From Quaternities to the Quintessence -
exploring the early 16C painting
'Christ Crowned with Thorns' by Hieronymus Bosch[1]

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http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/hieronymus-bosch-christ-mocked-the-crowning-with-thorns

At first sight, it is hard to believe that Hieronymus Bosch's painting of 'Christ Crowned with Thorns' in the National Gallery, London[1] could have come from the brush that stirred up a thousand and one nightmare images. Bosch is synonymous with the bizarre: his very name conjures up a world of hellish fantasy. Yet this paradoxically serene moment, frozen from the story of Christ's Passion, has none of the frenzy we normally associate with his painting. This picture is the calm 'eye in the hurricane' of Bosch's turbulent work.

The striking imagery of Bosch's paintings provokes an immediate emotional reaction, but our intellectual response is largely inhibited by the painter's enigmatic iconography, which confronts the modern mind with a mass of confusing riddles. In his vocabulary of visual expression, Bosch is the most remote of the five artists considered in this book. Although his style has affinities with other painters, it cannot be said to belong to any particular school. Bosch's individuality was the product of a fertile imagination working largely in isolation: a narrow life led in a provincial city largely untouched by the cultural mainstream of the Low Countries.

Hieronymus Bosch lived in the city of S'Hertogenbosch[2], the capital of the North Brabant region of the Low Countries. He was born into the van Aken family who had been painters there for at least three generations. His grandfather, Jan van Aken, is mentioned in the archives of S'Hertogenbosch cathedral, which was still being built in Bosch's day. Jan van Aken is thought to have painted frescos in the cathedral, where a Crucifixion of c1444 may be his handiwork[3]. Since the family was long established in the city, it is generally assumed, though not actually proven,[4] that Hieronymus was born in S'Hertogenbosch around the middle of the fifteenth century and adopted the shortened form of the city's name as his own, perhaps to distinguish his work from that of this father, uncles and brothers.

Although S'Hertogenbosch was a prosperous enough city, it was no hot-house of culture. It had no university and fostered no other major artist. Bosch was on his own, so to speak, insulated from the influence of artistic and intellectual centres like Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges and Louvain. To the masters of these cities, Bosch's work would have seemed decidedly 'provincial'. His painting had its roots in the International Gothic style that he had

inherited from his family: a tradition embodied in the gothic cathedral still rising in the midst of S'Hertogenbosch, but already fallen out of favour in the more progressive areas of Europe. Some of Bosch's puppet-like figures and crowded compositions would have looked very old-fashioned to more cosmopolitan eyes. There is no reason to suppose that Bosch ever travelled far from his home town, so it may be assumed that innovation in his work was through his own personal development, fed by the more 'portable' art of the popular woodcuts, devotional prints and manuscript illuminations. It is not surprising that such a restricted environment, like the evolution of animals on isolated islands, encouraged eccentricity in Bosch's creations. The financial independence afforded by the judicious marriage must also have breed Bosch from the rigours of patronage and allowed him to explore the world of his own imagination, a privilege denied most artists for centuries to come. He had married Aleyt, a daughter of the aristocratic van der Mevenne family. The match was a step up the social scale for the son of a painter and a tailor's daughter. Judging by the high level of taxes he paid, Bosch lived in comfort and enjoyed a growing reputation for the rest of his life.

At least one of his paintings was to be seen in the palace of Henry III of Nassau in Brussels.[5] Others were owned by Phillip the Fair and his sister, Margaret of Austria.[6] Bosch had achieved a reputation that outlived his death in 1516. In the latter part of the sixteenth century, Phillip II of Spain gathered together a large collection of Bosch pictures to display in the Escorial and the Royal Palace at Madrid, where the panel of 'The Seven Deadly Sins' hung in the King's own room.[7] Then for four hundred years, Bosch's work was ignored by collectors and artists alike. From the end of the nineteenth century onwards, however, interest in Bosch's painting was renewed, stimulated, in part perhaps, by the advent of psychoanalysis and later by the Surrealist movement – both concepts which would have been quite alien to Bosch.

Although it is the eccentric and the bizarre in Bosch's imagery that appeal most to the modern eye, the popularity of Bosch's work in his own day would lead us to believe that neither he nor his audience saw it as anything other than conventional. Yet it is Bosch's departures from the artistic norm rather than his conformities that intrigue us and urge us to try to discover the means of his pictures. 'Christ Crowned with Thorns' is especially interesting in this respect since it presents us with a double departure: the painting differs dramatically from the artist's own usual style, and it differs subtly from the standardised representation of the scene as it had been evolved during the preceding centuries.

Like generations of artists before him. Bosch was expected to turn out a repertoire of scenes from the Passion of Christ. The earthly sufferings and Crucifixion of Christ had gradually been given greater prominence since a shift in theological emphasis during the ninth century.[8] Until that time the veneration of Christ had centred on the exaltation of His image as Christ in Majesty ruling over the Heavenly Kingdom. But during the ninth century, the interrelationship between the Passion of Christ, the symbolic sacrifice of the mass and human sin claimed theological priority.[9] This new emphasis had two important

consequences. Through the re-enactment of Christ's expiatory self-sacrifice in the mass, the Church gained a monopoly in administering salvation to the individual (though the doctrine of transubstantiation was not to be official dogma until the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215). This in turn led to a greater demand for devotional images of Christ's Passion, in particular the Body of Christ on the Cross with the Blood flowing from His wounds, the origin of the sacramental bread and wine of the mass. The icon of Christ in Majesty was relegated to secondary importance, and became increasingly identified with His portrayal as the judge of the 'quick and the dead' in the narrative scene of the Last Judgement. Preoccupation with the Passion grew steadily, fostered particularly by St Bernard of Clairvaux during the twelfth century. In 1264, the feast of Corpus Christi was made an official holy-day in the calendar of the Western Church. But it did not acquire this status in the Eastern Church where there had not been the same marked shift towards the Passion. For some time the figure of Christ on the Cross had retained much of the dignity of Christ in Majesty, ruling, as it were, from the Cross rather than the throne. But from the thirteenth century onwards, the pain and humiliation of the Passion became more evident. The Body on the Cross grew broken and pathetic, rather than triumphant and majestic. Each episode of the Passion was given special signifances and symbols. Resonances were drawn from the Old Testament, of the 'type and anti-type' kind discussed in the earlier chapter on van Eyck's 'The Madonna and Chancellor Rolin'. The mocking of the drunken Noah by his youngest son, for instance, was seen as the type for the mocking of Christ.

By Bosch's day, the Passion and the Stations of the Cross had been parcelled out into a complex system for devotional meditation, represented by a sequence of standardised scenes. These scenes were illustrated in the illuminated manuscripts of the rich, and in the blockbooks of the less well-off. The poor saw them in the stained glass windows of their church and painted on its wall. They were acted out in the cycles of Mystery Plays performed annually by the guilds and religious fraternities of every prosperous town. The epic story of the Bible from Creation to Last Judgment passed before their eyes, the climax being the Passion of Christ played out in agonisingly prolonged and cathartic details. Dramatic and pictorial representations each influence the other.[10] Together, they provided the medieval artist with a standardised vocabulary of imagery that everyone understood at a glance.

In the Biblical sequence of the Passion, Christ is mocked twice: firstly, by the Jews, and secondly, by Roman soldiers when the condemned Christ is dressed in a purple robe with a ring of thorns for a crown and reed for a sceptre.[11] Early representations of the second mocking, the Crowning with Thorns as it is usually known, show none of the suffering and pathos that was to characterise the late medieval scene. A fourth-century Roman sarcophagus, [12] for instance, shows Christ standing upright and dignified, while a legionary places a wreath upon His head as though He were a victorious emperor. The Crowning with Thorns was seen as heralding Christ triumph over death: it was a true coronation. The physical cruelty of the tormentors and the pain of Christ's suffering did not find overt expression until as late as the fourteenth century. Until then, it seems that the

formalised irony of the mock coronation was humiliation enough. A wall painting by Giotto in the Arena Chapel at Padua, painted during the first decade of the fourteenth century, shows the first evidence of a new mood of drama and violence in the representations of the Crowning with Thorns. The body of Christ is no long inviolate. Tormentors strike as Him with sticks and pull as His hair and beard. By the late fifteenth century the original ambiguity and irony of the Crowning with Thorns had been swamped by the obsession with its suffering and degradation. The traditional representation of the scene now shows Christ seated on a bench surrounded by tormentors, two of whom use long wooden staves to force the Crown of Thorns down onto His brow. Christ is sometimes blindfolded. Other tormentors hit Him with their fists, tear at His hair and clothes, or kneel in a mock homage. In both painting and drama the Crowning with Thorns had become a standardised scene of callous violence.

To the contemporary viewer the most striking feature of Bosch's painting of the Crowning with Thorns must have been not what he shows but what he does not show. In a remarkable break with tradition, instead of the usual violence, we see the split second before that violence strikes. Not a drop of blood has yet been split. For generations the Passion of Christ had provided artists with an excuse to revel in horror, leaving the smell of stale blood as their pungent legacy. Yet in this picture Bosch, who could have outdone any one of them on that score, has held back. Why this deliberate restraint?

We can be sure that Bosch was quite capable of reproducing the absolutely standard version of the Crowning of Thorns because he does so in the grisaille painting of the Mass of St Gregory on the outside of the wings of the Epiphany Altarpiece[13], painted around the same time as our picture. And his two other known paintings of the Crowning with Thorns, though they move towards ours in composition and emotional tone, still retain the traditional sense of violence and pathos that our painting transcends. One is known only from copies. [14] But the second, a tondo in the Escorial,[15] is unanimously acknowledged as Bosch's own work. The border of the tondo is filled with grisaille painting of the Battle and Fall of the Rebel Angels, an invitation, perhaps, to regard the Passion of Christ in a wider dimension: as Creation went awry through the Pride of Lucifer, so it is redeemed by the Humility of Christ.

Similarly, by his departures from the artistic norm in the National Gallery's 'Christ Crowned with Thorns', Bosch is asking us to look beyond the immediate brutality of Jesus beset by four bully-boys in the spring of AD33 to things more universal. As we shall see, the enigmatic emblems that Bosch has assembled in this deceptively simple picture lead us to allusions both topical and timeless. From the topical scandals of the Church, to Man's timeless striving for an understanding of his own nature and his place in the order of the cosmos – a journey that makes travelling companions of alchemy and theology, astrology and philosophy. To the modern mind these seem disparate, even contradictory, disciplines. To the medieval mind they were not so. The people of Bosch's day saw themselves as living within a continuum in which the physical, metaphysical and spiritual not only co-existed but interrelated. Our exposition of Bosch's 'Christ Crowned with Thorns' will present a

progression of interpretations of the four figures that encircle Christ. These interpretations are not alternatives; they are concentric layers of meaning that lead us ever inwards to the crucial late-medieval theme of personal salvation through identification with the Passion of Christ.

The devout of the Middle Ages did not see the Passion of Christ as just a distant historical event. They believed that their own sins continued to torment and wound the actual Body of Christ in a perpetual Passion. When Christ's sufferings were acted out in the Mystery Plays, the performers were not dressed in the costume of the Biblical Holy Land, but in contemporary clothes that brought home the immediacy of the perpetual Passion. Bosch follows this convention in our painting, showing Christ's tormentors wearing the fashions of his time. And the contemporary costume leads us to the contemporary reference, the outmost of our lays of meaning.

In the early sixteenth century, it seemed to many Christians that the Passion of Christ was being re-enacted in scandalous attacks upon the Body of the Church by the Papacy itself. Bosch was painting 'Christ Crowned with Thorns' only a few years before the outcry against corruption in the hierarchy of the established church reached a climax inn 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five propositions to the church door in Wittenberg, precipitating the Church into Reformation. [16] Bosch had often singled out the religious orders and upper echelons of the Church for particularly sadistic treatment in his depictions of Hell. 'Christ Crowned with Thorns' implies the same criticism, but more subtly.

The Bible apportions the blame for the Crucifixion of the Christ between all classes of society, lay and spiritual. The standard medieval representation of the Emblems of the Passion shows the face of Christ surrounded by four heads representing the church, the ruling class, the bourgeois and the peasant. Bosch exploits the familiarity of this arrangement of heads in his composition for our painting, but he extends the parallel beyond its social generalisation to point the finger at specific targets of his day.

The para-military outfits of the upper figures would have brought to mind the mercenary armies which were the scourge of Europe. The oak leaves worn in the hat of the tormentor in the top right-hand corner of the picture would have been instantly recognised as the badge of the della Rovere family, in particular of Giuliano della Rovere (1443-1513) who had become Pope Julius II in 1503. Julius did nothing to inhibit the sale of indulgences and other corrupt practices that had brought the Church into disrepute. In fact, he made matters worse. In an attempt to enhance the Church's tarnished authority, Julius II tried to buttress the spiritual power of the Papacy by emphasising external pop and glory, and to strengthen its temporal power by devious diplomacy and military force. In 1509, Julius joined league with the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian I and Louis XII of France against the Republic of Venice. He was resolved to recover absolute authority in the territories that had been lost by his predecessors. Europe was scandalised as the Pope took upon himself the role of a general. Money, diverted from the Papal treasure or raised by heavy loans from the Jews, was 'laundered' to pay for mercenary troops to further Julius' militaristic ambitions. In

Rome, wrote Michangelagelo, 'helms and swords are made of chalices: the blood of Christ is sold so much the quart: His cross and thorns are spears and shields.'[17] Something of Michelangelo's bitter-sweet attitude towards his patron was expressed in a huge and awesome statue of the Pope, commissioned to stand as an admonition to the people of Bologna whose city had recently fallen prey to the Papal troops. [18] Michelangelo showed Julius giving the benediction with a grasping gesture that seemed more a threat than a blessing. As soon as they were free of the Pope in 1511, the Bolognese melted down the bronze statue to make, appropriately enough, a cannon.

In Northern Europe, the sense of outrage among the intellectuals was led by Desiderius Erasmus, the most outstanding scholar of that age. He made frequent derogatory comparisons between Pope Julius II and his namesake, Julius Caesar. In 1506, Erasmus wrote from Bologna that the Pope was 'waging war, conquering, leading triumphal processions; in fact, playing Julius to the life….'.[19] But he prudently reserved his most acid criticism until after Julius' death. In *Julius Exclusus,* usually attributed to Erasmus, Julius is shut out of Heaven for his earthly sins. At the gates of Heaven, St Peter voices the revulsion of Europe: 'While you wear on the outside the splendid attire of a priest, underneath you are utterly horrendous with the clatter of bloody weapons.'[20] 'Happy indeed is the Pope,' says Erasmus' St Peter, 'if he can make a mockery of Christ.' [21]

It is precisely that mockery which Bosch portrays in our painting. The tormentor with his badge of oak leaves is surely a hired soldier or official, in the pay of the Pope himself: the representative of spiritual power in the standard medieval layout of the Emblems of the Passion. By the same analogy; this tormentor, with the bolt of a cross-bow through his hat, also appears in both Bosch's other versions of the Crowning with Thorns. The tondo in the Escorial shows him wearing a badge of the double-headed eagle of the Holy Roman Empire. So in these two tormentors we may see the alliance of the Pope and the Emperor against the Body of the Church. Having accounted for the spiritual and temporal, the bishop and the kind, the standard format of the Emblems for the Passion leaves us with the bourgeois and the peasant. In our painting, the lower felt-hand figure wears the costume of the rich merchant, the hanging corners of his headdress weighted with pearl-encrusted baubles, and the tormentor on the right wears the everyday dress of the period. But here again Bosch is more specific. Among the accusations levelled against Pope Julius II, the most vehement were that not only did he borrow money from the Jews, and thereby encourage usury, but he was even prepared to make alliances with the infidel Turks, universally resented by the Christians since the failure of the Crusades to recapture Jerusalem. So Bosch further identified the right-hand figure as a Jew by his physiognomy, and the left-had figure as an infidel by the crescent moon and star of Islam on his headdress.[22]

Here then is the traditional layout of the four faces of the Emblems of the Passion, representing the apportioning of blame for the sufferings of Christ, reassigned by Bosch to illustrate the four forces that were seen to be attacking the Body of the Church in his own day: the corrupt Papacy, the Emperor, the Infidel and the Jew. But Bosch gives us far more

than a thinly-disguised political cartoon. We have penetrated only the first, contemporary layer of meaning.

Compared with most of his work, the burghers of S'Hertogenbosch would probably have found Bosch's 'Christ Crowned with Thorns' shockingly 'modern', particularly in its composition. His use of a group of half-length figures isolated against a plain background, with the central figure of Christ looking out towards the viewer, had its origins in Northern Italy. There had long been a two-way traffic of artistic ideas between the Low Countries and Italy, initiated by the arrival of Hugo van der Goes, 'Portinari Altarpiece' in Florence in, or just after, 1475.[23] Van der Goes' rich, but controlled, use of colour and the sheer virtuosity of his oil technique caused a sensation among Florentine painters and patrons. Some thirty years later, Michelangelo's painting of the Madonna for Bruges cathedral was causing a similar stir in the Low Countries.

In our opinion, the composition Bosch uses for 'Christ Crowned with Thorns' can be traced back to a prototype by Leonard da Vinci: his picture of 'Christ Disputing among the Doctors', painted in 1504,probably for Isabella D'Este. The painting in now lost and we know it only from a copy by Bernadina Luini in the National Gallery, London. The seminal influence of Leonardo hardly needs to be re-stated. His composition for 'Christ Disputing among the Doctors' is clearly reflected in other pictures of the same subject painted by his contemporaries.[24] Albrecht Durer, whose career overlaps with Bosch's, travelled twice from Nuremberg to Venice where he was profoundly influenced by the work of Leonardo. On his second visit, between 1505 and 1507, we know that he met Giovani Bellini, one of the artists who painted 'Christ Disputing among the Doctors' after Leonardo's composition. Was it from Bellini that he learned something of Leonardo's ideas, or did he, perhaps, meet the master himself?

Durer's engraving of the 'Virgin and Child with a Monkey' shows knowledge of the central figures of Leonardo's 'Adoration of the Magi' of 1481, now in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. We do not know how Leonardo's compositions were disseminated among his admirers, many of whom were in Venice, which he had visited briefly in 1500. But Durer's work proves that they were known, either through sketches or lost prints. A preparatory sketch for Durer's engraving of 'The Knight, Death and the Devil' [25] reveals that he drew the horse according to a method devised by Leonardo, constructing the body from square units based on the length of the horses head. [26]

While in Venice, in 1506, Durer painted his own version of 'Christ Disputing among the Doctors'. Inspired, inevitably, by Leonardo's conception of the scene, the painting is in complete contrast with Durer's engraving of the same subject two years earlier. The engraving, from a series of the Life of the Virgin, shows a spacious furnished room with pillars in perspective leading to the full-length figure of Christ sitting at a reading desk – the traditional visual representation of the story. The simple narrative scene of the engraving has none of the heighted intensity that the 'close-up' view, borrowed from Leonardo, brings to the painting. Luini, in his usual way, conventionalised and sweetened Leonardo's

composition in his version of 'Christ among the Doctors'. Durer, acting true to his form, exaggerated and coarsened it. Leonardo's lost original will have been somewhere between these two extremes.

Although we have no evidence that Hieronymus Bosch ever left his home town of S'Hertogenbosch, equally we have no proof that he spent his entire life rooted by his own fireside. Even if he did not travel as far as Italy, a wealthy man like Bosch must have had the opportunity, as least, to catch the Italian influence at second-hand. Perhaps it was Durer who provided the link between Leonardo's innovative use of these arrangements of figures and its appearance in Bosch's work. Besides the basic composition, two other aspects of Durer's 'Christ Disputing among the Doctors' find echoes in Bosch's 'Christ Crowned with Thorns': the carefully differentiated faces of the people around Christ and the choreographed interplay of their hands. Although the connection is inferred and far from proven, there is a pleasing intellectual symmetry in seeing this episode from the very start of Christ's earthly ministry reflected in Bosch's scene from its end.

Bosch would certainly have been fascinated by Leonardo's now famous pages of drawing of grotesque heads. The grim, almost sub-human, faces packed into Bosch's painting of 'Christ Carrying the Cross' [27] tempt us into believing that, late in his life, he must have acquired some knowledge of Leonardo's work. In the painting of the Low Countries, ugliness had long been equated with moral degeneration. But the Renaissance brought a more analytical dimension to the study of physiognomy, seeking to link physical appearance to intellectual and emotional qualities. According to medieval medicine, defences of body and mind were caused by the imbalance of the four fluids which were thought to govern the constitution of the body, the four 'humours': blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile. The ideal man had all four humours in perfect balance. In lesser mortals, the varying mixture of humours accounted for differences of personality and physique. An excess of any one humour produced an individual of a particular temperament or 'complexion': an excess of blood made a man sanguine; phlegm, phlegmatic; black bile, melancholic; and yellow bile, choleric. This theory had first been suggested by the ancient Greek philosopher, Hipocrates (c. 460-c.377CV), the 'Father of Medicine'. It was bequeathed to the medieval world through the writings of Galen (c.129-c.200 AD), whose teachings were considered almost infallible until after the Renaissance. Through medical texts and popular almanacs, the four humours and their corresponding temperaments were made familiar to everyone from the court physician to the housewife tending her patch of herbs.

The Guildbook of the Barber Surgeons of York [28] provides a typical example of a late medieval medical text. It is really a glorified almanac giving information about the planets and the signs of the zodiac, saints' days and rules for working out the dates of the moveable feasts of the Church, beneficial times for 'bleeding', guidelines for good health and, of course, the theory of the four humours and temperaments. The Guild book devotes a whole page to an illustration of the theory. In the centre is the head of Christ, representing the ideal man with all four humours in perfect balance, and around Him are four figures

representing the human temperaments. It is no coincidence that we find, once again, a layout analogous to the composition that Bosch uses in his 'Christ Crowned with the Thorns': the head of Christ surrounded by four precisely defined physiognomies. Like doctors, artists were professionally concerned with facial types and what they revealed about personality. Ours is not the first suggestion that the four tormentors of Bosch's painting were meant to personify the four temperaments, [29]nor was Bosch the only artist to employ this metaphor.

Albrecht Durer, whose work has already provided one interesting parallel, produced a woodcut called 'The Men's Bath House' around 1496, two years after he first travelled to Italy with the express purpose of studying human form. He uses the subject to illustrate the five senses and to explore the differences between the physiology of the four temperaments. Thirty years later, in what was probably his last painting, we find Durer applying the same device to his twin panel paintings of 'The Four Apostles', [30]each of whom represents a particular temperament. Durer's intention is clearly documented in his earliest biography, published in 1546, by Johan Neudorffer. [31] Neuudorffer's account of the significance of the 'The Four Apostles' commands particular credence since he was the calligrapher employed by Durer t o execute the inscription at the foot of each panel. St John, identified by the words of his Gospel, represents the sanguine type. St Peter, recognised by his key, is the phlegmatic. St Mark, named on the scroll in his hand, is the choleric. St Paul, identified by his sword, is the remaining temperament, the melancholic. By assigning one of the temperaments to each of the four Apostles, Durer is making them stand as representatives of all mankind.

Since the four temperaments are not Christ's Apostles but his tormentors in Bosch's painting, it is their least attractive qualities that we must expect to find portrayed in 'Christ Crowned with Thorns'. The more active temperaments of the sanguine and the choleric tended to be associated with the energies of youth, while the more contemplative temperaments belonged to middle and old age. The phlegmatic was usually the oldest, portrayed with pallid complexion, wispy white hair and beard, his eyes and nose watering with age – a description that admirable fits with lower left-hand face of our painting. The melancholic, lowest in spirit and often heaviest in physique, was frequently personified as a dusky-faced man in middle age, like the lower right-hand figure who weighs Christ down and almost sinks out of our picture. Of the more active temperaments, the choleric was fierce and quick to anger. This was the temperament of soldiers, but he was often shown in almanacs as a wife-beater too. The armoured fist of the top left-hand figure, and the grimly determined set of his jaw, marks him out as the choleric. The sanguine was seen as the least detrimental of the temperaments, handsome and in the prime of life. The remaining figure, with his treacherous half-smile, does indeed appear to be the most affable of Christ's tormentors.

The temperaments are also identified by their costumes. The Denis Moslier Hours, printed by Jean Supre in Paris c. 1490, illustrates the multiple correspondences made

between man and the cosmos in an engraving called the 'visceral planet man.'[32] In the four corners of the illustration, as might be expected, we find personifications of the temperaments differentiated, among other emblems, by their clothes. The choleric wears a suit of armour. The sanguine wears court dress. The phlegmatic wears the robes of a wealthy merchant, and the melancholic the sober dress of a scholar. In Bosch's painting exactly the same distinction is made in the costumes of Christ tormentors, confirming the temperaments assigned to them.

The very popular *Shepherds' Calendar*, first published in French in 1493 and subsequently translated into several other languages, follows the Moslier Hours in also giving each temperament an emblematic animal: a lion for the choleric;[33] a monkey for the sanguine; a lamb for the phlegmatic; and a pig for the melancholic. This rather odd four some of animals appears in no other context. The text of the *Shepherds' Calendar* provides a clue to its relevance. We are told[34] that we may discover a person's 'complexion' by observing the effect of wine upon the individual. In his cups, the choleric man has 'vin de lyon': he is driven to dance and to create a commotion. The sanguine man has 'vin de singe': he becomes playful and inclined to chase the ladies. The phlegmatic man has 'vin de mouton': he turns serious and more intent on business than ever. The melancholic man has 'vin de porceau': he wants only to sleep and to dream. This catalogue of drunkenness is not entirely frivolous. The writer was quite serious in his intent. The imagery of these four animals may be traced back to a thirteenth-century story of Noah which in turn derives from a Hebrew tradition going back to at least the sixth century.[35] According to this story, Noah blended the blood of a lion, a monkey, a lamb and a pig to make fertiliser for his vines. The grapes from the vines eventually became the wine from which Noah became drunk. [36] The four animals, therefore, became a popular metaphor for the progressive stages of drunkenness. In the Biblical story, the drunkenness of Noah led to the mocking of his nakedness by his youngest son, Ham. As we have already noted, the mocking of the drunken Noah in the Old Testament was seen by medieval Christian thinkers as the 'type' for the Mocking of Christ in the New Testament – the scene Bosch sets before us. Christ himself was often referred to allegorically as the one 'true vine', his blood being the wine of the sacrament. The informed audience of Bosch's day, schooled in the contemplation of the Passion and exegesis of its emblems, would have recognised such resonances in his painting of 'Christ Crowned with Thorns'.

But Bosch's metaphor does not end with the four temperaments. In the medieval world picture, everything connects. As Cornelius Agrippa was to write soon after Bosch's death: man 'doth contain and maintain within himself all numbers, measures, weights, motions, Elements and all other things which are of his composition.[37] The body of Man was seen as a microcosm of the macrocosm, subject to the same celestial influences as the planets and starts. Every medieval almanac, like the Shepherds Calendar or the *Guildbook of the Barber Surgeons of York*, usually included diagram of the human body showing which parts of the anatomy were governed by which signs of the Zodiac. The feet, for example, were rules by Pisces. Inevitably, the four human temperaments were seen to be subject to a

particular planet. Jupiter presided over the sanguine man, who wears in his hat a sprig of oak leaves, the emblem Julius II had appropriated from the god Jupiter. The phlegmatic temperament, being watery, was naturally governed by the Moon. Mars, the bringer of war was the planet ruling the excitable choleric temperament, and the melancholic came under the gloomy shadow of Saturn.

As our temperaments reflected the celestial workings of the cosmos, so they were also subject to the material nature common to the whole of manifested creation. The *Guildbook of the Barber Surgeons of York* says that the four temperaments 'are referred unto the four elements' – that is the four primary elements of which all matter was believed to be composed – Fire, Air, Earth and Water.

These four elements were first defined by the Greek philosopher, Empedocles(c 500-c. 430 BC) who called them the 'roots' of all things. They represented a microcosmic dimension of the four most readily distinguishable forms of matter in the world around us: the land, the ocean, the atmosphere and the celestial 'fire' of the sun and stars. Under the action of the two opposing forces of love and hate, the combination of the elements was believed to take place within a four-period cosmic cycle. During the reign of hate the elements separate; during the transformation from hate to love, they draw together and begin to combine; during the rule of love, harmony is established between the elements to produce a perfect world; but with the return of hate comes repulsion and decomposition.[38] In the *Guildbook of the Barber Surgeons of York* theses four phases are still recognizable in the terms the writer inserts between the groups of correspondences appropriate to each of the four elements: attraction, cohesion, digestion and expulsion. In his *Timaeus*, Plato (c. 428 – c. 347) took the theory of the four elements and refined it further, assigning numerical proportions between the elements and giving each its own particular geometric form. [39]

During medieval times there was some variation in the relating of the temperaments to the four elements, but the most common was that adopted in the *Guildbook of the Barber Surgeons of York*, *The Shepherds Calendar* and the Denis Moslier Hours. In all these sources, Fire inflamed the choleric; Air breathed vitality into the sanguine; Earth weighed down the melancholic; and Water dissipated the phlegmatic. *The Shepherds Calendar* illustrates the fire of each temperament standing on its appropriate element. So we may also see the four faces of Bosch's 'Christ Crowned with Thorns' as representative of the four elements.

Bosch has extended the metaphor of Christ's tormentors to include the maladies of mankind from the political to the personal, and from the personal to the universal. The ideal man, within each of us, is hedged about and confined by the human limitations of the four temperaments and the material limitations of the four elements. As in a nightmare, the circle closes in: the very elements of Creation turn upon the Creator. The thorns will burn His brow like Fire. Air will hiss corruption into His ear. Water rises to swamp Him in a stinking tide of lust. And Earth tries to drag down His spirit.

It may seem that such speculation demands a long stretch of the imagination, leading us well away from the orthodox Christianity of the Low Countries in the early sixteenth century. But a beautifully illuminated Dutch manuscript called *The Compendium of Christian Faith* [40] shows that such thinking was quite the norm in towns and cities like S'Hertogenbosch. The original manuscript of *The Compendium of Christian Faith* was written in 1404 for Duke Albert of Bavaria, Count of Holland. Several copies were made during the fifteenth century. This encyclopaedia of Christian belief was one of many such popular compendia, the sort of book that any educated person, like Bosch, would have known. Between concepts of God and the Trinity, and the story of Creation, it happily interweaves the signs of the Zodiac, the four temperaments and the four elements. One illuminated capital shows the four elements stratified in just the same way as Bosch's representatives of the elements in our painting: Earth being the lowest, Water just above, then Air and finally Fire. *The Compendium of Christian Faith* makes no distinction between Christian dogma and such secular, even pagan, beliefs. They were all integrated parts of the medieval world picture. And the inclusion of such matters was not just a sop for the superstitious. In his writings, the great thirteenth-century theologian, St Thomas Aquinas, debates at length the question of whether the form of the four elements remained in the Body of Christ as He hung of the Cross.[41] Such matters, then, were hardly alien to Bosch, his painting of 'Christ Crowned with Thorns', or his audience.

But where does Bosch's layered metaphor lead us? Four tormentors, four humours, four temperaments, four elements, all conspiring to trap mankind in its base nature. How can we escape from this imprisonment? The picture does provide an answer. When Erasmus wrote the introduction to his *Enchiridion Militis Christi* in 1518, [42] he must have had in mind an image very like Bosch's painting of 'Christ Crowned with Thorns'.

He writes –

'I will paint a certain image of thyself'as it were in a Table and set it before thine eye; that thou mayest perfectly know what thou art inward and within thy skin…...Some vices accompany the complexions of the body. As appetite and lust accompany the sanguine man; wrath, fierceness, cursing followeth the choleric man; grossness of mind, lack of activities, sluggishness of body, to be given to much sleep followeth the phlegmatic man; envy, inward heaviness, bitterness and to be solitary, elf-minded, sullen and churlish followeth the melancholy person…. Christian man hath not war unto another but with himself. If you call the sky, the earth a, the sea and this common air the world, so is there no man which is not in the world. But if you call the world ambition, desire of honour, covetousness, bodily lust, so are thou worldly. Verily a great host of adversaries springeth up out of our own flesh.'[43]

Erasmus gives us yet another set of four that we might apply to Christ's tormentors: four categories of sin. But he also points to the only way out of the limitations of our human weakness:

The chief hope and comfort of victory is if thou know thyself to the uttermost…There was never no storm of vices that did so overcome and quench the heat of charity but it might be restored again at this flintstone of Christ. Let Christ continue and abide as He is indeed a very centre or middle point unmoved.[44]

Here is the stillness that we find in the heart of Bosch's painting: the face of Christ, unmoved and unmarked by his assailants. Here is the stillness that marks off Bosch's scene from a hundred others. Here is the stillness that endowed the crowned Christ of that Roman sarcophagus with such calm dignity.

Time stands still. The Crown of Thorns is poised, almost like a halo, to bite down on Christ's head; the wooden poles are at hand ready to drive the thorns into his skull; the seamless white robe is about to be ripped; a hand hints at more intimate abuse; and a last, insidious whisper suggests that even now collaboration with the authorities might reverse this regrettable chain of events.

Bosch's freezing of the action at the moment just before the violence strikes is a successfully ambiguous device. On one hand, it heightens the horror of the scene by leaving the violence to our own imagination – and everyone knew what happened next. On the other, the suspended animation prevents an overwhelming emotive response by alienating us from the violence and forcing us to consider the situation and its context instead of the action. We are set outside the scene to be better placed for a rational contemplation of its meaning. We might take a modern analogy for this alienation. To those involved in a car crash, time seems almost infinite in the last few inches before collision. Space collapses and time expands. Bosch presents just that experience in 'Christ Crowned with Thorns.' All the faces are crushed into the same picture plane, flattened against a bland background. There is no breathing space in the picture, yet there is all the time in the world: a single moment is projected beyond its present into an eternal dimension.

This is the stuff of meditation, and the real function of devotional image. This is why the people of the late middle Ages dwelt so obsessively on the sufferings of Christ. It was not just morbid fascination. They believed that identification with the Passion of Christ was the only way through the torments of this world to personal salvation. If any man will come after me,' says the Gospel of St Matthew, 'let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.' For more than a century, Christians in the Low Countries had been struggling beyond passive participation in the formalised ritual of the Church towards a more personal mysticism based on just this kind of meditation.

Bosch's home town may not have had much by way of 'avant garde' culture, but what it did have was religion. And paradoxically that religion was progressive rather than conservative. S'Hertogenbosch was unusually well-provided with monasteries and convents, even for the late Middle Ages. Although laxity within the traditional Orders gave Bosch material for some of his most biting satires, one religious society, the Brethren of the Common Life, continued untarnished the simplicity and holiness with which it had been

founded over a century earlier. The Brethren of the Common Life began as a grass-roots movement, made up mostly of lay members who took no formal vows. It grew up outside the hierarchies of the established Church and independent of the Universities.

The Order was founded by Gerard Groote and approved by Pope Gregory XI in 1376. The Brethren first met at a private house in Deventer. Ten years later, they set up the monastery of Mount St Agnes at Windesheim, near Zwolle, financed by the copying of Bibles, prayer books and other manuscripts. But the meeting-houses in towns were not abandoned. They continued as centres for preaching and pastoral care, and as informal schools for religious study. Erasmus was educated at the houses of the Brethren of the Common Life at Deventer and at S'Hertogenbosch, where he spent three years. The school set the religious tone in Bosch's home town and in his work. It is not surprising that we find such strong parallels between the caustic writing of Erasmus and the often savage painting of Bosch. Although the Brethren remained loyal to the Pope, they still saw it as their duty to denounce the abuses and scandalous behaviour of many priests: the corruption which both Erasmus and Bosch satirised in their work, and which led, eventually, to the Reformation.

In the early fifteenth century, the Brethren of the Common Life became part of the wider 'devotia moderna' movement. It was called 'modern' in contrast to the 'old' spirituality of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries which had been tied strongly to the ritual and central authority of the Church. The new emphasis was on self-knowledge and morality, individual meditation and devotional reading. Above all it stressed the personal responsibility for salvation through an early life modelled on the humanity and virtues of Christ. The testament of the Brethren of the Common Life was *The imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis (1389-1471), written at the monastery of Mount St Agnes around 1413 and still in print today. In his book, we find eloquent expression of what was seen as the only escape route from imprisonment by the torments of sin, the temperaments of humanity and the elements of material existence; 'the only road to oneness with God is by treading the "Royal Road to the Holy Cross" – devotion to Christ Crucified.' [45] It is against this devotional background that Bosch's 'Christ Crowned with Thorns' must ultimately be placed. The imitation of Christ could, indeed, be a sub-title for the painting.

A meditative picture like this must have been intended for the private chapel of someone deeply religious – a member of the Brethren of the Common Life perhaps, or one of their lay houses. Since Bosch was wealthy enough not to depend on patronage for his work, the picture may even have been painted for himself, his own personal prayer. Durer sometimes gave his own features to his pictures of the Christ in a particularly personal kind of identification with the Saviour. Perhaps we may sense something of the same identification in Bosch's painting.

As meditation takes the adept beyond the daily round to a fifth dimension, so we must now escape from the circular interpretations of our four tormentors to focus on the fifth face, Christ. Each of the contexts in which we have set the four tormentors provides its own fifth dimension, its own escape from the prison of Man's nature to a more perfect

world. If the tormentors are taken to be the vices that spring from our flesh, then Christ is Erasmus' still centre unmoved. If they represent the four elements, then Christ is the ether, called the fifth element by Aristotle. His 'quintessence' gave celestial bodies their perfect circular motion. It stood for the 'soul' of the stars and was latent in the four material elements. If we see them as t he four human temperaments, then Christ is the Ideal Man in whom the balance of humour achieves perfection.

Francesco Giorgio's *Harmonia Mundi*, written in 1525, less than a decade after Bosch's death, calls Christ 'Le Grand Homme Archetype' who, because of his perfection, contains within himself all things inferior. [46] For Giorgio, following in Plato's footsteps, the harmony of the world to which his title refers was primarily numerical; the cosmos was created and functioned on the basis of mathematical proportion. Number, if not quite divine, was the next best thing to it. Quaternities recur throughout the book. Mathematics itself is subdivided into four: number, measuring, music or harmony and celestial arithmetic.[47] This division corresponds to the four disciplines of the 'quadrivium', the medieval university course that led to the Masters Degree and which we meet again in the next chapter: Arithmetic, Geometry, Music and Astronomy. In the introduction to the French translation of Giorgio's book,[48] Guy Le Febre de la Boderie attaches special importance to the number four because it contacts all numbers; its integers add up to ten, the decad, and thereby return to the divine unity. So our four tormentors, be they vices, elements or temperaments are purified through the Passion of Christ and re-forged into a unity with the divine. The devout Christian, meditating on such an image as Bosch presents in his 'Christ Crowned with Thorns', saw before him Thomas Aquinas' 'Royal Road' to oneness with God.

All philosophies contain an expression of the transcendental in some shape or form. For the alchemist it was the philosopher's stone which could turn base metal into gold. Alchemists were not merely eccentric experimenters, likely to blow themselves up at any moment as they stumbled towards the 'proper' science of chemistry. Alchemy had always had a serious philosophical dimension. From the beginning there had been two types of alchemist: the practical man and the armchair theorist. The enlightenment sought by the alchemist was quite comparable to that of the Christian mystic, so it is not surprising that several great theologians are known to have dabbled in the theory, if not the practice, of alchemy. A Treatise on the philosopher's stone was attributed to Thomas Aquinas during the Middle Ages. Any educated man, like Bosch, would have been familiar with some of the symbolism of alchemy, and it provided a quite legitimate source of imagery, even in the context of overtly Christian paintings.

An illustration from a later manuscript [49] of the work of the most influential alchemist of the Middle Ages, Nicholas Flamel (1330-1417), provides yet another parallel for composition used by Bosch in 'Christ Crowned with Thorns'. Here again the four material elements are shown surrounding a symbol of the supernatural – this time the mermaid-like Melusina. She was Flamel's metaphor for the feminine spirit of nature, the primal mother of

being and the first of many such exotic creatures met on the long road that led to the production of the Philosopher's Stone. Melusina stood for the perpetual cycle of generation and regeneration that led eventually to the perfection of balance between the four elements. [50] We are reminded of Erasmus' 'flintstone of Christ' at which charity might be continually rekindled to overcome and quench the 'storm of vices.'

As the alchemists observed in detail the chemical processes in their retorts, they conjured up a fantastic world of such cryptic beings, both to explain what they saw and to protect the secrecy of the Work. Melusina is a symbol of the transmutation of the material world. She is both creator and destroyer: a manifestation of the Earth Mother that devours the dead and disgorges the newborn. She must be sealed in the vessel with the Water and purified by the Fire. From her body, the waters of creation arise like vapours. Through them shine the Sun and Moon, the children of the suffering of the Mother in the Fire. The Sun, the male principle, and the Moon, the female, must now conjoin in an intimate union from which will be born a wondrous child: the androgynous Mercurius, guider of souls. But the Dragon of Time lies in wait to devour the Child and initiate yet another cycle of transmutation. [51] These alchemical creatures sprang from the same subconscious sources as the characters of ancient mythology and the imagery of the Bible. The alchemical image of the Dragon of Time waiting to devour the child Mercurius, offspring off the Sun and Moon, calls to mind the Woman of the Apocalypse described in the Revelation of St John the Divine: 'And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet…..and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns…...stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.'[52]

The alchemist and the Christian mystic trod the same road. For both the goal was transformation of the base into the pure and incorruptible. Alchemical texts repeatedly stress that the Work, the production of the fabulous philosopher's stone, can only be achieved by one who is motivated not by greed or by power, but by enlightenment; one who is worthy of the personal spiritual purification that was symbolised by the chemical processes of his retort. The philosopher's stone, we are told, was most precious and spotless, and capable of purifying all things. So evenly was it tempered that 'neither fire, air, water or earth have the power to corrupt it'[53] – a parallel image surely for Christ the Redeemer. Erasmus 'flintstone', and the Christ of Bosch's painting who, though assailed by the four elements in the form of His tormentors, appears strangely inviolate and unmoved by their attack. As the philosopher's stone of the alchemists would transmute base metal into gold purer than earthly gold, so the mystics believed that through the crucible of Christ's Passion, the human soul might be tempered for salvation. For them, Christ was the philosopher's stone.

Bosch was painting for an audience who, over a century or so, had acquired, through their religious life, a taste for the progressive revelation of deep meanings. Their metaphors and images were built upon facet of popular religious beliefs, of folklore, and of mysticism in

its many guises. Over the centuries we have disjointed and compartmentalised many concepts that seemed to the Middle Ages to be intimately related. The imagery of Bosch now seems the language of an 'in-group', and we are at a loss to explain the apparently incongruous and bizarre that we find in his work. To fill the vacuum in our understanding, it has sometimes been suggested that Bosch belonged to some secret and heretical religious sect, such as the Adamites, but we hope to have shown that there is no need to resort to such extravagant theories. The little we know of Hieronymus Bosch points to his orthodoxy within the context of late medieval religious belief in the Low Countries. The knife-edge of his irony was the taste of the times, paralleled in the scalding sarcasm of the writings of Erasmus. His savage brutality reflected the contemporary obsession with violence: suffering on earth as the holy hope of salvation, and suffering in Hell as the price of failure.

Almost all the biographical information we have of Bosch comes from the records of the Confraternity of Our Lady at S'Hertogenbosch, an orthodox religious society sometimes called the Swan Brethren. Bosch was elected to the prestigious society in 1486-7 and soon became one of its leading figures. The Fraternity had its own chapel in the city's cathedral, and Bosch is known to have painted the wings of its altarpiece between 1488-9 and 1491-2. [54] The chief duties of the Fraternity were veneration of the Virgin and philanthropic work among the less fortunate. This would have been the common aim of all such societies; but the Confraternity of Our Lady also had a special interest in the production of the city's mystery plays. [55] Bosch's talents were very likely to have been employed in designing the sets. The influence of medieval drama on contemporary religious painting has already been discussed, and it may well be that Bosch's association with the productions of the Confraternity accounts for some of the more theatrical elements in his paintings.

Drama in the Low Countries led Europe. By the mid-sixteenth century, S'Hertogenbosch itself boasted five 'chambers of rhetoric'. These institutions were organised rather like guilds and depended for their existence on the public performance of poetry and drama. Both the most famous late fifteenth-century miracle plays, *Mariken Nieumeghen (Mary of Nijmegen)* and *Elckerlyc* (the original of the English *Everyman)* were written, not by religious orders, but by members of these secular chambers of rhetoric.[56]

While English drama was still relatively simple, the Low Countries had evolved complex plays within lays, levels of action like the levels of Bosch's painting. Their miracle or morality plays opened in the everyday world. Then, through some dramatic device like a dream or a tale being told, the action shifted to a parallel story on a metaphorical plane in which personification of temptation, called 'sinnekens', interacted with the human characters. At the climax of the play the third, innermost level was reached. A curtain was drawn back to reveal the 'toog', a tableau vivant or sometimes a life-size statue or painting, which represented the kernel of the plays message – its universal dimension. Bosch's 'Christ Crowned with Thorns' presents these same three lays telescoped into one image: the contemporary, the metaphorical and the universal – Christ himself. A S'Hertogenbosch company mentioned as earlier as 1493, which later became one of the city's five chambers

of rhetoric, was known as 'de gessellen van der Passie'. As its name suggests, it had a special responsibility for performing the Passion of Christ, and remarkably, it appears that the Passion was shown mainly, perhaps even entirely, as a series of tableaux vivants. [57] It is tempting to see here the inspiration for the suspended animation of Bosch's painting.

All Bosch's pictures are libraries of meaning. And, despite its apparent simplicity, 'Christ Crowned with Thorns', as we have discovered, is no exception. Some of its many layers we may never, now, hope to unravel. What, for instance, is the significance of the cross-bow bolt through one tormentor's hat? A proverb perhaps? If we knew, we would doubtless be led into another round of fascinating speculation. What direction it would take, we may not know, but we can be sure that the road would lead to that same 'still centre': the imitation of Christ.

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[1] Oil on oak panel, measuring 73.5 x 59 cm, c 1509

[2] Also known as Bois-le-Duc.

[3] Alternatively, the painter may have been one of Hieronymus' uncles. The other surviving frescoes are a late 14th century Tree of Jesse, an early 15th century St Nicholas and a St James and St Peter of the same period.

[4] Boschs name fails to appear in contemporary lists of citizens of S'Hertogenbosch, but they are known to be incomplete, (Charles de Tolnay, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 1965). The first written record of Bosch appears in the annals of the Fraternity of Our Lady at S'Hertogenbosch, which later described him as 'Jheronimus van Aken, painter, who signs himself Bosch'. This is the circumstantial evidence upon which Bosch's place of birth rests.

[5] The painting was seen there by Antonio de Beatis and may well have been the triptych in the Prado, Madrid, now known as 'The Garden of Delights'. See E.H. Gombrich, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 30, 1967, pp 403-6.

[6] Mia Cinotti in *The Complete Paintings of Bosch* (London 1696) quotes a document from the archives of the Departement du Nord at Lille (tr. P. Gerlach, Brabantia, 1967, p 64, note 2) in which Bosch is paid the sum of thirty-six pounds for a large painting off the Last Judgement, commissioned by Philip the Fair. A picture of St Anthony is mentioned in an inventory of property owned by Margaret of Austria and attributed by its writer to Hieronymus Bosch; Cinotti, op.cit. p. 85.

[7] By 1574, Philip II is said to have acquired well over twenty of Bosch's paintings: Cinotti, op.cit. 85>

[8] This shift of emphasis is typified by the monk Paschasius Radbertus in his *Liber de corpora et sanguine Domini*, 831-3, and his commentary on the Gospel of St Matthew and the Crucifixion of Christ. See Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art* (London 1972), vol 2, p. 9.

[9] Gertrud Schiller, op.cit. p 9ff.

[10] Dr W.L. Hildburgh cites an interesting examples of this interaction in a lecture to the Society of Antiquaries, 'English Alabaster Carvings as Records of the Medieval Religious Drama', read 23 March 1939 (Oxford 1949): a rare representation of the 'Crowning with Thorns' in alabaster shows the tormentors using two-pronged wooden forks to force the Crown onto Christ's head. This appears to reflect very closely a stage direction in the

Coventry plays ('Ludus Coventriae', p. 294) in which the performers are instructed to put the Crown of Thorns onto Christ's head 'with forkys'. For an extensive catalogue of correspondences between medieval visual imagery and the textual evidence of the plays, see M.D. Anderson, *Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches* (Cambridge, 1963)

[11] Matthew, chapter 27, verses 27-35; Mark, chapter 15, verses 16-19; John, chapter 19, verses 2-3.

[12] Stone relief, c. 340, Roman triumphal cross sarcophagus showing 'Crux invicta' with scenes of the Passion, Gertrud Schiller, op.cit. plate 1.

[13] Generally agreed, since Tolnay (1937), to have been painted c.1510. The triptych is now in the Prado, Madrid. The Mass of St Gregory was a late medieval legend according to which Christ appeared on the altar, displaying His wounds and surrounded by the instruments of His Passion, to dispel the doubts of an assistant celebrating the Mass with Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540 – 604)

[14] E.g. those in the Kunstmuseum, Berne; The Musee Royale des Beaux-arts, Antwerp; and the Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

[15] Painted c. 1510 and probably part of a polyptch.

[16] 'Christ Crowned with Thorns' has been ascribed to various periods of Bosch's life from his early career (Martin Davies in National Gallery Catalogues, 1955), through his maturity (Charles de Tolnay, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 1965 and Jacques Combe, *Hieronymus Bosch* 1946) to the brink of his old age (Ludwig von Baldass, *Bosch,* 1943). We prefer to date the painting to his late maturity, say 1509 – 1510.

[17] *The Sonnets of Michelangelo Buonarroti*, tr. John Addington Symonds (1926), p. 5 sonnet 4.

[18] The lost bronze is known from a drawing by Baccio Bandinelli for a monument to Pope Clement VII, in the Louvre, Paris, see Charles de Tolnay, *Michelangelo* (Princeton, 1963), vol.1, plate 247.

[19] A letter to Jerome de Busleyden, 17 November 1506. *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Vol. II, 1501-1514*, tr. R.A.B. Mynors and D.F.S. Thomson, Toronto 1975, epist. 205, 42-3.

[20] *The Julius Exclusus of Erasmus*, tr. Paul Pascal with introduction and notes by J. Kelley Sowards(Indiana and London 1968), p. 48.

[21] Pascal, op.cit. p. 63.

[22] Although the emblem of Islam is technically an anachronism since the Islamic faith was not founded until after Christ's death, the dislike of Islam in the later Middle Ages led it to be taken to represent any enemy of Christianity. The characters of the Mystery Plays swear 'by Mohammed', and Bosch uses the same Islamic emblem on the flag of 'The Ship of Fools' (c. 1490-1500, Louvre) and in his 'Ecce Homo' of c. 1480-85 (Staedelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt).

[23] The painting was commissioned from van der Goes by an agent of the Medici bank who lived in the Low Countries and sent straight to Florence upon its completion. The impressive altarpiece, now in the Uffizi Gallery, had a particular influence on Ghirlandaio.

[24] E.g. by Giovanni Bellini and Cima da Conegliano, see Peter Streider, *The Hidden Durer* (Oxford 1978), p. 86.

[25] In the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan.

[26] Peter Streider, opo.cit. p. 127.

[27] Now in the Musee des Beaux-Arts, Ghent, this powerful picture may even have been Bosch's last work.

[28] British Library MS Egerton 2572.For the four temperaments see folio 51v.

[29] See also Gert von der Osten, *Painting and Sculpture in the Netherlands 1500-1600*.

[30] The painting was not commissioned by painted by Durer as a gift to the city of Nuremberg, where it hung in the town hall for 100 years. It is now in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich. The accepted title of the picture is technically a misnomer since St Paul was not one of the twelve Apostles.

[31] Durer's biography was among those in Neudorffer's *Nachrichten von Kunstlern und Wekleuten*, see Erwin Panofsky, *Albrecht Durer* (Princeton, 1965), vol. 1, pp. 234-5.

[32] See H.W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (London 1952), p. 239ff.

[33] Perhaps Durer chose to make St Mark the choleric temperament since his evangelical emblem was the winged lion.

[34] *Le Compost et Kalendrier des Bergiers*, facsimile of Guy Marchant edition of 1493, Editions des Quatre Chemins, Paris 1926, f. 1.ii.v.

[35] H.W. Janson, op.cit.

[36] Genesis, chapter 9, verse 20.

[37] Christopher Butler, *Number Symbolism* (London 1970), p.55.

[38] See Rene Taton, *Ancient and Medieval Science*, and *The Beginnings of Modern Science*, London, 1964 and 1964 respectively.

[39] Fire was given the number 8 and the regular geometric solid, the tetrahedron; air, 12 and the octahedron; water, 18 and the icosahedron; earth, 27 and the cube.

[40] Meester dirc van Delf's 'Die Tafel van der Kersten Ghelove'. It came in two parts: the 'Somerstuc' and 'Winterstuc'. For an example of the former see Pieront Morgan Library, New York, MS 691; for the latter, British Library MS Add. 22288.

[41] *Summa theologica*, Question V.

[42] *Enchiridion Militis Christi* was first published in 1504. The introduction referred to was added to later editions.

[43] *Enchiridion Militis Christi*, ed. Anne O'Donnell (Early English Ext Society), Oxford 1981, pp.59, 60, 68, 89-90.

[44] Anne O'Donnell, op. cit. pp. 12, 14, 60.

[45] *The Imitation of Christ*, (ii, 12). For an authoritative account of the Brethren of the Common Life, see Albert Hyma, *The Brethren of the Common Life*, Michigan, 1950.

[46] Christopher Butler, op.cit. p. 57.

[47] Christopher Butler, op .cit. p. 58.

[48] *L'harmonie du Monde*, 1579.

[49] *Alchimie de Flamel,* Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, MS fr.14765 f. 135r.

[50] Laurinda S. Dixon, *Alchemical Imagery in Bosch's Garden of Delights*, Ann Arbor 1981, pp. 43-5.

[51] C. A. Burland, *The Arts of the Alchemist*, London 1967, pp. 141-2.

[52] Revelation, Chapter 12, verses 1-4

[53] Burland, op. cit. p. 157.

[54] Mia Cinotti, op.cit. p. 85.

[55] Jean Leymarie, Dutch Painting (Geneva 1976, London edn 1977), p. 26.

[56] Encyclopaedia Britannica, Literature, Western, p. 1117, Medieval Dutch Drama.

[57] For this and other information on medieval Dutch drama we are indebted to Prof W. M. H. Hummelen of the University of Nijmegen.