typical Northern European landscape, with what may be a castle or monastery and a few houses. This 'connects' to the everyday social aspects of life and needs no decoding. When this is viewed in connection to the religious image of St. Anthony, any sense of 'otherworldness' is broken down. Then moving across to the right we see a small dark cave, and beside it a tall tree trunk. The entrance to the cave is surrounded by smaller trees and grasses. It is relatively easy for us today to interpret these images as symbolic of the male and female sexual organs. This, of course, comes from knowledge of a separate modern tradition, our familiarity with the works of Freud. As it has often been pointed out, particularly in relation to Netherlandish painting, the works of Freud bear no relation to the artistic minds of the middle ages (Gibson, Hieronymus Bosch, 1973, p.12) but even taking into account the enormous differences between our societies, any mind capable of projecting and interpreting such a wide range of symbolic, iconic and allegorical forms would have possessed a highly developed vocabulary in this field. The tree and cave appear quite regularly together in Northern European art (ill. 11). We have already detailed lust to be the central focus for religious sins, and in religious painting it could not be graphically







10. The Temptation of St. Anthony., Lucas Cranach.









11. Tree and Cave, from The Temptation of St. Anthony, Jan Manden. The sexual aspect is emphasised here by the incorporation of two breast-like turrets, also note ther head of Pan in the bottom right hand corner. Bosch's influence is plain to see in this rather crude depiction of the theme.





displayed, so some symbolic forms were necessary to imply it. If this can be accepted, then we see the 'otherworldly' religious theme being related to the intensely personal in Cranach's engraving. This is perhaps the strongest, most powerful form of communication.

If we jump forward a decade or so, we see the concept of interpreting the religious to the personal and social reach new heights. The work of Pieter Bruegel the Elder was primarily concerned with showing society going about its everyday business, and from this implying a moralistic note in harmony with the dark fatalistic tenor of his times. One of his best known works today is The Blue Cloak (ill. 13). Here he depicts sayings, proverbs and figures of speech in a very obvious manner. A whole village acts out numerous adages. These proverbs either represent humanity's stupidity or its sinfulness. It is believed that this painting was directly inspired by an engraving by Frans Hogenberg (The Great Artists, C. Gregory, (ed.), vol 2, no.22, p.684) (ill.14). This engraving showed numerous proverbs but was placed in an abstracted landscape. Bruegel transposed the scene into a traditional Netherlandish village and increased the quota of expressions to over 100. This painting has in form lost all religious connection yet it communicates powerfully to the spirit of man. Its depictions of sin and stupidity are intended to make man notice his shortsightedness and amend his ways. Although Bruegel's art is secular, it is part of the traditions mentioned above. Its focus is at once spiritual and personal.

This concept also relates to a tradition detailed by Thomas A' Kempis who clarified a tradition known as artificial memory. This involves the direct relating of theological teachings to everyday images, which then form a link in the brain. In Bosch this is demonstrated in the close relation between lust and punishment, any time a person feels lust they would 'remember' the punishment linked with it, and this would act as a deterrent. So by a combination of high spirituality, great devotion and a powerful sense of realism, the tradition of art communicating directly to the people the fundamental themes of religious lore was developed and stamped emphatically on the middle ages. This was a development in the representation of man's foolishness and evil that was to produce the greatest heights in the development of depictions of the devil, for it was into those traditions that was born the master of spiritual communication, Hieronymus Bosch.







12. Netherlandish proverbs, Bruegel







13. The Blue Cloak, Hogenberg





## Chapter 4

### **Hieronymus Bosch**

the life of the soul in

the Temptation of St. Anthony,

the Conjuror,

the Garden of Earthly Delights.





"Where the spirit does not work with the hand,  
there is no art."

Leonardo Da Vinci



We have seen how Christianity arrived at its forms for the representation of evil, how this incorporated a moralising aspect, and how this moral tone was developed in Northern European painting. This chapter focuses on Hieronymus Bosch and his contribution to these themes, along with his own personal developments. When related to the earlier traditions, Bosch's work presents a potent amalgamation of elements; but with Bosch the devil changes form yet again. The powerful icon previously developed is not ignored, but in order to express new developments in the social relationship to evil a single form was not enough. Bosch explodes the iconography of evil in order to express the devil's omnipresence. To fully comprehend the communicative and moral power of Bosch's paintings we must expand the area of study slightly. It would, considering the focus of this essay being on a communicative spiritual art form, be very shortsighted, and not a little tedious, to study only the forms of demons and their symbolism in Bosch's work, and in any case this has already been studied in some depth by many authors. The devil, or evil, in the Northern European vocabulary is represented as existing in all worldly things, and Bosch's work contains reference to alchemy, astrology and other matters of importance to late Medieval man. We must incorporate these into the area of study if we are to achieve as full an understanding of the artist's work as possible.

In Bosch's work the devil roams the land in search of prey, tempting and torturing anyone it can. This is not a new development in itself; the devil was always accompanied by legions of demons, rivalling the angels, but Bosch gives these demons specific moral attributes, putting them to work in a more effective way. The devil's omnipresence represents an item of Christian faith, but with Bosch it is more than simply this. It is the expression of the general mood of the time, that we are all weak in faith and will, and Bosch seems to be saying that we should, at least, face up to this. This realisation would be the first step towards a strengthening of faith. This is Bosch's visual representation of the mood of the age as expressed in this poem by Eustache Deschamps: "I see the world is cowardly, decayed and weak, Old, covetous, confused of speech: I see only male and female fools ... the end approaches ... All goes badly" (*The Great Artists*, C. Gregory, (ed.), vol 2, no.11, p.560). Bosch's work contains this mood, but is not lost in despair. As we shall see, Bosch sometimes implies the triumph of good through faith.



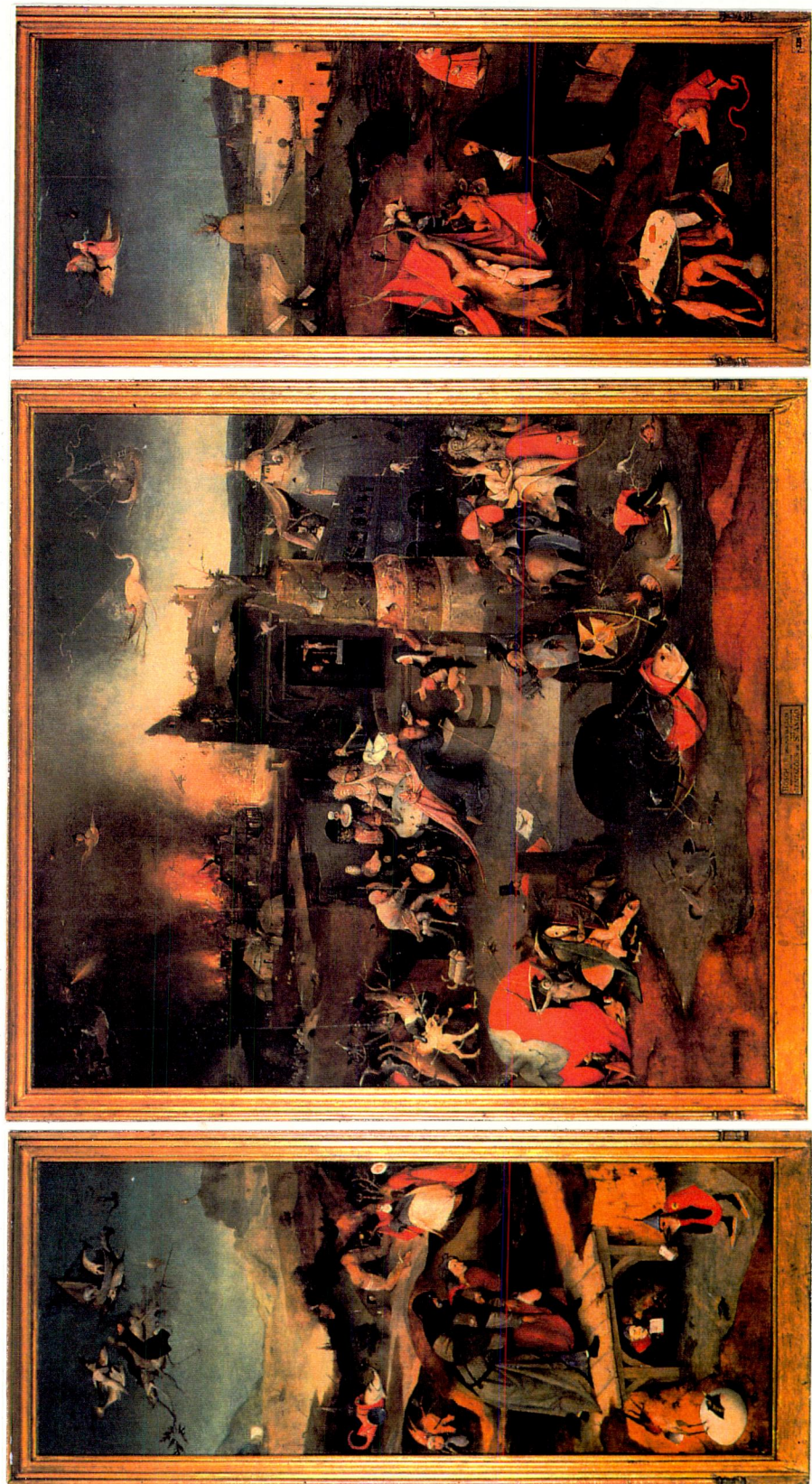


If we compare Bosch's 'Temptation of St. Anthony' to Cranach's engraving, we can see clearly the differences between the two forms of expressing the same theme. As we have seen, Cranach uses the concept of relating the religious to the everyday and then to the personal, and in this way forms a powerful connection with the viewer. Bosch's work does this by relating the story to the numerous sayings and proverbs that were so popular at the time, the mood, as expressed in literature, and the tradition of representing demons. Bosch makes great use of the amalgamation of animal elements and his creations show many subtle variations on this theme. Following the achievements of Van Eyck, Bosch creates forms that possess an intrinsic 'realness' and this in itself enhances the 'unreal' feeling many people experience on viewing his work. His wild amalgamations are treated so sympathetically that their existence seems possible.

Bosch's 'Temptation of St. Anthony' (ill. 14) is one of his numerous tryptichs, and one of many representations of this theme undertaken by the artists of the time. On the left wing we see the traditional form of St. Anthony being borne aloft by demons, (ill. 15), but here the devils have lost all their Greek and Roman influences. Visually, they are new forms, but they have been developed along traditional lines. They have taken influences from fish, birds and insects and more traditional 'demonic' animals. St. Anthony is seen again to be steadfast in his beliefs, as in Cranach's engraving, and the scene is also set in a Northern European landscape, but is markedly different to Cranach's. Bosch's land is filled with allegorical and symbolic forms. Here Bosch is an "illustrator of the whole range of vile actions of the devilish powers" (H. Guratzsch, 1981, p.76). Bosch relates the saint's temptation to the viewer by depicting the multitudes of temptations that are to be faced in life. Whereas Cranach focussed on the most powerful single temptation, Bosch expands the concept and litters his landscape with every temptation imaginable, both physical and spiritual. We see to the centre right of the left hand panel (ill.16) a group of horned figures, dressed in robes. These may be alluding to more traditional representations of devils, or false gods of the southern land, which are in Christian lore one and the same. On the right wing we see the saint turning away from his study (ill.17) to fix the viewer with a stare while all around strange demons attempt to lure him. In the sky a couple dressed in contemporary clothes sail by on a fish, echoing the saint's trial of being carried through the heavens, but whereas St. Anthony was







14. The Temptation of St. Anthony, Bosch.







15. The Temptation of St. Anthony, detail, Bosch.







16. The Temptation of St. Anthony, detail, Bosch.









17. The Temptation of St. Anthony, detail, Bosch.





seen to be deep in prayer, this couple seem to not to be unhappy. This may represent people who have given in to temptation, although as with most of Bosch's symbols this has been interpreted in many other ways. In the bottom right hand corner (ill.18) we see a figure, a head on legs reminiscent of the Indian gryllos, mentioned in part one. Here we see Bosch using traditional demonic forms, but the essence of the painting is more than the representation of temptations in order to warn people away from sin. The focus is on the personal, St. Anthony's faith and composure are the message.

The main image in the central panel is generally considered to represent a black mass (Clement Aymés, 1975, p.79-80), which Linfert proposes is taking place in "the ruined fortress on the Nile that he (Anthony) elected for his hermatige". The demons here are more subdued than in many of Bosch's other works. This is no wild, insane hell or day of judgement, rather this is a continued testing, the pace is slower. The aim is to hold faith, to retain control in the face of continued temptation. This relates to a more realistic and true experience of temptation that Bosch and his contemporaries would have known. St. Anthony must simply 'hang on in there' and wait it out, and his resigned and accepting expression in both the central part and right wing emphasise this, and reinforces the control and planning Bosch exercised in his work.

The demons of the central panel embody many new and very interesting forms, but their origins lie in forms we no longer possess, the moralistic vernacular of Medieval Christian Europe. This includes not only references to proverbs, but also to the occult religions and astrology. This becomes apparent when attempting to interpret the many fabulous devils in Bosch's more mature work. The most intriguing forms are to be found in the groups that occupy the left and right of the central panel. To the left we see a group of four figures, carrying a dead animal, presumably as a sacrifice, as they are heading for the 'altar' of the mass. There are three humanoid forms and one beast. The beast demon is an amalgamation of the hindquarters of a horse, a distant echo of Dionysus, wings, and a vaguely fish like creature, presumably the product of imagination. This demon shows the animal amalgamation tradition developing into one of imagination of animal-like forms. This is simply a development of the tradition mixed with a more profound and







18. The Temptation of St. Anthony, detail, Bosch.







creative imagination. It resembles the 'gryllos' form, yet the amalgamation is more subtle. The other figures include what may be a knight in armour and a monkey-like figure with a plant pot on its head. This form along with the pig-nosed character in green to the right, are more refined versions of the animal theme. The forms retain their human features to a greater or lesser degree, but take on specific animal forms in certain areas. This results in a new form of moralising, and one that still exists today. The human is represented as having certain animal characteristics, the pig's snout for instance, which may imply gluttony or uncleanness or one of the many traits which humans associate with the pig. Bosch often made his 'animal amalgamations' very subtle, men who resemble animals without actually incorporating any definable animal elements (ill. 19). This is a very refined development of the animal amalgamation tradition.

The final figure in this group presents us with what is one of Bosch's most impenetrable and enigmatic symbols. This involves a human figure with some part of its body, often its head, surrounded by a tree trunk. The figure to the left takes this form while the right hand figure has a fish-like lower body, a chalky upper body which transforms into a hollow tree trunk from the chest up, and at the point where their hands would be. This form reached its highest development in the "Garden of Earthly Delights", but is worth study in this painting. If we examine it in relation to the traditions detailed in part one, then the best interpretations we can come up with are (1.) some reference to the woods, (as we have seen the woods were considered the home of Pan, Dionysus and the Wild Man, so a form within a tree could be some reference to this theme); (2.) a development of the 'nature run riot' concept (this does surface in both its original and modified forms in Bosch's work, and here could be interpreted as a conjunction of that and the previously mentioned concepts of relating animal forms to humans). Until now 'nature run riot' has referred in the main part to animals. But with Bosch we see all natural forms take on insane qualities. Here he has incorporated man, animal and plantlife, to form a new and shocking demonic form. But these answers discount more contemporary influences to which Bosch was most certainly open. In Fred Gettings' The Hidden Art, Bosch's works are interpreted in relation to occult and astrological concepts. Astrology has long held an influence on Northern European painting (Guratzsch, 1981, p.153 ) and has been shown to have influenced religious architecture and







19. Christ carrying the Cross, detail, Bosch.







sculpture (Gettings, 1778, p. 17- 49), according to Gettings, the figure on the right hand side of the panel relates to an esoteric equivalent of Pisces. In a zodiac dating from 1653 we see under Pisces, a form Gettings calls 'Ichton', a fish tailed man, holding in one hand a child and in the other a rule. The legend is that Ichton, in an earlier incarnation under the name of Oannes, created humans from clay (Gettings, 1978, p, 90) This explains why the Ichton figure is holding a child. From this the hypothesis is that the child symbolises both Christ and Adam, the tree covered form Mary, and the forms surrounding them echo those present at Jesus' birth. This Gettings interprets as a mocking reference to the Church triumphant. At our present stage in understanding Bosch's symbolism, it seems unwise to engage in this judgmental type of interpretation. All attempted decoding of the symbols is useful, but too often it seems that scholars, having apparently decoded one of Bosch's 'messages', proceed to advance a hypothesis that is tainted with personal interests, modern concepts etc. If the group in the central panel do represent an attack on the Church by Bosch, what are they doing in a picture representing the temptation of St. Anthony, a figure who devoted his life to the worship of the head of that very Church?. This point will be visited again later in this chapter, but whatever specifics we have lost in the static of time, the general message is clear. These forms represent evil in the lives of men, and Bosch is attempting to tell us something pertinent in his depictions.

Although there are some exceptions, the majority of critics agree that Bosch's work was intended for Christian religious purposes. His home town of Hertogenbosh was comfortably wealthy, and family members, many of whom were artists had close connections with the city's Cathedral of St. John. His father and grandfather contributed numerous works to it. There were also a large number of confraternity houses belonging to various 'Brotherhoods' as well as many monasteries and convents (C.Gregory, The Great Artists ,1985, vol. 2, no.11, p.289). It is safe to presume that Bosch grew up in a reasonably wealthy, strongly religious family atmosphere. What is classed as Bosch's early period contains many secular works, depicting moral tales, such as The Conjuror. Bosch's focus here is not the depiction of evil, rather he illustrates mans foolishness in order to warn us against being taken in by the many guises evil may present itself to us in. Even today, this is the message most clearly distinguished by critics (R. Marijnissen, Bosch, 1987, p.23- 42).



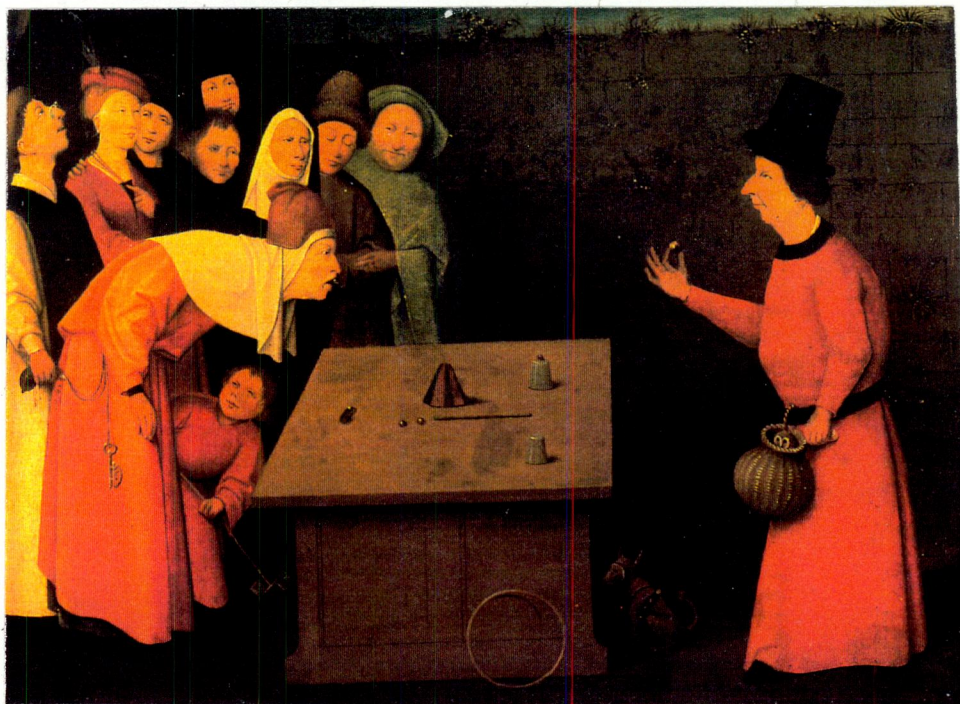


Although today the sheer creative power of the artist may overwhelm this message, to his contemporaries it could have only enhanced the communication. Bosch developed, using the everyday vocabulary of the time, a fabulous set of forms, all of which had connections with the 'known' but through this language, had the power to portray the unknown, the 'realness' promotes the 'unrealness'. This enabled people to face their very real fears in a form at once familiar yet frightening. This involved a masterful piece of design on the artists' behalf.

Bosch also speaks to his audience in another traditional language, that of the formal elements of art. Although he lived through the heights of the Italian Renaissance, his art had little to do with it formally. Unlike some of his contemporaries who attempted to incorporate the Italian advances into their work, Bosch continued to paint in a very definite Medieval style. Whether or not he would have been capable of emulating these artistic feats is of no consequence. The focus of Bosch's art was on as powerful a form of communication as possible. His figures are wonderfully expressive when they need to be, but in general are no more than icons. Also in the established Northern European tradition, he placed many religious scenes in a landscape which resembled that to be found all around the people. All these facts contributed to the formation of a highly communicative art form. His paintings were very concisely designed to speak as powerfully as possible to a defined audience i.e. Northern European Christians. If we take The Conjuror for example, the power of communication can be seen. Unlike most of Bosch's work, this painting requires no previous knowledge of the established artistic tradition. Its message and form are still current. It is to us, as to Bosch's contemporaries, a relevant subject.

In the painting (ill. 20) we see a conjurer at work, presumably in some market or similar place. A sizeable crowd has gathered around his table, including a nun and an amorous couple. It is assumed that the trick being played is that involving a number of beakers and balls (R. Marijnissen, 1987, p. 446). One member of the crowd is so taken by the trick he fails to notice the light fingered thief behind him who slyly empties his purse. This again refers to the recurring theme of man's stupidity, becoming so caught up in this world, that evil is allowed to creep up behind him. On one level it depicts an act we have all had experience of in one way or another, and it details a simple moral truth we implicitly know and instantly





20. The Conjurer, Bosch.





recognise in the painting. This is communication that needs little or no intellectual processing. It speaks a fundamental truth, directly to the everyday life of the person and spirit.

A print of this work exists, with Bosch credited as 'inventor', and this contains an inscription missing from the painting:

Oh what tricksters are to be found in the world,  
Which can hatch wonders from the conjurers bag,  
And split the people with their false tricks and  
wonders upon the table from which they make  
their living. Do not trust them for a moment, for  
if you too lost your purse you would be sorry. One  
cuts the purse, One quietly runs away with it. Those  
who turn a blind eye to this are also guilty. And even  
if they do not lose their money they will still have  
to pay.

The incorporation of this inscription transforms the work into a moralistic cartoon. The painting is not without wry humour, what Marijnissen called a "roguish mockery" (1987, Bosch, p.446). The print would make the work more readily accessible to the everyday people, so spreading this simple scene, and it's larger connotations. As is the case with much of Bosch's work, scholars tend to read all sorts of wonderful meanings into his paintings, and The Conjuror shows a clear example of this. Of the many interpretations Marijnissen details in Bosch (p. 446-448) perhaps the oddest is Wilhelm Fraenger's, who in 1950 described the scene as a "process of ritual castration, to create an artificial hermaphrodite". This serves to emphasise the problems we are faced with in attempting to interpret Bosch's work from a modern viewpoint, but in it's own time the work was a powerful piece of visual communication.

Bosch's best known work today, and the one that has produced the most speculation as to it's symbolism, is the triptych we have come to call The Garden of Earthly Delights . Although this painting presents some fantastic demons, it goes beyond signifying evils existence in the world. It's language is the language of the soul of the fourteenth century, and the painting is filled with references to the



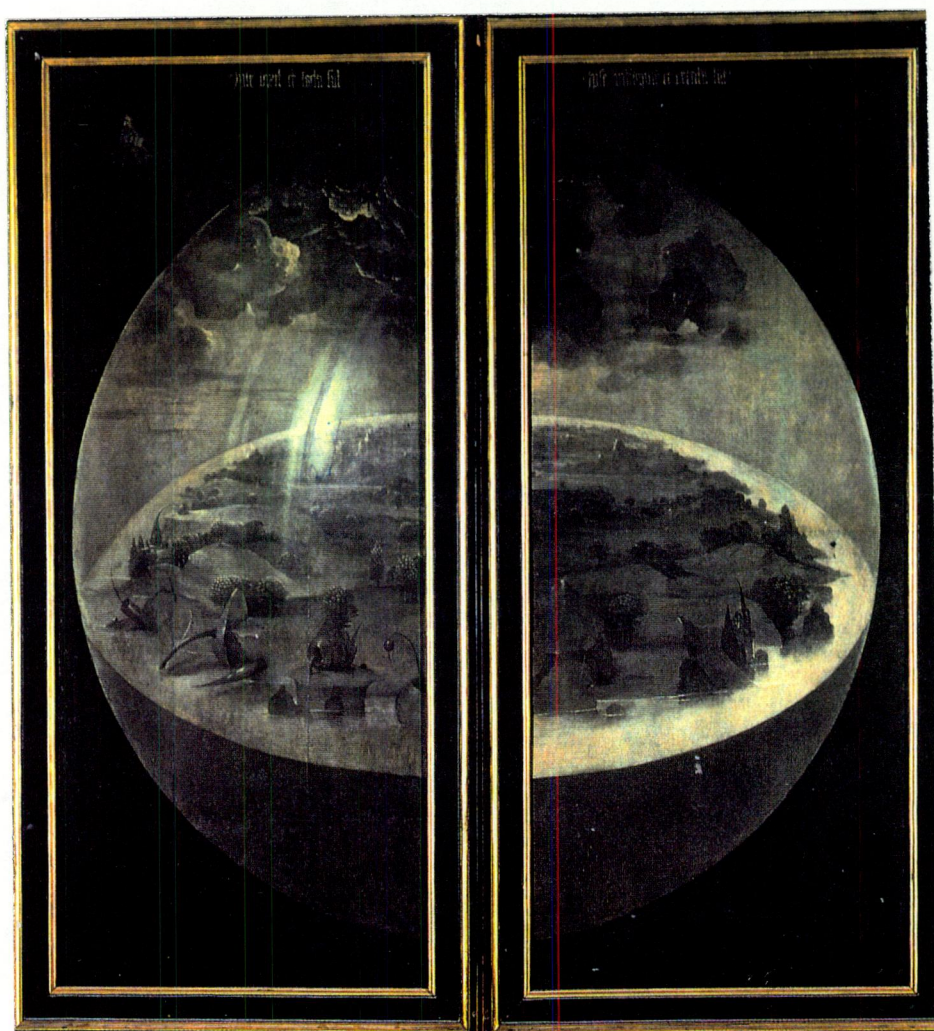




spiritual beliefs of the time. Ignoring the specifics, the best way to approach the painting is from a general viewpoint. In order to attempt any symbolic interpretation, we must first define what we consider to be the theme of the work. Firstly, we can presume that in relation to the generally accepted theory, it is a religious painting. Closed, the triptych shows a large globe (ill. 21), with an inscription in Latin from Psalm 33:9; "For He spoke, and it was, He commanded, and it stood". In the top right hand corner we see the Creator. The globe is generally taken to represent the earth on the first day of creation (C. Gregory, The Great Artists, 1985, vol .2, no. 11, p. 291). When open, the left hand panel (ill. 22) clearly depicts a scene from Genesis, although which scene has been the cause of some debate (R. Marijnissen, 1987, p. 91). In any case, these two scenes are decidedly orthodox in Christian tradition. The central panel (ill. 23) clearly depicts the relationship between man and woman. The right hand panel (ill. 24) is probably the best known piece Bosch ever painted, and can, without doubt, be taken as a visual representation of Hell. Now armed with these facts, we can attempt a very general interpretation: closed the painting depicts divine creation. The left hand panel depicts the Christian paradise, the Garden of Eden. The central panel is the link between this paradise and the hell on the right. In Christian doctrine the link between these two places, as they were to 14th century man, is sin. Therefore we can accept that the central panel, no matter what the specifics of the message, depicts sin. Now we have established three main themes, Creation, the relationship between the sexes, and sin. This simple formula, detailed by Marijnissen (1987, p. 91) has in a matter of minutes, discounted a large amount of erroneous interpretation. Having established, with reasonable certainty the themes, we can look more closely at the painting.

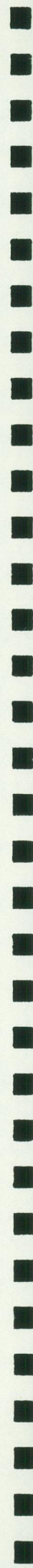
The closed triptych presents us with a clear globe, the earth in construction. This form is present in the central panel, and is echoed in many other forms there, where creation is tainted by sin. The Garden of Eden on the left, displays either Eve's creation from Adam, or perhaps their marriage (R. Marijnissen, 1987, p. 88) whatever, it shows them in 'innocence'. To the centre right, we see what is presumably the tree of knowledge, with a black serpent wrapping itself around it. Directly below it we see a small cave, as in Cranach's Temptation, and on to the land around this cave, crawl from the pool numerous amphibian forms. Here is

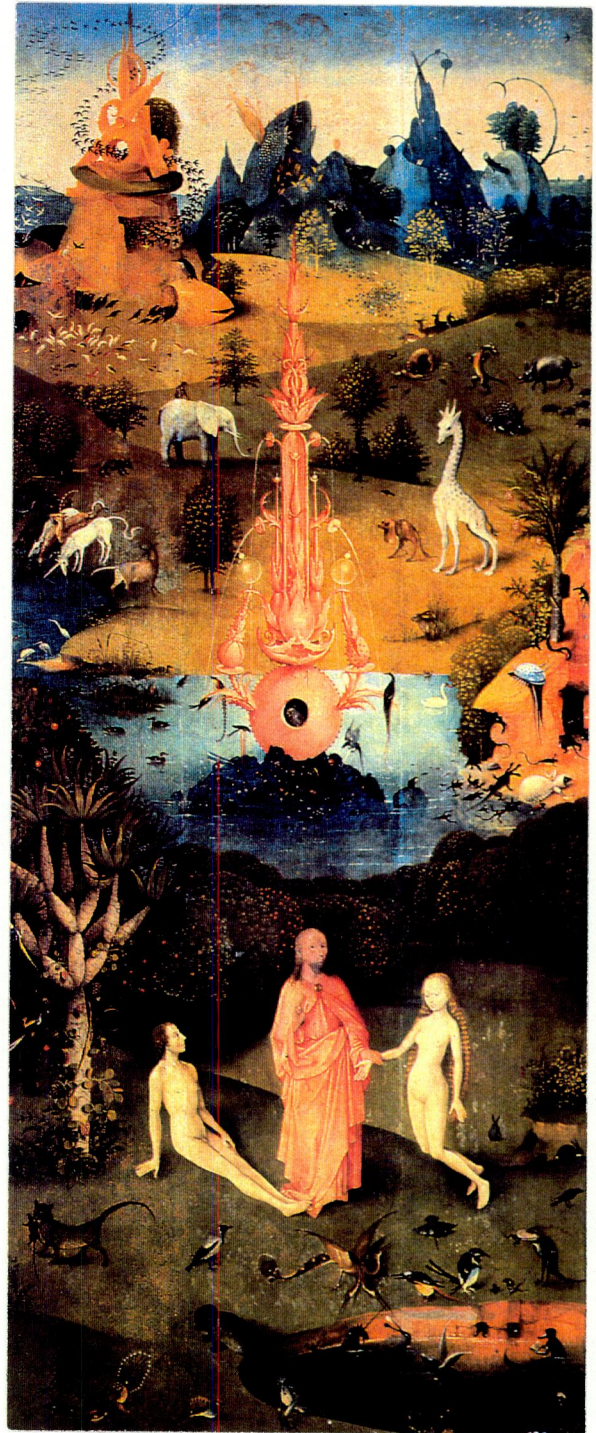




21. The Garden of Earthly Delights, (closed), Bosch.

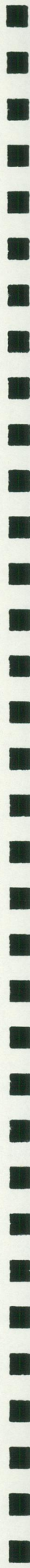






22. The Garden of Earthly Delights ,(left panel), Bosch.



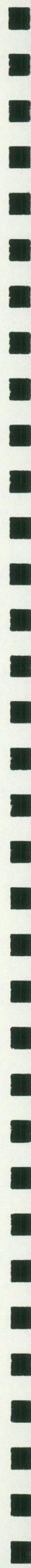


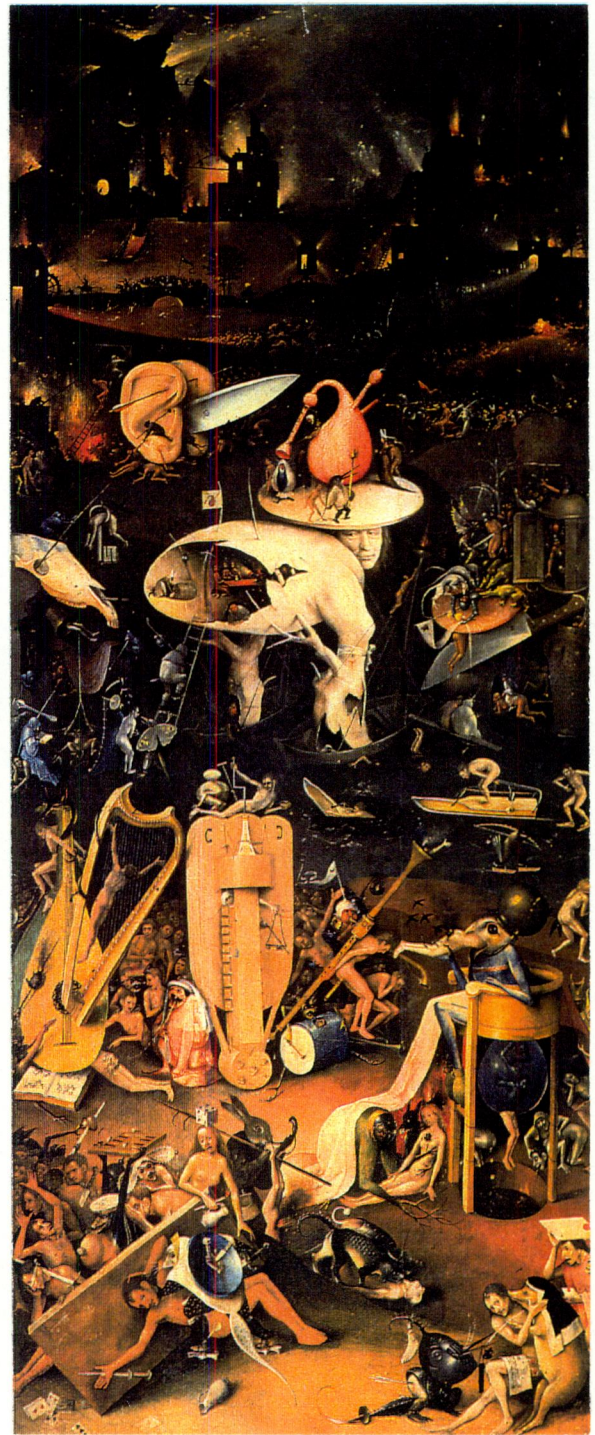




23. The Garden Earthly Delights, (central panel), Bosch.







24. The Garden of Earthly Delights, (right panel), Bosch.





'evil' present in the garden of innocence. The central axis of this panel is traced by two forms, both of the same colouring. The first is Christ, God's "word made flesh" (John 1:4) the second part of the Trinity, and directly above him, a fantastic fountain. This has generally been accepted as the fountain of life. (R. Marijnissen, 1987, p.92). It seems obvious that here Bosch is relating the two forms, giving creation under Christ a purity lacking in the central panel. If this panel's theme is creation under the word of God, then it can be accepted as illustrating the moment Adam and Eve were told "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over every living thing that moves over the earth" (Genesis 1:28). As I mentioned earlier, the story of Adam and Eve bears strong resemblance to Egyptian representations of lust, and giving in to its temptation, and this is the essence of the central panel.

Here we see the words of Christ being acted out. This is set out in three strongly defined stages. Firstly in the background we see another fountain, the fountain of lust or adultery (R. Marijnissen, 1987, p.92). This fountain also occupies the central axis of its panel. In the middle ground we see a large group of men, on animals, circling a small pool of women. Circling around a woman or group of women was an often used image in medieval times, with obvious connotations. That the men are riding on the backs of animals relates to the theme of animal amalgamation mentioned earlier. They are conventional signs which show the men as having less control of their desires, a step down from human to animal. The bottom half of the painting is crowded with figures engaging in a variety of actions alluding to the sexual act. Although not graphically displayed, it is shown clearly in the vast array of symbolic acts. The assumption is, after all, that the work was intended for a religious purpose, therefore the act was represented in a way so as not to offend, yet to make its message clear. To the left a couple are ensconded within a clear globe, resembling that on the outside of the wings. There is much fruit present, both enlarged and proportional, relating to Christ's words "be fruitful and multiply", the long held "forbidden fruit" as a sexual term, and the fruit of knowledge. The couple in the bottom right hand corner (ill. 25) have been interpreted as Adam and Eve (R. Marijnissen, 1987, p.93). Here Adam is covered in hair, reminiscent of the wild man mentioned in part one. The couple have descended a rung or two on the ladder of humanity, having been unable to

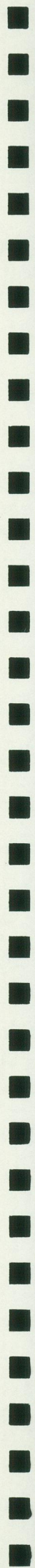






25. The Garden of Earthly Delights, (central panel), detail, Bosch.





resist temptation. 'Adam' looks toward the viewer while pointing to 'Eve', possibly attributing blame to her. This very chauvinistic viewpoint was the popular opinion of the time ( R. Marijnissen, 1987, p.93 ). The central panel shows the earthly results of Adam and Eve's fall. Here procreation is acted out but against the teaching of the Church, under a different fountain. As we clarified earlier, this panel depicts sin, so here the message Bosch is trying to relay is that the sexual act, outside the word of God, is sinful. The form of the central panel owes much to traditional representations of paradise, as detailed in Genesis. The usual depiction has a small circular or octagonal walled garden, often with a fountain, and usually at least one of the four rivers mentioned in the Bible. This form was also used to show false paradises, such as those of lovers or drug takers (Hughes 1968, p. 69-71), (ill. 26-27) so it is no surprise that Bosch's commentary on the false earthly paradise of lust uses this form. As with much of Bosch's work, the central panel has literary connections. The scene is perfectly echoed in this quotation from Hendrik Mande's "From the deepest feelings of Our Lord Jesus Christ":

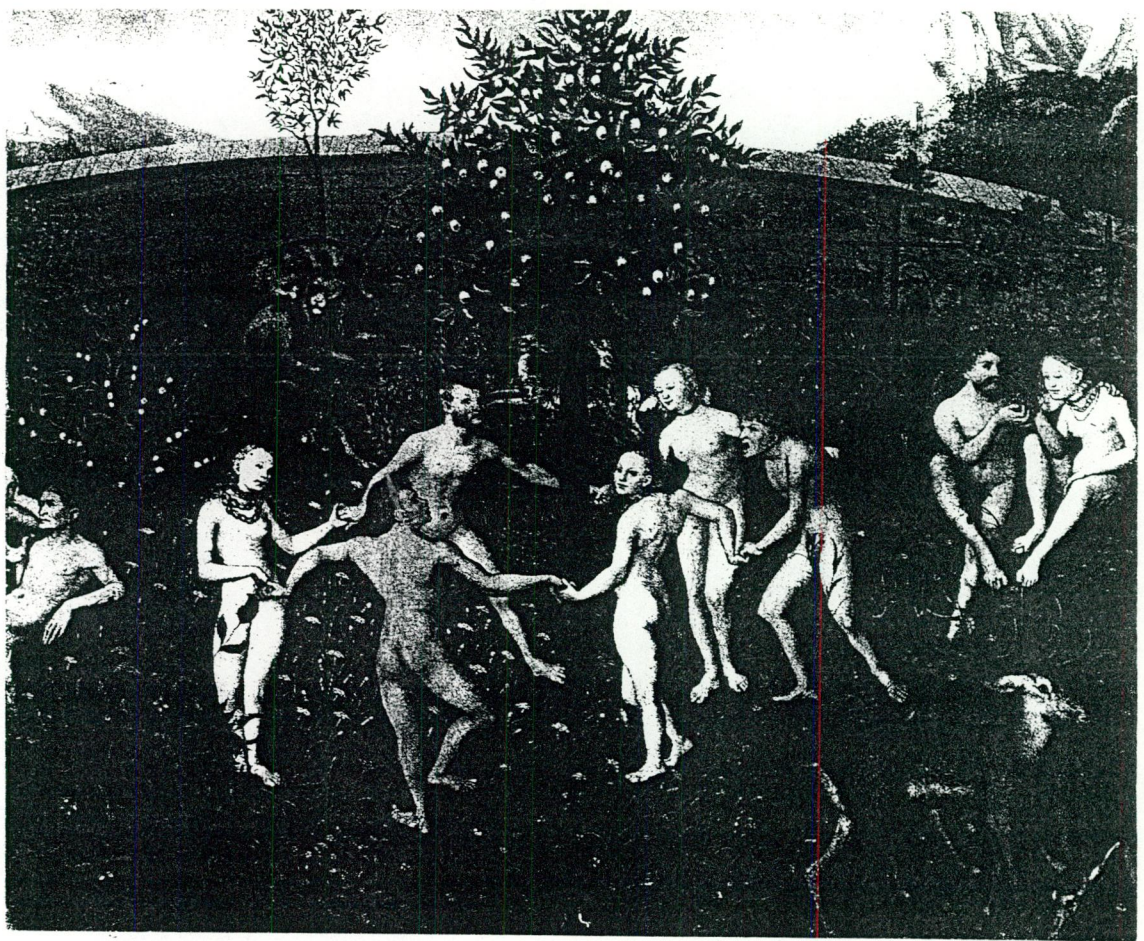
Those you saw dancing and playing on the land  
in the green fields with the trees and flowers, they  
are the one's who seek all their pleasures in the  
world and in the desires of the flesh, and it's  
earthly senses, who take pains in all things to  
pursue it's delights and to fulfil it's bodily pleasures  
They are so blinded by this that they have no  
knowledge or understanding of God, the  
kingdom of Heaven or Hell.

R. Marijnissen in his Bosch( 1987, p. 95-97) details this and other literary works related to this theme.

In the right hand panel we see the price of sin, eternal torture in Hell. This panel presents us with the highest development of Bosch's demons, and details another development in the representation of evil and it's consequences. This is the concept of punishment relating to sin. We see a proud woman being forced to view her reflection in the mirrored behind of a demon (ill. 28), a glutton is made to vomit into a pit, and a slothful man is visited in his bed by a group of horned demons. This adds to the insane, unreal quality of the work. Evil is expanded to







26. The Golden Age, Cranach.



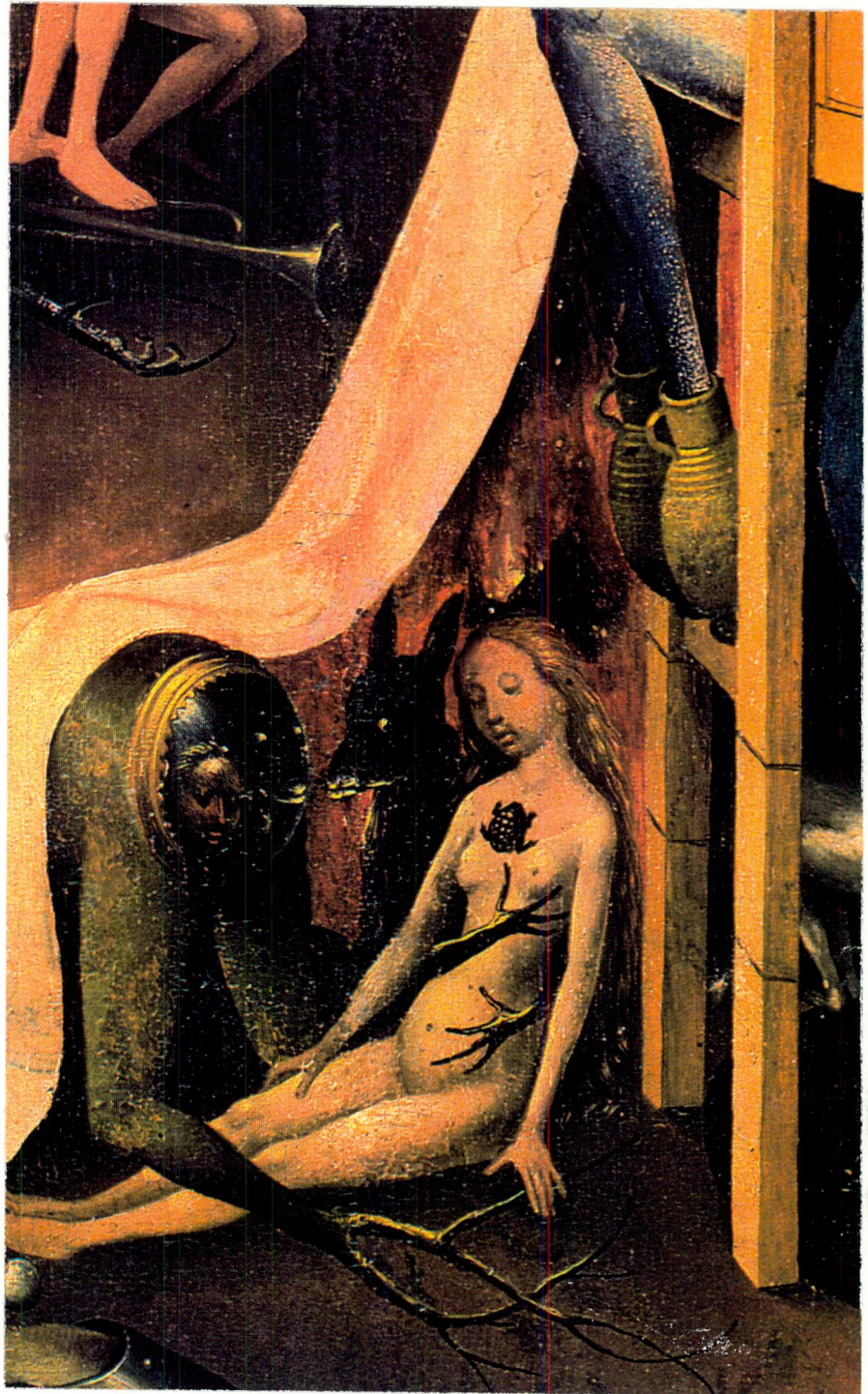




27. False paradise of lovers and hashish eaters, 15th century.







28. The Garden of Earthly Delights, (right panel), detail, Bosch.



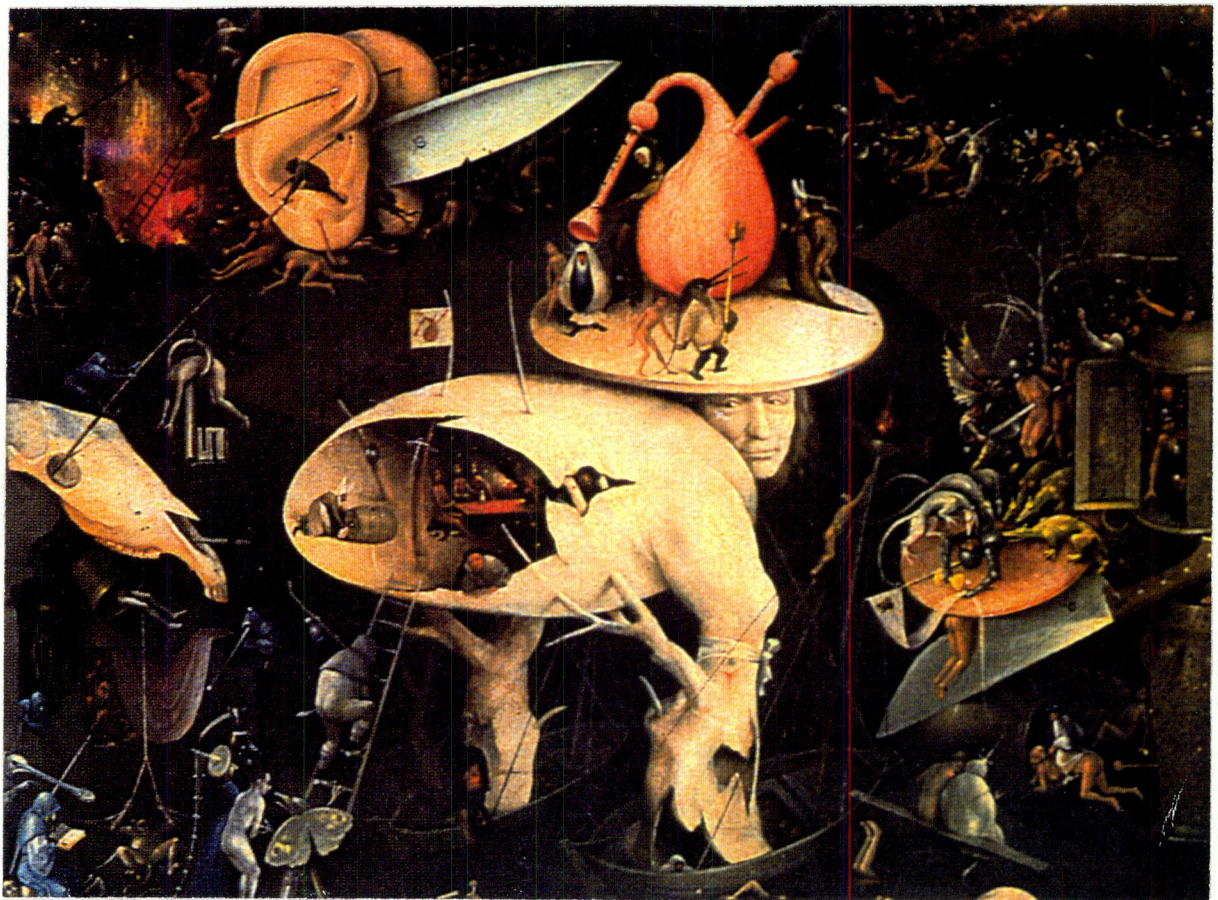


wild dimensions, the real horror is the reign of insanity, the total loss of all familiar aspects to their gross, mutant tortures. The scene has been arrived at through a highly conscious development, which the surrealists later accomplished through the unconscious, a total profound and effecting spiritual imbalance. Here again we see the tree man, whose presence has not, so far, been satisfactorily explained. We see it's power as a quite frightening dream-like image, but this is through eyes which know the work of the surrealists and the writings of Freud. The argument here, though is that demons are developed through conscious design, so we must ignore that strange relationship between their forms at first and focus on the forms alone. Firstly, we see a pale human head, then limbs that mutate into trees, and an egg-shaped 'body', broken at the back (ill. 29). The head has been associated with Bosch himself (C. Gregory, The Great Artists, Vol.2, no.11, p.1504). Again, using the traditions established in part one, we can relate the form most strongly to 'nature run riot'. Here we see the human form, what resembles an egg and plantlife joined together. If the torso section is indeed an egg, we can develop an interpretation from this, but without further examination it is interesting to stop here, with just these forms and investigate their relationship.

As previously documented, 'nature run riot' dealt originally with the battle to contain and comprehend natural forces. It is closely related to the 'animal amalgamation' tradition, and it is in the joint incorporation of these traditions that Bosch achieves his most disturbing work. "Nature run riot" is a presence in the central and left hand panels in the form of the strange rocky formations that form the background as well as in the swollen fruit in the foreground. Under Bosch, all of nature is under the effect of evil. This produces a perfect landscape for the wild and unsettling sexual allegories that crowd the foreground. 'Animal amalgamation' is present in all three panels, forming the demons in traditional, moralistic form. But with the tree man the very name we have given it details it's power. Bosch incorporates elements from different spheres of nature. He has incorporated an egg, in itself a form hard to define, with an item of plantlife, and then the most powerful amalgamation of all, has joined them with a human form. This conjunction of unrelated elements, in a landscape of demonic forms in itself frightening enough to medieval man, produces, even today, a deeply affecting image.







29. The Garden of Earthly Delights, (right panel), detail, Bosch.





Just as the first two panels have extensive literary relations, so does this panel. Although it is probably the most well realised individual vision of a spiritual hell in painting, Bosch here again is the illustrator of contemporary literature. A copy of the panel in Madrid has the words "Visio Tundaly" clearly inscribed ( Hughes, 1968, p.166 ). This is the same Vision of Tundale mentioned earlier. It dates from the late 12th century and goes into great detail about the geography of Hell. It became the most popular of the great number of these works by the end of the 15th century by when it had been translated and printed all over Europe. In popularity, although not in style, a Northern European counterpart to Dantés Inferno. In 1484 a version of the book was published in Dutch in Bosch's hometown (Hughes, 1968, p. 166). Gibson (1973, p.77) detailed it's inclusion in the third panel of Bosch's Haywain. The book included many references to people being punished in relation to their sins, gluttons being force fed or made to vomit continually, etc. It also contains reference to a 'bridge of Judgement' where the narrator is made walk along a thin plank, spanning a burning lake. This is illustrated in the third panel of the Garden of Earthly Delights where in the background, left of centre, we see a small figure silhouetted by burning buildings walk across a thin plank.(ill.30) The creature, often assumed to be the devil itself, in the foreground to the right (ill.31) is also a direct translation from Tundale and was in itself to become a popular form of Devil (R. Marijnissen, 1987, p.97). This devil's colouring may be related to the 'fountain of lust' in the central panel, as was Christs to the 'fountain of life'. But this devil cannot match in power the artists own creation, the 'tree man'. It is a much more affecting vision in it's form detailed in the previous paragraph, but if we expand the focus, and take into account the tremendous symbolism of the egg it becomes even more loaded an image.

The egg appears twice in the central panel, once with a specific reference to creation, and is echoed in many of the spherical forms in which figures are ensconded. It could also be related to the creation of the world on the outside panels. The egg is not only a strong symbol of creation, with it's inherent fragility, but it also express the riddle of creation, which came first..., and in doing so defines the need for a creator. It, as an image, also had other connotations. The study of alchemy was very popular at the time, and it was viewed, under Christian doctrine to be heretical. The Alchemists occult and esoteric occupation was greatly





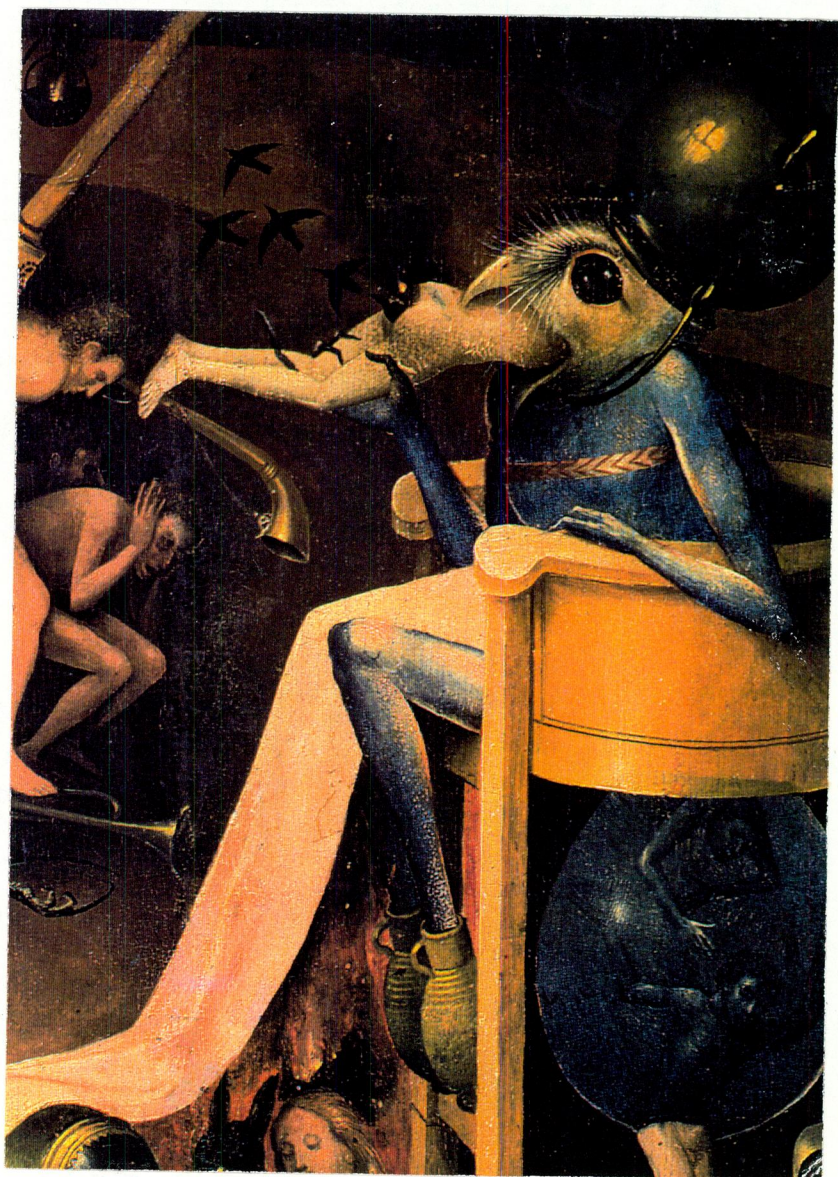


30. The Garden of Earthly Delights, (right panel), detail, Bosch.



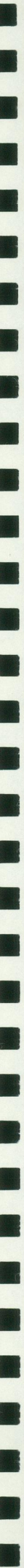






31. The Garden of Earthly Delights, (right panel), detail, Bosch.





concerned with the creation of new life, and the transformation of base elements into higher forms. This experimentation was in direct opposition to Christian dogma, and was frequently attacked by the Church. Alchemists attempted their procedures of creation and transformation within small crucibles. These were usually metal spheres, into which elements were mixed, and were generally known as the Alchemists' egg (Grilliot de Gervais, Witchcraft, Magic and Alchemy, 1971, p.53) and was often found as a symbol of creation in Egyptian culture (Ewa Kuryluk, Salome and Judas in the cave of sex, 1982, p.26). According to Kuryluk, the Alchemists identified as strongly with the woman giving birth as with God as creator. So the egg as a symbolic form, which appears in much of Bosch's work, would have powerfully related to creation and its study, and its use in the Garden of Earthly Delights produces a many pronged attack on Medieval society.











## Conclusion



The form of the devil has changed through its history in order to relate to the mood of the time. It's main purpose is to signify to the people that which the Church considers evil. It's original form in the Christian tradition, an ancestor of the image of the devil we know today, was developed from Pan, Dionysus and the Satyr because they concisely expressed the essence of all sin in their lust, animality and lack of morals. They were developments of ancient Pagan fertility cults, who saw woman as the creator of life, and their focus on creation without a spiritual reference was in direct opposition to Christian dogma. That these forms were the most serious alternative to Christianity also resulted in their incorporation into demonic representation.

The three traditions in demonic representation all relate to a question that during the middle ages was of great importance: how to comprehend and harness nature. 'Nature run riot' is the perfect expression of this. In its general use it refers to groups of animals out of control, later it was applied to all natural forms in Bosch's work where we see all of nature, animal, mineral and plantlife, taking on insane qualities. Nature becomes a gross parody of itself perfectly expressing an all encompassing evil. 'Animal amalgamation' is the most popular facet of 'Nature Run Riot'. Here we see animal forms joined together, again expressing worldly forms created in an unworldly way. 'Animal Instincts' is the human form brought down to its basest instincts, man stripped bare of the clothes of civilisation.

That all three relate to the animal can be seen as representative of two points. Firstly the basis of earthly sin, the act of sexual intercourse. This, without the church to give it a rational form and reason, to dislocate it from the 'animal act', was seen in the middle ages as the basis of all sin. It is the strongest surviving animal instinct in man. The second point encompasses this. The animal was an icon for the uncontrollable and the unexplainable, an encapsulation of all in Nature that man could not understand. When this was seen in a deformed way as with freaks of nature it was feared even more and came to be understood as a portent of evil. The basic themes of the devil, sex and nature, are today not feared as they were in Medieval times, and this is part of the reason that the devil has no real place in our society today.





We have no fear of the unknown that can relate to that experienced by Medieval man. Freaks and natural phenomena can be satisfactorily explained by science. But the main reason is the humanisation of our godhead. The process of making our god more forgiving and personalised has resulted in the almost total dilution of our devil.

The form of the devil was derived from Classical legend. The Greeks were the first to consistently define their God's as good resulting in the development of consistently evil devils. Previously Gods were capable of both good and evil. "Plato was the first active exponent of the 'beast within' ", wrote Mary Midgley in her book Beast and Man (1978, p.45). Plato used animal imagery every time he focussed on the subject of evil. The monstrous animal amalgamations of Bosch have their ancestors in Plato's animalistic forms. Again not one particular animal is singled out to any great degree (It was the Christians who grasped the form of the goat specifically) because each animal can be seen to have its good points, but the notion of 'animalism' in general, that which is not human, which is below our civilised and cultured life. The animal is that which religion and society force us to repress, lust, self gratification etc. and this is the reason it has become an icon for evil. The other side of this is the soul or spirit, the calming influence. This ancient concept leads through Christianity, right up to today's generally accepted, yet un-doctrinised conception of good and evil existing within us, rather than in a heaven or a hell.

We have seen how much of Bosch's work was influenced by literature. Each panel in the Garden of Earthly Delights can be seen as an illustration of one or more of the religious and moral writings popular at the time. That most of Bosch's work takes inspiration, in content, from religious and secular literature, folk tales sayings etc. emphasises its role as a communicative art form. It was a spreading of the 'Word of God' in a manner people could relate to. It was communication through the visual media. The power of illustration as a complement to literature has long been known and utilised. A good illustrator enhances the message by touching areas that the writer's form is not as well suited to, through composition, colour, etc. If the intellect and the spirit are taken to be the two 'receptors' of creative art then, although they overlap, the intellect is touched by the message and the spirit by the form this message takes. The spirit is the main receptor for Bosch's work, its message was the





general message of the times but its form gave it a power stronger than words alone. The strange forms and landscape, the dominance of animals and nature, the profound spiritual view of the world are all expressed in Bosch's paintings in a manner that even today cannot fail to reach into the soul and effect it. It is ironic that that which today clouds the message in its own time served to enhance it. We have lost the key to many of the symbols Bosch used to relay the specifics of his vision but the sheer wealth of these symbols at the time would have resulted in a message that could not be ignored. The earth is flooded with evil, everywhere we look we see sinners and demons and cannot help but recognise ourselves in some of them. Bosch's work is visual communication in the purest form. The importance given to the interpretation of specific symbolic images can overwhelm the essence of the message. What is important is the unity of the physical and spiritual on earth. Bosch's work shows the purity of the spirit being tainted by its place in the physical world. Bosch shows the 'earthly delights' in a devoutly religious way, exposing their wrongfulness in no uncertain terms. From this emerges the concept of the spirit's decay in the world. In his depictions of evil at work in the world Bosch defines a devil of sorts and in so doing sets one of the poles of morality, similar to those used by the church. The other is in ourselves, the knowledge of the purity of the soul. In Bosch's work we can measure ourselves against these poles and clarify how pure or tainted our spirit is in relation to the word of God. Bosch was, like Bruegel, a genre painter. He painted the life of the soul or spirit on earth.



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