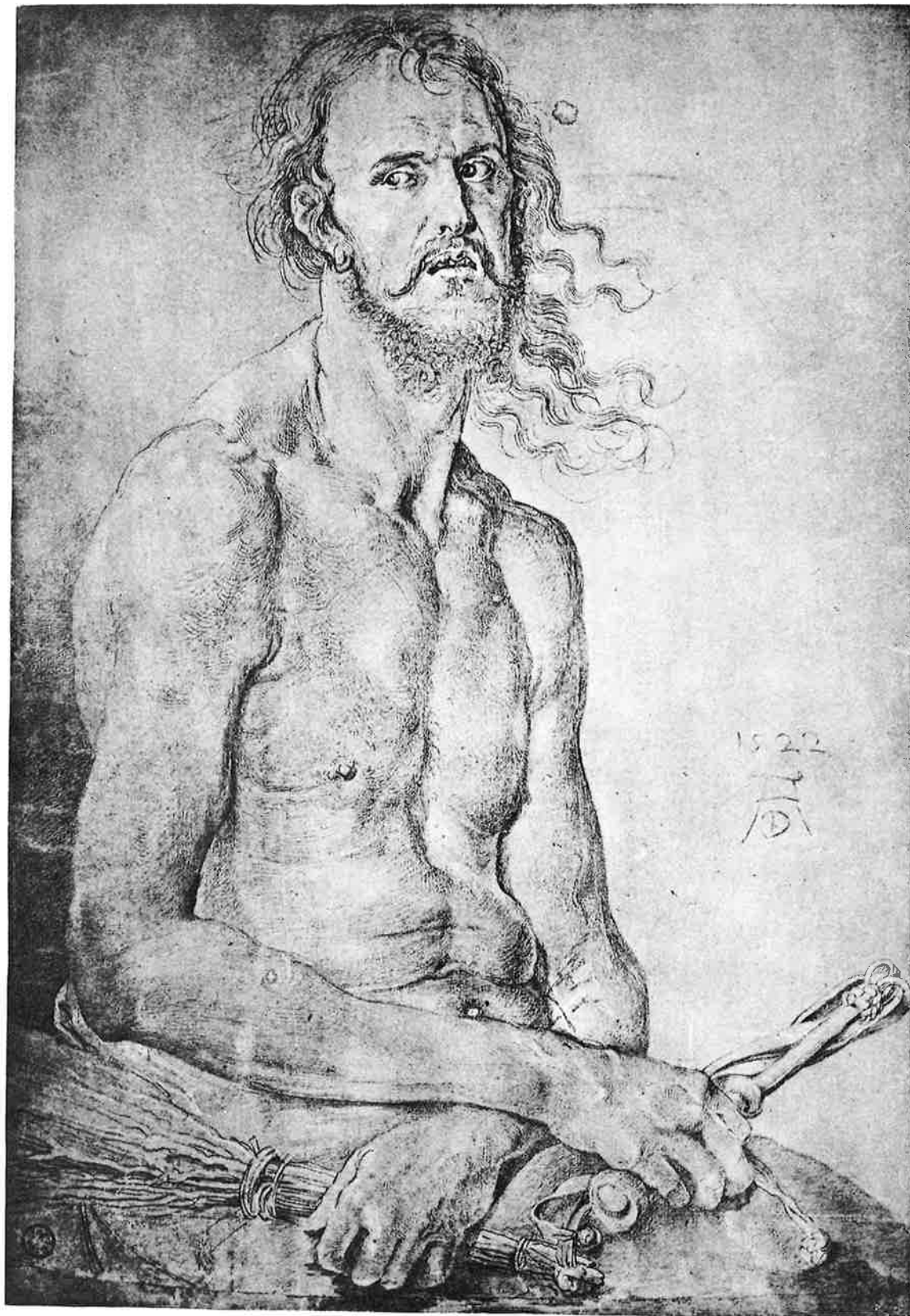




The Life and Art of
ALBRECHT DÜRER

BY ERWIN PANOFSKY

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conjectures that the intriguingly unattached woodcut *Cain Slaying Abel* (vol. II, p. 31, no. 221) was intended for a broad-sheet the text of which would have consisted, as in three analogous cases (vol. II, pp. 35 and 42, nos. 275, 352, 353), of a poem by Dürer himself; and he adduces some documentary evidence in connection with the drawing *Androclus and the Lion* (vol. II, p. 92, no. 899) and with the much-debated *Stag-Beetle* (vol. II, p. 131, no. 1359).

Losses and changes caused by the war are still unknown, except for the destruction of the manuscript formerly in the Landesbibliothek in Dresden which contained the following drawings: Handlist nos. 571, 661, 701, 839 (*fig. 312*), 947, 952, 1082, 1122, 1126, 1131, 1182, 1183, 1262, 1307, 1316, 1326, 1404, 1444, 1445, 1446, 1459, 1460, 1461, 1462, 1463, 1464, 1510, 1530, 1550, 1568, 1569, 1602, 1603, 1612, 1616, 1617, 1618, 1619, 1620, 1621, 1623, 1631, 1632, 1635, 1636, 1640, 1641, 1643, 1647, 1649, 1650, 1654, 1655 (*fig. 322*), 1656, 1656a, 1663, 1664, 1686, 1689, 1701, 1702, 1705, 1707, 1708.

As for the illustrations, attempts have been made to replace some of the least satisfactory photographs by better ones but have been successful—through the good offices of Messrs. E. Breitenbach, E. Hanfstaengl, C. H. Smyth, H. Swarzenski, and John Walker III, to all of whom the writer wishes to express his gratitude—in only a limited number of cases. He is, however, pleased to announce that his, the Princeton University Press's and the Meriden Company's united efforts have finally succeeded in substituting, in *fig. 68*, the right picture of *Katharina Fürlegerin* for the wrong one.

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FROM the point of view of those Venetian painters who claimed that Dürer "did not know how to handle color" the paintings produced between 1507 and 1511 are retrogressive. While the *Adam and Eve* in the Prado is still vaguely Bellinesque in style, a gradual hardening of form and lessening of coloristic refinement can be observed in the three great altarpieces. The "*Adoration of the Trinity*" is almost metallic in comparison with the "*Feast of the Rose Garlands*" (note, for instance, the treatment of the papal *pluvialia* in these two pictures), and its colors offer the variegated aspect of a bright and cheerful peasant's garden. In the windows of the "Allerheiligenkapelle"—where, it is true, the very medium suggested a planar and linear mode of expression—and in some related workshop drawings (640, 641, 873) we may detect a tendency to revert not only to the spirit but to the style of the Apocalypse.

In the following years—again a "maximum" period—Dürer lost interest in painting altogether. No picture was produced between 1513 and 1516, and the two painted works of 1512 are merely the aftermath of the preceding phase. One of them is a Madonna in half length generally referred to as the *Virgin with the Pear* (Vienna, Gemäldegalerie, 29), where a Virgin Mary reminiscent of the sweet, smiling maidens of Nicolaus Gerhaert von Leyden is combined with an almost Michelangelesque Infant Jesus freely developed from a drawing of 1506 (736). The other is a pair of portraits representing the Emperors Charlemagne and Sigismund (Nuremberg, Germanisches Museum, 51 and 65), the general composition of which had already been established in a "Visierung" of 1510 (1008).

In one of his Venetian letters, we remember, Dürer made fun of Pirckheimer's saltatorial exploits on the occasion of the "Feast of the Imperial Insignia." This merry Feast, called "Heiltumsfest" or simply "Heiltum," was celebrated in Nuremberg about Easter time when the crown jewels of the German Emperors (now happily restored to the "Schatzkammer" in Vienna after their transference to the Germanisches Museum) were exposed to public view. They had been in the custody of the city since 1424 and were normally kept in the "Spitalkirche." During the festivities, however, they were exhibited on the Market Square during the day and locked up in one of the adjacent houses, the "Schopperhaus," at night. Here a special room was set aside for the purpose, and it was as decoration for this room that Dürer was asked to portray the august personages who had figured most prominently in the history of the insignia: Charlemagne, who was supposed to have been their original owner, and Emperor Sigismund, who had entrusted them to the city of Nuremberg.

In the drawing of 1510 (fig. 176) both Emperors appear in three-quarter profile, but the superiority of Charlemagne is emphasized by a difference in scale as well as in costume. The

stooping figure of Sigismund—portrayed with the aid of a contemporary likeness preserved to us in mediocre copies—is dwarfed by four shields which occupy much of the available space; he is clad in simple garments and wears a humanist's wreath instead of an Imperial crown. The figure of Charlemagne, erect and with the space above him filled only by the shields of France and Germany, looks considerably taller, and his appearance conforms to a legendary or fairy-tale-like conception of grandeur. He has a long, snowy beard, a huge Gothic crown, a broad collar of ermine, a mantle of heavy brocade and an imposing scepter. However, Dürer was too much of a scholar to be satisfied with this romantic image. He made a careful study, in the same year, of the historic objects preserved in the "Spitalkirche" and rendered them in water color drawings which might well serve as illustrations for an antiquarian treatise (1010-1013). Even the actual length of the Imperial sword, which was too long to be shown in the drawing, was indicated by a piece of string attached to the paper (1011). On the basis of these meticulous studies the figure was revised in a drawing where the legendary Charlemagne is replaced by an "historical" one, beardless and clad in the correct Coronation garb (1009).

The panels themselves (fig. 177) were completed early in 1513. Well over life size and executed with the greatest possible accuracy, they delight the beholder, not by pictorial blandishments but by the very profusion of precise and glittering detail. In interpretation, they represent a compromise between popular imagination and archeological correctness. Charlemagne was equipped with the authentic insignia, but in person he appeared again, as simple people liked to think of him: as a kind of secular God the Father with a long white beard and flowing locks. Since he now wore the low octagonal crown and the Imperial sword which were believed to have been worn by him in life, his former attributes, the Gothic crown and the scepter, could be transferred to Sigismund. But while a certain external equality was thus established between the two rulers, the inward superiority of Charlemagne became all the more evident. Tall, erect, and—the most important change from the "Visierung"—rigidly frontalized, he overshadows his humble successor the more the latter's appearance lays claim to imperial dignity.

WHILE DÜRER THE PAINTER thus drifted away from the ideals of "pictorialism" and ultimately abandoned brushwork for a period of more than three years, his evolution as an engraver and woodcut designer, which had been interrupted by his stay in Venice, took a diametrically opposite course. His graphic works became luminaristic and tonal in proportion as his paintings became linear and polychromatic; and his most famed, and indeed most accomplished engravings were made at a time—in 1513 and 1514—when the production of paintings had ceased altogether. It is as though Dürer's activities in a medium which was more properly and exclusively his than brushwork had been stimulated and redirected by the very same impulses which had ceased to be fruitful in the domain of painting.

The post-Venetian woodcuts and engravings differ from the pre-Venetian ones in the same way that ordinary pen and ink drawings differ from drawings on colored paper height-

ened with white: they give what may be called a *clair-obscur* effect. This term is borrowed from those woodcuts which are printed from two blocks in two different tones. The outlines and the deepest shadows are cut upon the "key block" which is inked with black or the darkest tone desired. The lighter shadows are cut upon a "tint block" which supplies the middle tone, and the highlights are cut into both blocks so that, when printed, the white paper will show. The principle of these *clair-obscur* woodcuts is indeed the same as that of drawings on colored paper heightened with white. In both cases the lights and shadows are set out against a neutral middle tone in relation to which they appear as positive and negative values—with the only difference that the woodcuts express this middle tone by printer's ink and suggest the lights by white paper, whereas the drawings suggest the middle tone by colored paper and express the lights by heightenings.

To achieve an analogous effect in ordinary woodcuts and engravings Dürer had to create by linear means a value equivalent to the colored paper in white-heightened drawings, and to the "tint block" in *clair-obscur* prints. He had to stipulate that, as a solidly colored surface of medium darkness is accepted as a middle tone in relation to darker and lighter areas, so a system of parallel hatchings of medium density be accepted as a middle tone in relation to hatchings of greater density—particularly cross-hatchings—and to the blank paper. The introduction of this "graphic middle tone" constitutes in fact the main difference between the prints produced before and after Dürer's second trip to Venice. As we remember, an aesthetic transformation of material paper into incorporeal light had already been accomplished in his earlier woodcuts and engravings. But in these the scale of luminary values extended simply from "light" to "dark." In the post-Venetian prints it runs, simultaneously, from "neutral" to "light" on the one hand, and from "neutral" to "dark" on the other. The range of shades, extending, as it does, in two directions, thus seems both wider and more subtly differentiated. What had been an aggregate of contrasting spots or patches became a continuum of modulated "tones," as though a polyphonic system had been replaced by an harmonic one.

From a purely technical point of view this brought about two significant changes. First, the hatchings had to be made more uniform in direction and thickness and, more important, they had to achieve a similar independence of the plastic form as had, for instance, the shadows in the Berlin portrait of a Venetian lady. Second, the distribution of luminary values had to be altered. While in the earlier prints comparatively small areas of black seem to be superimposed on a basic surface of white, in the later ones the impression is of comparatively small areas of white reserved from a basic surface of gray.

Let us compare, for instance, the *Ascension and Coronation of the Virgin* (314, fig. 178) with any woodcut of the pre-Venetian period such as *St. Michael Fighting the Dragon* (292, fig. 81) or, to narrow down the chronological difference as far as possible, the *Presentation of Christ* (308, fig. 144). In the print of 1510 we perceive at once a tonal unity entirely absent from the earlier woodcuts. Every luminary value can be appraised in relation to the gray of large, frontal surfaces whose straight, protracted hatchings establish what we have

called the "graphic middle tone." The deep shadows thus strike us as much darker, and the high lights, particularly the quivering haloes cut out of the nocturnal sky, as much lighter than in the earlier prints. The individual figures and objects are modelled by lines more regularly spaced, more protracted, and organized into more extensive areas; and the most startling innovation is the suppression of plastic relief in favor of tonality wherever solid bodies lie in a shadow of medium depth. In such cases straight horizontal hatchings similar to those employed for the shading of architectural backdrops or the nocturnal sky are run across such rounded forms as the right knee of God the Father, the right leg of the Virgin Mary, or the drapery of the Apostle with the open book. As a result, the forms so treated contribute to the compositional pattern as tonal values rather than as plastic volumes.

EXCEPT FOR A DECORATIVE BORDER first used for a book by Pirckheimer which appeared in 1513 (408) and a *St. Jerome in his Cave* of 1512 (333), all the woodcuts here to be considered were executed between 1508/09 and 1511. Setting aside a few broad-sheets and book illustrations (221, 275, 352, 353), they can be classified under three headings. First, the Small Passion, published in 1511. Second, a number of single woodcuts, all of them either "half sheets" or "quarter sheets" except for the large *Trinity* of 1511 (342). Here and in other cases the prints are single compositions in the full sense of the term; but the much-imitated *Martyrdom of St. John the Baptist* (345) has a counterpart in *Salome Bringing the Head of St. John to Herodias* (346); and three subjects, namely *St. Jerome in his Cell* (334), the *Mass of St. Gregory* (343) and *David in Penitence* (339, commonly known as "Der Büssende," the royal penitent bearing Dürer's own features) still seem to reflect the program of the unfinished "*Salus Animae*." The third group includes the woodcuts added to what Dürer calls "Die drei grossen Bücher," that is, the Apocalypse, the Large Passion and the Life of the Virgin. As we remember, Dürer—signing himself as the publisher—brought out these "Three Large Books" in 1511, the Apocalypse in a new Latin edition, the two others—with Chelidonium's versified explanations printed so as to face the corresponding pictures—for the first time. The Apocalypse needed only a Frontispiece to be combined with the beautiful title already extant (280). The Large Passion and the Life of the Virgin were also provided with Frontispieces (224 and 296); but in addition they still lacked several pages, all of which were executed in 1510. To the Large Passion were added: the *Last Supper* (225), the *Betrayal of Christ* (227), the *Harrowing of Hell* (234), and the *Resurrection* (235); to the Life of the Virgin: the *Death of the Virgin* (313), and her *Assumption and Coronation* (314).

It is not possible here to analyze all these woodcuts individually and to show how the *clair-obscur* principle prevails throughout. Suffice it to mention some further good examples of straight horizontal hatchings running across convex forms—for instance, several figures in the *Last Supper*, the Baptist and the companion of Salome in the *Martyrdom of St. John*, the Eve in the *Harrowing of Hell* (fig. 87)—and to point out the amazing flexibility of the new style. Now, it serves to sharpen the terror and confusion of the *Betrayal*; now, it lends

color to the weird yet somehow humorous inferno of the *Harrowing of Hell* (fig. 179) which delighted such Mannerists as Beccafumi and Bronzino; and then again it enhances the serene dignity of an *Adoration of the Magi* (223, fig. 184) where the compositional ideas of the Life of the Virgin appear to be revised according to the standards of the High Renaissance.

One phenomenon, however, deserves some special consideration: a curious revival of the "visionary" within the framework of the new woodcut style.

The *Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin*, added to the Life of the Virgin in 1510 (fig. 178), is evidently derived from the Heller altarpiece of 1508/9 (fig. 168). Yet the differences are no less important than the similarities. In the first place, the woodcut is less hieratic in character and attempts to impress the beholder by sentiment and concrete associations rather than by solemnity. Christ no longer wears the papal tiara, and His posture is both simpler and more moving than in the painting; He bestows the crown with His left hand so that His arm no longer overlaps His chest, and His head is not quietly turned to full profile but is thrown back with a pathetic expression of suffering. Furthermore the scene is enriched by all those paraphernalia essential to a "real" funeral in the popular mind; there are books, censers, asperges, and processional crosses, and in the foreground is seen a bier which had been present in some of the more archaic representations (for instance in the drawing no. 520), but was significantly absent from the Heller altarpiece.

In the second place, the Apostles are no longer aligned on two diagonals symmetrically divergent from the center, but on two parallel lines, with a canyon of space in between; in this respect the woodcut of 1510 bears the same relation to the painting of 1508/9 as the *Adoration of the Trinity* of 1511 (fig. 172) to its preparatory drawing, likewise of 1508 (fig. 174).

In the third place, the luminary values are reversed so that the relation between the woodcut and the painting may be compared to that between a photographic negative and the positive print. In the panel the Coronation group and the Apostles with the landscape form two comparatively dark areas separated by a bright strip of sky. In the woodcut we have two comparatively bright areas separated by a dark strip of forest. The Coronation group detaches itself as a luminous apparition from a "middle tone" background, and this is bordered by a white band of clouds which offers the strongest possible contrast to the gloom of the terrestrial scenery. The introduction of this contrast is a conscious reversion on Dürer's part to the Nemesis engraving (fig. 115) where a similar fringe of bright clouds overhangs a darkening landscape. However, while the Nemesis is silhouetted against the clear sky, the Coronation group stands out from a mass of gray which, like a miraculous curtain, seems to obliterate the physical sky as well as the things on earth. We are not transported to dizzy heights, for the perspective conditions are entirely normal. Instead of the landscape being represented in bird's-eye view, the visual horizon coincides with that of the Apostles. But for this very reason the effect is all the more mysterious. The scene in Heaven, with the band of clouds coming down so as to overlap the visual horizon, is brought so near to the beholder that the celestial

apparition seems to descend upon the earth; it fills him with wonderment, not so much by defying the objective laws of nature as by abolishing the subjective distinction between hallucination and reality.

Similar principles of composition and interpretation can be observed in the last woodcut of the Large Passion, commonly quoted as the *Resurrection of Christ* (235). In reality it fuses the Resurrection with the Ascension just as the Assumption of the Virgin had been fused with the scene of her Coronation; and the miracle is made visible and credible by analogous methods. According to a scheme developed in Italy, but contrary to the Northern tradition to which Dürer adhered in his two other prints (124 and 265), Christ is not represented standing on the ground or on the lid of the sarcophagus, much less in the very act of stepping out of the tomb; He is miraculously suspended above the grave. As in the Coronation woodcut, the figure is set out against a "neutral" background bordered by a band of radiant clouds which cuts into the gloom of a nocturnal scenery. The apparition descends even farther than in the *Coronation*, and again we have the impression that a magic curtain is lowered so as to invade our field of vision and to transfigure rather than overthrow the natural world.

In the *Mass of St. Gregory* of 1511 (343, fig. 183), where the Man of Sorrows and the instruments of torture appear to the Saint while he is celebrating Mass, the miraculous event is depicted in an entirely different and perhaps still bolder manner: the natural space is not merely encroached upon or disrupted by a supernatural force, it simply dissolves. The scene is, of course, supposed to take place in the Basilica of St. Peter. But Dürer had the audacity to abolish every indication of an architectural setting. No walls, no piers, no windows or vaults are depicted. They are wiped out by an impenetrable darkness—as though Mass were read by night in the open air—from which emerge white clouds and two adoring angels. Floating in this amorphous darkness, yet endowed with the semblance of full reality, are seen such heavy objects as the hammer, the tongs, the dice, the bust of Judas and his purse. The column, the ladder with the spear and reed, and the cross (on which is perched the cock of St. Peter) stand or lean on the altar as palpably as the candlesticks and the chalice; and the retable is transformed into a stone sarcophagus from which arises the figure of Christ. The visionary effect is achieved, not by a mere interpenetration of the natural world with the supernatural, but by what a spiritualist would call the "dematerialization" of tangible objects coupled with the "materialization" of imaginary ones.

The last step is taken in the Frontispieces of the "Three Large Books," all executed in 1511. Each of them shows a scene of miraculous or mystical character which takes place on terrestrial ground. But the ground itself is lifted into a transcendental environment, thereby presenting a spectacle which the beholder can interpret only as a vision experienced by himself.

The Frontispiece of the Life of the Virgin (296, fig. 181) shows a combination of the "Virgin of Humility" (the Virgin Mary sitting on the ground) with the "Apocalyptic Woman" (the Virgin Mary "clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet"). A fusion of these two images—one realistic and humble, the other visionary and sublime—is not unusual in earlier art and was in fact inherent in the concept of the "Virgin of Humility" as

such—a concept based on that very “coincidence of opposites” which Dante expressed in the Prayer of St. Bernard:

*“Virgine Madre, figlia del tuo Figlio,
Umile ed alta più che creatura . . .”*
*(“Virgin and mother, daughter of thy Son,
Humble and lofty more than any being . . .”).*

However, if we compare Dürer’s woodcut with one of these earlier representations, for instance with a beautiful Flémallesque panel in the Muller Collection at Brussels, we perceive that Dürer reversed the relationship between the natural and supernatural elements. In the Brussels picture the Virgin is seated on a pillow placed on the ground, and the crescent, debased to the rank of a mere attribute, is rendered as a tangible object lying beside her on the lawn. In Dürer’s woodcut also the Virgin is depicted on a pillow which rests on a plot of grass. But instead of the crescent lying on the ground the whole group, including the pillow and the piece of ground, is inscribed within the crescent, and the crescent is in turn suspended in a starry sky. A fragment of the earth has been bodily moved into Heaven, and the beholder has to accompany it into a sphere of visionary unreality.

In the Frontispiece of the Apocalypse (280, fig. 180) St. John the Evangelist is seen on the island of Patmos. Accompanied by his eagle and seated by a grassy ledge on which he has deposited his inkpot and pen box, he sees and describes the “Apocalyptic Woman” who here appears, not as the “Virgin of Humility” but as a half-length figure radiantly appearing in the sky. But again the whole scene is transposed into a supernatural sphere; St. John the Evangelist, the eagle, and the grassy ledge with inkpot and pen box are miraculously poised in the void, supported only by a band of clouds. St. John on Patmos appears as a vision to the beholder at the very moment when the “Apocalyptic Woman” appears as a vision to St. John on Patmos.

The Frontispiece of the Large Passion, finally, shows what, at first glance, seems to be an incident of the Passion itself (224, fig. 182). Christ, crowned with thorns, is seated on a bench of stone, wringing His hands with grief and despair; two scourges lie on the ground, and before Him is kneeling a soldier who offers Him a reed with sneering reverence. The scene thus seems to be identical with the Mocking of Christ as described in *Matthew*, xxvii, 29. But that Dürer did not intend to illustrate any specific event of the life of Christ on earth is demonstrated by the five wounds in His body and by the band of clouds which, as in the Frontispiece of the Apocalypse, removes the scene from the terrestrial realm. It is not a portrayal of the Christ Incarnate mocked by the soldiers of Pilate, but becomes for us a vision of the Eternal Christ Who has completed His Passion on earth and yet continues to be tortured by the sins of mankind. The woodcut makes us “see” the sufferings still inflicted upon Christ by our own wickedness; and the idea of a “Perpetual Passion”—definitely unorthodox,

but widely accepted by popular feeling in Dürer’s time—is also brought home to the beholder by the verses with which he is apostrophized by Christ Himself:

*“These cruel wounds I bear for thee, O man,
And cure thy mortal sickness with my blood.
I take away thy sores with mine, thy death
With mine—a God Who changed to man for thee.
But thou, ingrate, still stabb’st my wounds with sins;
I still take floggings for thy guilty acts.
It should have been enough to suffer once
From hostile Jews; now, friend, let there be peace!”*

Thus interpreted, the Frontispieces of the “Three Large Books” are cognate not only with one another but also with the most monumental woodcut of the period here under discussion, the large *Trinity* of 1511 (342, fig. 185). This shows the modern and more emotional version of the “Throne of Mercy”—with God the Father holding the broken body of Christ instead of the Crucifix—which is best represented by a lost but often copied and widely imitated composition by the Master of Flémalle. But Dürer “visionized” the traditional scheme just as he had the St. John on Patmos, the Mocking of Christ, and the “Virgin of Humility.” Crowds of Angels approach from either side, carrying the instruments of torture, supporting the arms of the dead Christ and spreading out the papal *pluviale* of God the Father into the likeness of the tent or baldachin which is frequently seen in earlier representations; and this whole group is mysteriously suspended before a somber sky lit up by milky clouds and by the electric flashes of the halos. In the “*Adoration of the Trinity*” in Vienna God the Father is at least enthroned on a rainbow. Here He floats in the void; and to make the apparition even more incommensurable it is elevated beyond the sphere of the Four Winds, that is, according to pre-Copernican cosmology, beyond the limits of the physical universe. Once more Dürer conjured up a vision to be experienced by a beholder “transported” both in the literal and the figurative sense of the word.

Small wonder that this subjective approach to the most sacred and transcendent concept of Christianity impressed the following generations even more deeply than Dürer’s contemporaries. His composition was to live on—to mention only a few of many instances—in Cigoli’s *Trinity* in Sta. Croce in Florence, in Tintoretto’s mystical *Lamentation* in the Palace of the Doges, and, above all, in Greco’s *Throne of Mercy* in the Prado.

THE SMALL PASSION (236-272) can best be considered together with what may be called its more sophisticated counterpart, the Engraved Passion (110-125). Both series were prepared and executed more or less simultaneously (the Small Passion published in 1511, with two woodcuts dated 1509 and two 1510; the Engraved Passion published 1513, with the dates of the individual prints ranging from 1507 to 1512). And both are in part retrospective. In three pages of the Engraved Passion—the *Agony in the Garden* (111), the *Betrayal of Christ*

(112) and *Christ before Pilate* (114)—Dürer reverted to the "Green Passion" (556, 523/566, 525/570). The Small Passion, on the other hand, can be associated with the Life of the Virgin. Three scenes—the Annunciation, the Nativity and the Leave-Taking of Christ—occur in both series, and it has already been mentioned that this duplication may reflect an original program according to which the Life of the Virgin was to be followed by the Passion of Christ. But the relationship is not restricted to the subject alone. The *Annunciation* (239) and the *Leave-Taking of Christ* (241) are variations on the corresponding woodcuts in the Life of the Virgin (303 and 312) rather than new inventions, and in the case of the *Nativity* (240) an even closer connection can be established.

This woodcut (fig. 192) differs from the rest of the Small Passion, first, in that the figures are much smaller in scale; second, in that the design is more minute, particularly in such details as draperies and foliage; third, in that the scene is staged on a platform seen *di sotto in sù*, with the additional anomaly that the vanishing point of this platform and the adjoining steps does not coincide with that of the roof. It has rightly been felt that the smallness of the figures and the tendency toward particularization are reminiscent of the Life of the Virgin, and it has even been proposed to date the woodcut about 1504 rather than about 1509. But this hypothesis does not explain the unusual features of the perspective and is at variance with the technical treatment. What seems more likely is that Dürer reused a drawing originally made at the time of, and probably in connection with, the Life of the Virgin. Since the latter is more than twice as large as the Small Passion, the composition had to be cut down at the margins (witness the truncation of the building as well as of the St. Joseph) and, in addition, to be reduced in scale. Thereby the figures became much smaller than those in the other woodcuts, and the curious, almost Tintorettesque substructure in worm's-eye perspective was added in order to push the figures back into space and thus account for their diminution in size.

With respect to period, then, and in view of their somewhat retrospective tendency, the Small and Engraved Passions can be regarded as parallels. But here the similarity ends. From every other point of view the two series offer a contrast eloquently illustrative of the difference between their respective media.

The very format of the Engraved Passion differs from that of the Small Passion by what may be called an aristocratic slenderness of proportion: it is about 4.5 by 3 inches as against about 5 by 4. No textual interpretation was deemed necessary, for the engraved series was not conceived as an edifying book, but rather as a "collector's item," to be relished by the art-lover instead of read by the devout. In fact there were collectors in the sixteenth century who had the engravings treated so as to suggest the appearance of precious miniatures. In defiance of Erasmus's judicious remark: "If you would spread on pigments you would injure the work," the prints were occasionally illuminated with color, heightened with gold and silver, and even mounted on leaves of vellum the borders of which were decorated with hand-painted flowers and little animals, as was the custom of late fifteenth and early sixteenth century book illuminators.

The engraved series is preceded by a Frontispiece—a *Man of Sorrows* according to St. Bridget—and is concluded by *Sts. Peter and John Healing the Lame*. This piece was appended in 1513, either because Dürer wished to round out the number of prints to a full sixteen which could be printed on a "whole sheet" without waste, or because he planned to follow up the Passion of Christ with the Acts of the Apostles; it is, characteristically, absent from most of the copies bound in the sixteenth century. The Passion proper comprises only fourteen decisive incidents, beginning with the *Agony in the Garden* and ending with the *Resurrection*.

In the woodcut series, the drama of the Passion, paraphrased by Chelidonium in varying classical meters, unfolds in a much wider perspective. Ushered in by a Frontispiece which again brings home the idea of the "Perpetual Passion" (236), the sequence opens with the *Fall of Man* and the *Expulsion from Paradise*. The Passion proper is preceded by the *Annunciation*, the *Nativity* and the *Leave-Taking of Christ*; and the *Resurrection* is followed by four of the "Appearances" (Christ appearing to His Mother, to the Magdalen, to the Disciples of Emmaus, and to St. Thomas), the *Ascension*, *Pentecost* and the *Last Judgment*. All in all, there are, including the Title Page, thirty-seven woodcuts as against sixteen engravings, and the scenes of the Passion proper number twenty-four as against fourteen, including as they do the *Entry into Jerusalem*, the *Expulsion of the Money-Lenders*, the *Last Supper*, the *Washing of the Feet*, *Christ before Annas*, the *Mocking of Christ*, *Christ before Herod*, *St. Veronica with the Sudarium*, the *Nailing to the Cross* and the *Descent from the Cross*.

The program of the Engraved Passion is thus less comprehensive than that of the Small. But in spite of its brevity the engraved series has something sumptuous about it. Every scene is carefully worked out with architecture and furnishings, bizarre physiognomies, picturesque costumes and fanciful armor, and emphasis is placed on the refinements of lighting and surface texture. The Engraved Passion stresses spiritual suffering rather than physical torture and never loses sight of the preterhuman dignity of Christ. The shrillest note is struck in the *Agony in the Garden*—a scene of purely mental anguish—while the *Crucifixion* is pervaded by a spirit of resignation and peace. The opposite is true of the Small Passion. It emphasizes the human side of the tragedy, from the magnificent wrath of the *Expulsion of the Money-Lenders* to the quiet sadness of the *Washing of the Feet* and the cruel violence of the *Derision*; and while the narrative as a whole has the redundancy of a popular Mystery Play the individual incidents are told concisely and directly. The treatment is forceful at the expense of delicacy. Picturesqueness and psychological refinements have been suppressed in favor of strong and simple emotions.

The engraved version of *Pilate Washing His Hands* (fig. 188), for instance, is so rich in details and so subtle in interpretation that it demands unhurried and sensitive contemplation. The eye of the beholder will delight in the contrast between the threatening darkness of the architecture and the brilliance of a beautiful landscape; his attention is likely to be arrested by the obsequious Jew who still harangues the Governor, and particularly by the negroid servant who, grotesquely arrayed and illumined by the strongest light, is placed

right in the center of the composition. It may take him some time to perceive the figure of Christ as He is led away by two soldiers, and still more to discover that Pilate does not listen to his interlocutor. Deaf to what he hears and blind to what he sees, the Governor seems to be shut within himself, tragic and lonely like the Saul in Rembrandt's late picture in The Hague. The language of the woodcut (fig. 190) is much more direct. The eye is caught at once by the tall figure of Christ. No picturesque servant detracts from the basic antithesis between Him Who is dragged to His death and him who is left behind with the burden of his thoughts. There is a strange void around the figure of Pilate; his loneliness is not expressed obliquely by his not listening to an interlocutor, but, more directly, by the absence of anyone who would dare speak to him.

Similar differences can be observed throughout. In the engraved *Lamentation* (fig. 186) the mourners sigh; in the *Lamentation* in woodcut they cry out—not to mention the more pitiful aspect of the dead Christ—and the Magdalen kisses His feet. The engraved *Deposition* is a masterpiece of intricate foreshortening, and the felt hat of the wealthy burgher viewed from the back may have attracted more comment among the experts than anything else. In the strictly frontalized composition of the woodcut nothing disturbs the atmosphere of silent grief.

In the engraved *Resurrection* the figure of Christ is not only patterned after the Apollo Belvedere—this is the rule with Dürer's renderings of this scene, and certainly intentionally so—but it is also made to stand on the sarcophagus as on a pedestal, exalted and remote like a beautiful statue. In the woodcut (fig. 193) He steps into the midst of the soldiers so that His foot comes in actual contact with one of theirs; but in the distance is seen the rising sun, a symbol of the Resurrection so deep and wide that it bridges the gap between the spiritual and the natural world, and even between Christianity and Paganism. To quote once more from Chelidonium:

*"This is the day on which the Lord of Lords
Began to build the world; sacred by ageless
Religion to the King of Heav'n and Phoebus.
This is the day when the all-seeing sun,
Slain on the cross, so as to set in night
And hide in death, splendidly rose again."*

The most significant contrast exists between the two interpretations of the *Bearing of the Cross*. In the engraving (fig. 189) Dürer reverted to a formula prevailing in Byzantine, Italian and Italianate art, but very rarely retained by Northern artists of the fifteenth century: instead of breaking down under the weight of the Cross, Christ walks proudly erect. His figure dominates a pyramidal group comprising, besides Himself, a bestial soldier on His left and the kneeling Veronica on His right. This group is brought into relief by concentrated light; but just the figure of Christ is left in darkness, except for those parts—His

face, the drapery across His shoulder, and His raised right arm—which are the most important, not only in that they mark the apex of the pyramid, but also in that they establish a connection between His figure and that of St. Veronica. The emphasis is not on physical action and physical suffering but on the spiritual relationship between the Saviour and the believer, a relationship all the more subtle as the face of the kneeling Saint remains almost invisible. In the woodcut (fig. 191) the interest is divided between this silent dialogue and violent action. Here Dürer retained the more usual type of composition which he had used in the Large Passion (fig. 89), repeating even the motif of the callous soldier who stabs the neck of Christ with a stick. But the figure of Christ no longer displays the beautiful pose of the classical Orpheus. He goes to his knees with a terrific impact; His right arm stiffens in an attempt to break His fall; His left hand clutches the lower part of the cross, instead of being raised with an elegant *contrapposto*; His head hangs from His shoulder as from a rack. It is only by excruciating effort that His glance catches the eye of St. Veronica, so that her very piety adds to His suffering.

Some of the scenes represented in the Small Passion but absent from the engraved series, such as the *Mocking of Christ*, the *Nailing to the Cross* or *Christ before Annas*, show a similar emphasis on torture and brutality, and the *Descent from the Cross* verges on the horrible. The broken body of Christ, head downward, lies across the shoulders of a lansquenet like the carcass of a slaughtered animal, its upper part is almost obliterated by a harsh foreshortening, the face is wholly invisible, and the helpless hands and dishevelled hair convey a sense of almost unbearable misery.

In other woodcuts, however, we find a feeling of tenderness and human warmth which is absent from the Engraved Passion and dear to those of whom it has been said that "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Nothing can be gentler and sadder, yet fuller of promise than the transfigured Christ appearing to the Magdalen, His face in the shadow of the broad-brimmed gardener's hat, the blade of His spade shining before the sky, and—again—the "sun of righteousness" rising behind Him. Nothing can be simpler, yet more solemn than the gesture with which He breaks the bread for the disciples of Emmaus so that "their eyes were opened and they knew Him."

This atmosphere of sympathy and human kindness is felt most intensely in the *Fall of Man* (fig. 194). Like the engraving of 1504 (fig. 117) this woodcut must be interpreted in the light of the theory according to which the sin of Adam subjected mankind to the domination of the "four humors" and thus dragged it down to the level of animals. This theory, as we remember, existed in two versions. According to the one, man had originally no "temperament" at all, whereas every animal had one of the well-known four. According to the other, man was originally "sanguine," whereas the animals were either "choleric," "phlegmatic," or "melancholy." In the engraving, Dürer had accepted the first of these variants; he had set out the impersonal, or rather pre-personal, perfection of Adam and Eve against the characteristic qualities of four species of animals. In the woodcut he kept to the second version. Only three beasts are depicted, and they symbolize the non-sanguine

temperaments, the lion standing for "choleric" wrath, the bison for "melancholic" gloom and inertia, and the particularly conspicuous badger, notorious for his laziness, for "phlegmatic" sloth. The "sanguine" temperament is represented by Adam and Eve themselves; they illustrate its most characteristic feature, the capacity and inclination for love (see fig. 217). While yielding to temptation, they are clasped in an embrace of, as yet, paradisiacal innocence. Their happiness is not to last; but their endearments contribute to the scene a delightful note of affection and tenderness and foreshadow a companionship which, however much changed by the fateful event, will be their and their offspring's heritage for good or worse. In fact it was possible for Dürer to employ the same preparatory drawing (459, fig. 195) both for the *Fall of Man* and for the *Expulsion from Paradise* (238).

This almost idyllic interpretation of mankind's tragedy appealed to other Northerners, including the youthful Hans Holbein. Other artists borrowed from other pages of the Small Passion, and still others preferred the engraved series. Here, as always, the character of a given work may be judged by the character of those who were influenced by it.

The Engraved Passion, for instance, appealed to Andrea del Sarto, especially in his earlier period. In his *Sermon of St. John the Baptist* in the Scalzi Cloister at Florence of 1515 he took over, quite literally, the monumentally impassive bystander seen in the foreground of the engraved "*Ecce Homo*"; he was attracted by the strange outfit of the figure as by something "bizarre" or even exotic, but he also understood its simple, almost Masacciesque grandeur and its compositional significance. Like Dürer, he used it as a massive pier or pylon which would consolidate the right-hand corner of the composition and would serve as a "repoussoir" for a group of people farther back; and he retained its diagonal relation to the main figure. But while Dürer's Christ appears not only on a higher level but also in a more distant plane, Sarto's St. John is pushed forward so as to be "in line" with the borrowed onlooker, and the latter's weight is balanced by two figures standing in the left-hand corner of the picture.

The Small Passion, on the other hand, had its deepest effect on artists who were concerned with expression rather than with formal equilibrium. Jacopo da Pontormo's magnificent insanity seized upon and exaggerated Dürer's Gothicism as Sarto's reasonableness appropriated and emphasized his classical tendencies. Pontormo's frescoes in the Certosa di Val d'Ema draw from all the printed series of the Passion; but the emphasis is definitely on the woodcuts. In the *Lamentation* only some details are reminiscent of the engraved version while the composition as a whole appears to be inspired by the woodcut in the Large Passion; in the fresco of Christ before Pilate Pontormo fuses motifs from the Engraved and the Small Passions into an indissoluble unity; and in the *Resurrection* he out-Dürers Dürer in combining the contorted postures of the soldiers in the woodcut from the Small Passion (fig. 193) with an ultra-Gothic Christ floating upward like a wisp of smoke.

The greatest posthumous triumph, however, was reserved to the woodcut *Christ driving the Money-Lenders from the Temple* (243). The figure of the irate Lord falling upon the

desecrators with a bunch of heavy ropes was copied by young Rembrandt at a time—1635—when he strove for drama rather than sentiment. Then Dürer did for him what Pollaiuolo and Mantegna had done for Dürer.

THE SAME INNOVATIONS in style and technique that could be observed in the woodcut field distinguish the engravings of 1507-1512 from their pre-Venetian forerunners. They, too, changed from a "black-on-white" style to a "white-and-black-on-gray," or *clair-obscur*, style; and apparently this new principle was applied to engravings even before it was extended to woodcuts. Dürer resumed burin work as early as 1507 whereas the earliest date on a post-Venetian woodcut is 1509; and it is possible that the very idea of obtaining *clair-obscur* effects by graphic methods was first suggested by the "Green Passion" which in several instances furnished models for the engraved series.

However, the style of the one engraving of 1507, the *Lamentation of Christ* (fig. 186), does not yet differ appreciably from that of 1504/05. The full force of a stylistic and technical reorientation is felt in the engravings of 1508, two of them—the *Agony in the Garden* (111) and the *Betrayal of Christ* (fig. 187)—belonging to the Engraved Passion while two others—a *Crucifixion* (131, fig. 196) and a *Virgin on the Crescent* (138)—are single prints. With the exception of the *Virgin on the Crescent* all these engravings of 1508 are "nocturnes," which was usual in representations of the Betrayal, but rare in renderings of the Gethsemane scene and the Crucifixion, and altogether a novelty in prints. This very fact bears witness to Dürer's wish to put the style of his engravings, too, on a *clair-obscur* basis. The later pages of the Engraved Passion include three more "nocturnes": the *Crucifixion* (120), the *Resurrection* (124), and, what is almost unprecedented, the *Bearing of the Cross* (119, fig. 189). All the other engravings of the series, except for the *Lamentation* of 1507, are at least composed in such a way that the figures detach themselves from a darkish background, whether the scene is laid indoors or in the open air.

The first example of this new style appears to be the *Agony in the Garden* which bears all the earmarks of a new departure including the tendency toward overstatement. Its technique is loose, rough, impatient, in parts reminiscent of dry point rather than orthodox burin work. An explosive radiance emanates from the Angel and the cloud whence he emerges, so that the figure of Christ is lit up as by the glare of a floodlight; and this violence in treatment and lighting is matched by an emotional pathos still absent from the composition of 1504 which served as a basis for the engraving (556). The earlier composition already shows Christ throwing up both His hands in utter despair. But in the engraving the pathos of this gesture is immeasurably enhanced. The tense figure, lengthened in proportions and enlarged in scale, forms a sharp contrast with the recumbent form of St. Peter which fills the previously empty foreground; it is placed much higher and is brought into almost direct contact with the cross proffered by the Angel. The arms of Christ are no longer encased in tight sleeves but emerge naked—as with a scream, if one may say so—from ample drapery. And, most important of all, His figure is no longer foiled by rocks but stands out against the vastness of the dark sky.

The two other "nocturnes" of 1508 are smoother in technique and less *outré* in lighting, but they also glow with a passion more intense and somber than other interpretations of the same subjects. Like the *Agony in the Garden*, the *Betrayal* is developed from a composition which forms part of the "Green Passion" of 1504 (523/566). But several significant changes serve to shift the emphasis from the commotion of the arrest to the tragedy of the betrayal. The number of figures is greatly reduced. Physical violence is limited to the duel between Malchus and St. Peter—who, in addition, is invested with a Mithras-like monumentality. Christ is no longer seized by the arms, pulled by His coat and prodded in the back as in the earlier version; much less is He already bound and dragged away as in the large woodcut of 1510 (227). Unconscious of the noose which threatens His neck, He bends His head and closes His eyes to receive the kiss as though He and Judas were alone in the universe.

The most striking feature of the *Crucifixion* of 1508—the general arrangement of which can be traced back to the painted *Crucifixion* in Dresden (3, f)—is the expressive figure of St. John. Turned to full profile, he raises his arms and wrings his hands with a loud cry of anguish, his face a tragic mask of classical Antiquity melted with the heat of Christian passion. The model of this figure is in Mantegna's engraved *Deposition* where a St. John similarly placed, similarly posed, and crying out with similar despair, is seen near the right margin of the composition (fig. 198). But Mantegna's pathos is hard and stony compared to Dürer's. Mantegna's St. John clasps his arms against his breast instead of thrusting them out; he stands motionless instead of pressing forward; he holds his head erect instead of tossing it back. Above all, he appears in a *Deposition* staged in broad daylight and not in a nocturnal *Crucifixion*. In all these respects Dürer's engraving—significantly different from the restrained *Crucifixion* of 1511 which graces the Engraved Passion—reminds us of that Mathis Gothart Nithart, whom we shall probably continue to know as Matthias Grünewald.

Grünewald was a Christian mystic—no secular representation by him is known—where Dürer, with all his piety, was essentially a humanist. He was a poet in spite of his proficiency in hydraulic engineering, where Dürer was a "scientist" in spite of his fervid imagination. He thought in terms of light and color where Dürer thought, primarily, in terms of line and form. He was, in short, both the consummator of the German Gothic and a prophet of the Baroque where Dürer was the founder of a Northern Renaissance. Thus the same *Crucifixion* which appeared pictorial and vibrant with emotion when compared to Mantegna's *Deposition* seems statuesque and calm when compared to Grünewald's "Small Crucifix" in the Koenigs Collection (fig. 197). But for a Dürer engraving of 1508 it is exceptional (also in that the arms of Christ are wrenched upward more cruelly than in any other *Crucifixion* by Dürer)—just as exceptional as the somber *Betrayal of Christ* and the spasmodically lighted *Agony in the Garden*. We feel that here more than anywhere Dürer approached the precincts of Grünewald's witchery.

Further evidence of this *rapprochement* between Dürer and Grünewald is furnished by an extraordinary charcoal drawing which, with a certain grim humor, portrays a sharp-eyed, hook-nosed man with an enormous double chin not unlike the dewlap of an animal (1043,

fig. 199). That it is by Dürer cannot be questioned in view of a magnificent firmness and sweep of line which brings to mind the charcoal portraits of 1503, and of the perfectly authentic, though somewhat enigmatical inscription "Hye conrat verkell altag." Yet it is understandable that it should have been ascribed to Grünewald. For, while the structural forms are determined by firm and definitely graphic lines, the flesh shows a certain flabbiness—resulting from a profusion of fleeting, blurry shadows and reflected lights—which is peculiar to Grünewald's studies of heads. Moreover, the face is marked by an asymmetrical distortion which is as characteristic of Grünewald as it is normally foreign to Dürer (see fig. 200).

Like the *Agony in the Garden*, the *Betrayal* and the single *Crucifixion*, this drawing bears the date 1508; and this year—the year which marks that basic change in Dürer's graphic style—is, curiously enough, one which may have brought him into a new and more momentous contact with Grünewald's art.

The Heller altarpiece, we remember, was a triptych with movable shutters. But for some reason, perhaps in order to screen off the light which came from the rear, it was subsequently provided with fixed wings as well. Each of these wings was composed of two panels *en grisaille*, placed one above the other so as to match the composition of the shutters; and the two panels which have come down to us—a *St. Lawrence* and a *St. Cyriacus*—fully confirm Joachim Sandrart's assertion that the painter commissioned with this addition to Dürer's most sumptuous altarpiece was none other than Grünewald. Grünewald was then residing in Seligenstadt (about fifteen miles east of Frankfort), but he was also active in Mayence (about twenty miles west of Frankfort), as well as in Frankfort itself.

These four panels were probably not executed until 1512 when Grünewald stayed with the Dominicans at Frankfort for a time. We do not know whether Dürer was ever consulted about the matter, nor can we be sure that he himself had come to Frankfort to see Jacob Heller while he was working for him. However, one of his letters to Heller does contain a few passages which may be construed as a reference to such a visit; and if this visit really took place it could have been only in September or October 1508. Thus it is not impossible, though far from demonstrable, that Dürer had another occasion to be impressed by Grünewald's artistic personality precisely at a time when the content of his prints seems to reveal the impact of a strong emotional experience, and when their style suddenly changed toward luminarism and tonality. It is tempting to think that this crisis was precipitated by a new encounter with his antipode.

However that may be, the change in Dürer's graphic style took place in 1508, and the engravings originally led the woodcuts. But in the further course of evolution the "spirit of the burin" proved to be somewhat recalcitrant. As we have seen, the very nature of line engraving calls for analytical precision, curvilinear calligraphy, and emphasis on plastic modelling. As it plows into the revolving copper plate, the graver of necessity produces incisive lines which tend to be marshalled in orderly fashion, which stress the undulation of the contours, and which enclasp, as it were, the plastic forms with circular arcs. This innate character of the medium offers a natural resistance to luminaristic tendencies, and of this

Dürer was fully aware. The *Agony in the Garden*, where he had sacrificed the graphic system at the altar of pictorialism, is an exception, explicable only by the enthusiasm of a new departure. In general, Dürer tried to reconcile his new luminarism with the demands of orthodox line engraving, but he refused a compromise at the expense of intensity. He wanted to achieve, at the same time, a maximum of both pictorial and graphic values, and the result was what a musician would call "over-orchestration." The engravings produced between 1508 and 1512 are marvelously rich but somewhat labored. They are crowded with sharply delineated details—so much so, in fact, that the structure of the whole is at times obscured—and yet an attempt is made at suggesting something like atmosphere. The plastic volumes are heavily and rigidly modelled, so that even human flesh seems to assume a marmoreal or metallic hardness, and yet an equally strong emphasis is placed on the surface texture of different materials. The contrasts between light and dark are stressed to such an extent that the lights begin to flicker or to glare while the shadows tend to turn opaque. The network of lines, strokes and dots appears too dense in some places and too loose in others and at times verges on confusion. Dürer was great enough to force these conflicting elements into a unity exciting just by virtue of its interior tensions. But he was also great enough to see that he could proceed no further in the same direction. He felt that his style of engraving needed what in political life would be called a "purge."

This "purge" took place in 1512 when the conflict between pictorial and graphic principles had reached a climax in such engravings as the *Bearing of the Cross*. In an effort to find an outlet for those tendencies which had proved to be incongruous with the "spirit of the burin," Dürer resorted to a technique which he had strenuously avoided for almost twenty years: he took up dry point.

As will be remembered the dry point artist is free from all the restrictions which are imposed upon the line engraver. Dry point permits, and even demands, improvisation and irregularity where line engraving requires meticulousness and systematization. It is conducive to strong contrasts between slight scratches which, when accumulated, may give an almost impressionistic effect and vigorous slashes which, if the bur is not polished away, will produce deep, soft shadows. In short, it lends itself most willingly to those pictorial tendencies in which the burin can only indulge at the expense of its innate principles and virtues. Thus we can understand why Dürer, after having strained the medium of Schongauer to the very limits of its possibilities, had recourse to the medium of the Housebook Master.

Dürer's dry points are only three in number. Two of them, a *Man of Sorrows* and the *St. Jerome by a Pollard Willow*, are dated 1512. The third, a *Holy Family*, is not quite finished and neither dated nor signed (ultimately Dürer tried to destroy the plate altogether by an angry stroke across the face of the Virgin), but was almost certainly executed in the same year.

The *Man of Sorrows* (128) seems to be the earliest of these three prints. It is simple in composition, small in size—Dürer may have used one of the plates prepared for the Engraved Passion—and somewhat timid in treatment. Dürer still hesitated to apply much pressure to

the tool, and the bur was polished away as in a regular line engraving. The print is delicate and full of tender feeling but, even in good impressions, a little pale.

In the *St. Jerome* (166, fig. 202) the possibilities of the new medium are fully exploited. The lighted objects, particularly the lion, the face and arms of the Saint, and the Cardinal's robe spread over his improvised desk, stand out from a rocky landscape, the elements of which are interpreted in terms of tonal values rather than of plastic form. In the earlier proofs Dürer even resorted to a somewhat unorthodox device to strengthen the impression of tonality. After having inked and wiped the plate he put on a thin film of printer's ink wherever he wished to obtain a kind of wash effect ("Plattenton"). But above all he had learned to take advantage of those contrasts between delicacy and vigor which are the royal prerogative of dry point. The face and body of the Saint are modelled with fine little touches, and the volume of his crucifix seems almost to dissolve within the surrounding brightness. But such details as the stubby branches of the polled willow, the cavities of the rocks, and the shaded parts of the fluffy lion's coat are accentuated by slashing strokes which produce plenty of bur (compare fig. 203 with fig. 204). In good impressions—which are, of course, extremely rare because of the tendency of the bur to wear off very quickly—the effect of these deep, downy blacks amidst volatile whites and grays heralds what Rembrandt was to do in such pure dry points as the *Clump of Trees with a Vista* of 1652.

The *Holy Family* (150, fig. 201) is, perhaps not by accident, somewhat reminiscent of the "*Virgin with the Dragonfly*" (fig. 92), which in turn was influenced by Dürer's only forerunner in the use of dry point, the Housebook Master. In both cases the Virgin Mary is seated on a grassy bench while St. Joseph, sitting on the ground behind it, is only half visible. But he is neither playful nor sleepy. Dignified and grave, he looks like a gloomy Prophet instead of playing his more usual pathetic or even slightly ludicrous role. He is indeed interpreted as a seer of tragedy, for he—and not the smiling Virgin—perceives the three mysterious figures which have emerged behind the group of Mother and Child. They are St. John the Evangelist, Nicodemus, and the Magdalen with her ointment jar—the witnesses of the Passion. They fill the whole upper right-hand corner of the composition while the upper left-hand corner is empty except for the unfinished landscape; and this almost Baroque diagonal is echoed and emphasized by a piece of masonry which rises by steps from left to right, its lowest section being taller than the huddled figure of St. Joseph while its tallest section is lower than the tight, columnar group of the "witnesses."

The graphic technique of this print is as bold and free as its design and iconography. Bur and "Plattenton" are used freely, but parts such as the heads of St. John and Nicodemus are so attenuated in volume that they give a truly *plein-air* effect. In the face of St. John not only the plastic modelling but also the outlines are subdued in favor of a gentle play of light and shade, and the face of the Virgin, built up from innumerable tiny flicks and scratches, has practically no contours at all. Here Dürer approaches, for once, the Leonardesque ideal of *sfumato*; his Virgin, in fact, brings to mind Leonardo's St. Ann in the Louvre.

From this brief orgy of luminarism Dürer emerged with what may be called his second "classic" burin style. As the engravings of 1503/04 had achieved perfection by tempering the miniature-like refinement of the *St. Eustace* and the *Nemesis* with the coarser but more ingenuous spirit of his earlier manner, so the engravings of 1513/14 regained perfection by disciplining the conflicting tendencies of the Engraved Passion and its relatives to a purely graphic mode of expression. This does not mean that Dürer renounced the *clair-obscur*, or tonal, principle which he had adopted in 1508. It is, on the contrary, within the limits of this principle that he reinstated that economy, clarity, and uniform density which had distinguished the *Coat-of-Arms with the Skull* or the *Fall of Man*.

This tendency to obviate the dangers of the preceding phase without forfeiting its accomplishments is already evident in an engraving like the *Sudarium* of 1513 (132) which, like the *Coat-of-Arms with the Skull* of 1503, is definitely heraldic in character. Two adolescent Angels, balanced with almost perfect symmetry, yet subtly differentiated in pose and gesture, display the kerchief with the imprint of the Holy Face which—clearly built up from the elements of Dürer's own physiognomy—fastens its eyes on the beholder with hypnotic intensity. The Angels, apparently supported by the billowing folds of their surplices rather than by their half-closed wings, hover in the void, and this void is indicated by horizontal hatchings which spread a veil of gray over the entire background. But this emphatic *clair-obscur* effect no longer seems to endanger the strictly graphic character. Dürer achieved a greater uniformity of the lines in thickness and spacing so that he could exploit their tonal significance without either weakening or overstating their calligraphic effect. Even the deepest shadows remain transparent, and even the highest lights are not too harsh because the accents of light and dark are more subtly graded, more evenly distributed and more carefully balanced against each other than in the engravings of 1508-1512.

The acme of perfection—perfection inasmuch as Dürer succeeded in fusing widely divergent tendencies without a sacrifice of either harmony, as in the preceding years, or concreteness and variety, as in later years—was reached in 1514. Compared with the vivid *Virgin with the Pear* of 1511 (148) on the one hand, and with the stony *Virgin with the Swaddled Infant* of 1520 (145, fig. 251) on the other, the *Virgin by the Wall* (147) represents indeed a perfect coincidence of apparent opposites. Regal and virginal, yet humble and motherly, the Virgin Mary is depicted in an environment in which a sense of sheltered intimacy blends with the freedom of the open spaces. The utmost precision of design is combined with an incomparable softness of texture. The lines and strokes, while fulfilling the difficult and varied tasks of modelling form, of indicating direction (as the converging hatchings of the foreshortened walls and the parallel hatchings of the sloping roof), of suggesting luminary values, and of characterizing surface qualities (as in the woolen stuff and silken lining of the Virgin's mantle), yet maintain what may be called their graphic integrity. The deepest shadows, like the ones above the Virgin's right knee and beneath her neat "Hausfrau's" purse, are so small in compass and so softly embedded amidst other areas of varying darkness that they do not

impair the impression of perfect transparency and homogeneity. The whole engraving, though far from being lusterless, shimmers with the soft, cool tones of mat silver.

IN THE YEARS 1513 and 1514 the production of woodcuts and paintings ceased altogether, but in addition to the four engravings already mentioned (*Sts. John and Peter Healing the Lamé*, the *Sudarium*, the *Virgin with the Pear*, and the *Virgin by the Wall*) Dürer produced nine others. Six of these are small in size and unambitious in content: the *Virgin by the Tree*, a *Virgin on the Crescent*, and the *Bag-Piper* (142, 140, and 198, all of them of the same format as the Engraved Passion and probably engraved on plates prepared in this connection); the *Couple of Peasants Dancing* (197); and the first two of a series of Apostles which was never completed, *St. Paul* (157) and *St. Thomas* (155). The three remaining engravings, however, are not only exceptionally large in size—about 7 by 10 inches—and meticulously careful in execution, but also complex and significant in iconography. They are Dürer's most famous engravings and, not unjustly, known as his "Meisterstiche": the *Knight, Death and Devil*, the *St. Jerome in His Study*, and the *Melencolia I*, the former of 1513, the two others of 1514.

These three "Master Engravings," though approximately equal in format, have no appreciable compositional relationship with one another and can thus hardly be considered as "companion pieces" in any technical sense. Yet they form a spiritual unity in that they symbolize three ways of life which correspond, as Friedrich Lippmann pointed out, to the scholastic classification of the virtues as moral, theological and intellectual. The *Knight, Death and Devil* typifies the life of the Christian in the practical world of decision and action; the *St. Jerome* the life of the Saint in the spiritual world of sacred contemplation; and the *Melencolia I* the life of the secular genius in the rational and imaginative worlds of science and art.

Dürer's awareness of the fact that the first of these three prints, the *Knight, Death and Devil* (205, fig. 207), was an important enterprise is again manifested by the special form of the signature. The figure 1513 is preceded by an "S.," an abbreviation of the word "Salus" which occurs, identically placed, in the date lines of Dürer's first drafts for an Introduction to his Treatise on Human Proportions, composed in 1512 and 1513.

In the Diary of his journey to the Netherlands Dürer refers to the engraving simply as the "Reuter" ("the Horseman"). But in the same Diary we find a passage which furnishes a clue to its interpretation. Grieved and incensed by the unfounded rumors of Luther's assassination, Dürer jotted down, amidst the records of his daily work and expenses, a magnificent outburst against the Papists which culminates in a passionate appeal to Erasmus of Rotterdam: "O Erasme Roderodame, where wilt thou take thy stand? Look, of what avail is the unjust tyranny of worldly might and the powers of darkness? Hark, thou Knight of Christ [*du Ritter Christi*], ride forth at the side of Christ our Lord, protect the truth, obtain the crown of the Martyrs!" No doubt the phrase "*du Ritter Christi*" alludes to Erasmus's youthful treatise *Enchiridion militis Christiani* ("Handbook of the Christian Soldier") which had been composed in 1501 and was first published in 1504. But that Dürer promoted the Erasmian

"soldier" (*miles*, not *eques*) to a "knight" riding forth on horseback shows that his mind involuntarily associated him with the hero of his own engraving.

The comparison between the Christian facing a hostile world and the soldier preparing himself for battle can be traced back to St. Paul who speaks of the spiritual weapons of "our warfare" (*II Cor.*, x, 3) and urges the faithful to arm themselves with the "armor of God," the "breastplate of righteousness," the "shield of faith," and the "helmet of salvation" (*Ephes.*, vi, 11-17; see also *I Thess.*, v, 8). It remained popular in medieval writing and also found its way into fifteenth century woodcuts. In these the Christian Soldier is generally depicted singly while the personifications of Death and Devil are found in representations of a closely related theme, that of the Christian Pilgrim. The two ideas intermingled, however, and a complete fusion of Soldier's March and Pilgrim's Progress, with the time-honored simile of the ladder serving as a common denominator, is seen in woodcuts and etchings of the sixteenth century where the *miles Christianus* climbs the ladder which leads to God, hampered but not discouraged by the strings of Death, Luxury, Disease, and Poverty.

In Erasmus's *Enchiridion* these traditional concepts are interpreted in the spirit of humanism. He clothes his thoughts in the garment of beautiful Latin; he takes his examples from Greek and Roman literature as well as from Scripture, "for we must love the classics for the sake of Christ"; and he rejects the "theologians" in favor of the "sources." But above all he humanizes the idea of Christianity as such. He preaches purity and piety, but not monasticism and intolerance; and he spurns sin not only as something forbidden by God but even more as something incompatible with the "dignity of man."

This book could not supply an artist with suggestions for iconographical details. But it could reveal to him the idea of a Christian faith so virile, clear, serene and strong that the dangers and temptations of the world simply cease to be real: "In order that you may not be deterred from the path of virtue because it seems rough and dreary, because you may have to renounce the comforts of the world, and because you must constantly fight three unfair enemies, the flesh, the devil and the world, this third rule shall be proposed to you: All those spooks and phantoms [*terrícula et phantasmata*] which come upon you as in the very gorges of Hades must be deemed for nought after the example of Virgil's Aeneas."

This is precisely what Dürer expressed in his engraving: unlike all other representations of similar subjects, the enemies of man do not appear to be real. They are not foes to be conquered but, indeed, "spooks and phantoms" to be ignored. The Rider passes them as though they were not there and quietly pursues his course, "fixing his eyes steadily and intensely on the thing itself," to quote Erasmus again. How did Dürer contrive to create this impression?

It has long been observed that the equestrian figure—almost a symbol of Dürer's art and mentality—is composed of two disparate elements: one German, Late Gothic, and "naturalistic"; the other Italian, High Renaissance, and stylized in accordance with a "classic" canon of pose and proportions. The armored knight was taken over from a costume study of 1498 (1227) which was, however, adapted to the new purpose by minor yet significant changes. The simple sergeant's face of the original model was replaced by a stern mask of concentrated

energy and almost sardonic self-assurance, and the perspective of the helmet was altered in favor of a *di sotto in sù* effect which strengthens the impression of tallness and superiority. The horse, on the other hand, is patterned after one (or more) of Leonardo's studies for the monument of Francesco Sforza. Its proportions are remodelled according to a canon of Dürer's own invention (see the drawings 1674-1676), but its gait retains more of the Italian rhythm than is the case in the *Small Horse* of 1505 (*fig.* 125) or the drawing *Death on Horseback* of the same year (*fig.* 147). In contrast with these earlier instances not only the near foreleg but also the off hind leg are raised and bent, and the movement of the latter was even intensified by a last-minute correction still recognizable in the engraving.

This monumental Horseman—his general appearance somewhat reminiscent of Burgkmair's well-known equestrian portrait of Maximilian I in a woodcut of 1508, which was in turn derived from Dürer's *Small Horse*—is set out against a background of forbidding rocks and bare trees with his ultimate goal, the unconquerable "fortress of Virtue," still far off at the end of a steep, winding road. From the gloom of this "rough and dreary" scenery there emerge the figures of Death and the Devil. As in the drawing of 1505, Death wears a regal crown and is mounted on a meager, listless jade with a cowbell; but he is even ghastlier in that he is not depicted as an actual skeleton but as a decaying corpse with sad eyes, no lips and no nose, his head and neck encircled by snakes. He sidles up to the Rider and tries in vain to frighten him by holding up an hourglass while the swine-snouted Devil sneaks up behind him with a pickaxe. The Rider, on the other hand, is accompanied by a handsome, long-haired retriever whose presence completes the allegory. As the armored man personifies Christian faith, so the eager and quick-scented dog denotes three less fundamental yet no less necessary virtues: untiring zeal, learning and truthful reasoning. In the capacity of "zealous endeavor" he accompanies the Christian Pilgrim on his journey through life; as a symbol of "sacred letters" he occurs in a treatise on hieroglyphs which Dürer illustrated precisely in 1512/13 (see the drawing 970 and our *fig.* 228); and as "Veritas" he helps the huntress "Logica" to catch the hare "Problema."

It has been contended that all these additions were harmful to the aesthetic effect of Dürer's engraving. His original intention, it was argued, was "to represent a horse with a man thereon," and he would have done better to refrain from justifying this intention by an iconographical program: "No one can doubt for a moment that the accompanying figures are merely tacked on, and that the whole is a compromise." But the attempt at reinstating the original beauty of the composition by "blacking out" the whole background defeats its own purpose. It shows that the "many odds and ends" are indispensable, not only from the point of view of subject matter but also from the point of view of form and content. It is quite true that Dürer was anxious to find a subject which would permit him to demonstrate the final results of his studies in the anatomy, movements, and proportions of the horse. But he would not have been a great artist had he conceived of this problem in terms of detachable accessories. Once he had discovered his theme in the idea of the Christian Knight the visual image of the perfect horseman merged with the mental image of the perfect *miles Christianus* into an artistic concept, that is to say, an integral unity. The iconography of the Christian

Knight took shape according to the formal pattern of a carefully balanced equestrian group while, conversely, this formal pattern assumed, as such, an expressive or even symbolic significance.

Based as it is on accumulated research and observation, Dürer's equestrian group bears all the earmarks of a scientific paradigm. The horse is represented in full profile so as to show off its perfect proportions; it is emphatically modelled so as to reveal its perfect anatomy; and it moves with the regulated step of the riding-school so as to give a demonstration of perfect rhythm. With the background obliterated, Dürer's engraving thus looks like a stiff and over-elaborated imitation of an equestrian statue *à la* Pollaiuolo, Verrocchio and Leonardo da Vinci. With the background retained, the compositional structure of the main group is not only enhanced by what may be called a visual counterpoint—note the use of foreshortened forms *versus* full profile, of diagonals *versus* horizontals and verticals—but also endowed with a definite meaning. Contrasted with the twilight and the specters of a Northern forest, the very articulateness and plastic tangibility of this moving monument suggests an existence more solid and real than that of Death and the Devil who appear as little more than shadows of the wilderness. Contrasted with their futile attempts to attract the Rider's attention, the very fact that man, horse, and dog are represented in pure profile convinces us that none of them is even aware of the presence of danger and thus expresses the idea of imperturbability. And contrasted with the jerky obsequiousness of the Devil and the pitiful weakness of Death and his worn-out horse, the measured gait of the powerful charger conveys the idea of unconquerable progress.

Thus it is just by combining a highly formalized equestrian group with a fantastically haunted wilderness that Dürer was able to do justice to the Erasmian ideal of a Christian fortitude which reduces the enemies of mankind to "spooks and phantoms." If his engraving needed a caption this caption could be found in the Biblical motto which Erasmus suggests to the *miles Christianus*: "Non est fas respicere" ("Look not behind thee").

While the Christian Knight goes out into the cold, dark and perilous maze of the world, the Christian Scholar and Thinker, as typified in Dürer's *St. Jerome* (167, fig. 208), lives in the warm, bright and peaceful seclusion of a well-ordered study. The room is a real cell, separated from an adjoining one by a partition which cuts right into one of the round-topped, mullioned windows piercing the south wall of a cloister. It is a very simple room, yet thoroughly pleasant, provided not only with the necessities but also with the small comforts of a devout and scholarly life. When Lucas Cranach portrayed the Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg in the guise of Dürer's St. Jerome (paintings in Darmstadt and Sarasota) he felt obliged to enrich the milieu by such luxuries as velvet covers, colorful animals and hot-house fruit; but these additions all but destroy the atmosphere of the original setting. This atmosphere can only be described by two untranslatable German words, "gemütlich" and "stimmungsvoll." Such English words as "snug" or "cozy" may express the feeling of intimacy, warmth and protectedness which pervades St. Jerome's sanctum, suffused as it is with a mellow sunlight in which even the skull on the window-sill looks friendly rather than terrifying. But

they do not adequately suggest what may be called its spiritual climate. The threshold of the room is blocked by St. Jerome's lion who, dozing with contented boredom, yet keeps a drowsily suspicious eye on possible intrusions from the outer world. A little dog is fast asleep, one of its feet in friendly contact with the lion's paw. The Saint himself is working at the far end of the room, which in itself gives the impression of remoteness and peace. His little desk is placed on a large table which otherwise holds nothing but an inkpot and a crucifix. Engrossed in his writing, he is blissfully alone with his thoughts, with his animals, and with his God.

It is, however, not only by the magic of light and by the empathic realization of human and animal nature that Dürer transformed the cell of St. Jerome into a place of enchanted beatitude. He also exploited the psychological possibilities of a method which, one would think, is almost inimical to psychological expression, namely, exact geometrical perspective. The construction of the picture space, impeccably correct from a mathematical point of view, is characterized, first, by the extreme shortness of the perspective distance which, if the room were drawn to natural scale, would amount to only about four feet; second, by the lowness of the horizon which is determined by the eye level of the seated Saint; third, by the eccentric position of the vanishing point which is little more than half a centimeter from the right margin. The shortness of the distance, combined with the lowness of the horizon, strengthens the feeling of intimacy. The beholder finds himself placed quite close to the threshold of the study proper on one of the steps which lead up to it. Unnoticed by the busy Saint, and not intruding upon his privacy, we yet share his living space and feel like unseen friendly visitors rather than distant observers. The eccentricity of the vanishing point, on the other hand, prevents the small room from looking cramped and box-like because the north wall is not visible; it gives greater prominence to the play of light on the embrasures of the windows; and it suggests the experience of casually entering a private room rather than of facing an artificially arranged stage.

And yet everything in this informal and unpretentious room is subject to a mathematical principle. The apparently irreducible impression of order and security which is the very signature of Dürer's *St. Jerome* can be accounted for, at least in part, by the fact that the position of the objects freely distributed about the room is no less firmly determined by elementary perspective construction than if they were attached to the walls. They are either placed frontally like the writing table of St. Jerome, the animals, the books, and the skull on the window sill; or orthogonally like the "cartellino" with Dürer's signature; or at an angle of precisely forty-five degrees like the little bench on the Saint's left. Even the slippers beneath the window-seat are arranged so that one is almost parallel and the other exactly at right angles to the picture plane.

This regularity might seem dry or even pedantic were it not softened, or indeed concealed, by the delightful gambol of light and shade. Space and light constitute a perfect balance of stability and oscillation. Yet even the most pictorial effects are obtained by rigorously graphic methods. From a technical point of view the *St. Jerome*—in this respect superior to the *Knight*, *Death and Devil* in the same sense and to the same degree that the *Virgin by*

the Wall (147) is superior to the *Virgin by the Tree* of 1513 (142)—is a *ne plus ultra* of consistency, clearness and, above all, economy. A maximum of effect is achieved with a minimum of effort and complication, as can be seen, for instance, in the shadows cast upon the window embrasures by the latticed windows (fig. 205). The phenomenon is as pictorial and subtle as the treatment is graphic and simple: the “bull’s eyes” themselves are rendered by outlines without hatchings, and their shadows by short horizontal hatchings without outlines. That is all.

The *St. Jerome* differs from the *Knight, Death and Devil* in that it opposes the ideal of the “*vita contemplativa*” to that of the “*vita activa*.” But it differs much more emphatically from the *Melencolia I* (181, fig. 209) in that it opposes a life in the service of God to what may be called a life in competition with God—the peaceful bliss of divine wisdom to the tragic unrest of human creation. While the *St. Jerome* and the *Knight, Death and Devil* illustrate two opposite methods of reaching a common objective, the *St. Jerome* and the *Melencolia I* express two antithetical ideals. That Dürer conceived of these two prints as spiritual “counterparts” within the triad of the “*Meisterstiche*” can be concluded from the fact that he was in the habit of giving them away together and that collectors looked at and discussed them side by side. No less than six copies were disposed of as pairs while only one copy of the *Melencolia I* was given away singly and no impression of the *Knight, Death and Devil* changed hands together with either of the two other prints.

The two compositions offer, indeed, a contrast too perfect to be accidental. While the *St. Jerome* is comfortably installed at his writing desk, the winged Melancholia sits in a crouching position, not unlike that of the Job in the “*Jabach altarpiece*” (fig. 112), on a low slab of stone by an unfinished building. While he is secluded in his warm, sunlit study she is placed in a chilly and lonely spot not far from the sea, dimly illuminated by the light of the moon—as can be inferred from the cast-shadow of the hourglass on the wall—and by the lurid gleam of a comet which is encircled by a lunar rainbow. While he shares his cell with his contented, well-fed animals, she is accompanied by a morose little *putto* who, perched on a disused grindstone, scribbles something on a slate, and by a half-starved, shivering hound. And while he is serenely absorbed in his theological work, she has lapsed into a state of gloomy inaction. Neglectful of her attire, with dishevelled hair, she rests her head on her hand and with the other mechanically holds a compass, her forearm resting on a closed book. Her eyes are raised in a lowering stare.

The state of mind of this unhappy genius is reflected by her paraphernalia whose bewildering disorder offers, again, an eloquent contrast to the neat and efficient arrangement of *St. Jerome*’s belongings. Attached to the unfinished building are a pair of scales, an hourglass, and a bell under which a so-called magic square is let into the wall; leaning against the masonry is a wooden ladder which seems to emphasize the incompleteness of the edifice. The ground is littered with tools and objects mostly pertaining to the crafts of architecture and carpentry. In addition to the grindstone already mentioned, we find: a plane, a saw, a ruler, a pair of pincers, some crooked nails, a molder’s form, a hammer, a small melting pot (per-

haps for melting lead) with a pair of tongs to hold the burning coals, an inkpot with a pen-box; and, half hidden beneath the skirt of the Melancholia, an instrument which can be identified—on the basis of a woodcut by Hans Döring—as the mouth of a pair of bellows. Two objects seem to be not so much tools as symbols or emblems of the scientific principle which underlies the arts of architecture and carpentry: a turned sphere of wood and a truncated rhombohedron of stone. Like the hourglass, the pair of scales, the magic square, and the compass, these symbols or emblems bear witness to the fact that the terrestrial craftsman, like the “*Architect of the Universe*,” applies in his work the rules of mathematics, that is, in the language of Plato and the *Book of Wisdom*, of “*measure, number and weight*.”

In modern usage, melancholy means, to quote from the Oxford Dictionary, “*mental depression, lack of cheerfulness; tendency to low spirits and brooding; depressing influence of a place, etc.*” However, when Dürer composed his engraving the expression could not yet have been used as of a transient mood, much less of the gloomy emanation of a locality. In order to understand the title “*Melencolia I*”—inscribed on the wings of a squeaking bat—we must, instead, recall to mind that theory of the “*four humors*” which has already been touched upon in connection with Dürer’s interpretations of the Fall of Man. This theory, fully developed by the end of classical Antiquity, was based on the assumption that both the body and the mind of man were conditioned by four basic fluids which in turn were supposed to be coessential with the four elements, the four winds (or directions of space), the four seasons, the four times of day, and the four phases of life. Choler, or yellow gall, was associated with the element of fire and was believed to share the latter’s qualities of heat and dryness. It was thus held to correspond to the hot and dry Eurus, to summer, to midday, and to the age of manly maturity. Phlegm, on the other hand, was supposed to be moist and cold like water and was connected with the wind Auster, with winter, with night, and with old age. The blood, moist and warm, was equated with air and was likened to the pleasant Zephyr, to spring, to morning, and to youth. The melancholy humor, finally—the name deriving from Greek μέλαινα χόλος, black gall—was supposed to be coessential with earth and to be dry and cold; it was related to the rough Boreas, to autumn, evening, and an age of about sixty. Dürer himself has illustrated this cosmological scheme in one of his woodcuts for Conrad Celtes (350, fig. 215) which differs from the original tradition only in that the melancholy humor is identified with winter instead of with autumn, and the phlegmatic with autumn instead of with winter—an understandable concession to the climatic difference between Germany and ancient Greece.

In an ideal or absolutely healthy human being these four humors would be perfectly balanced so that none would predominate over the others. But such a human being would be immortal and free from sin, and we know that both these advantages were irretrievably forfeited by the Fall of Man. In practice, therefore, one of the four humors prevails over the others in every individual, and this determines his or her entire personality. Apart from the fact that each of the humors asserts itself, quite generally, according to the course of the year, the day and the human life—we still speak of “*sanguine youth*” or “*the melancholy of*

autumn"—every man, woman and child is constitutionally either a sanguine, or a choleric, or a melancholic, or a phlegmatic. These four types differ from one another in every possible respect. Each of them is marked by a peculiar physical habitus—slender or stout, tender or tough, robust or delicate; by the color of hair, eyes and skin (the word "complexion" derives, in fact, from the Latin word for "humoral mixture" or "temperament"); by a susceptibility to specific diseases; and, above all, by characteristic moral and intellectual qualities. The phlegmatic is inclined to other vices—and, conversely, is capable of other virtues—than the choleric; he behaves differently toward his fellow-men, he is suited to a different set of professions, and he has a different philosophy of life.

As long as the predominance of any one humor keeps within reasonable bounds the mind and body of the individual is merely qualified in this peculiar way. But if his humor gets out of control—either by an excessive increase in quantity which may occur for a variety of reasons, or by a deterioration in quality which may be caused by inflammation, chill or "adustion"—he ceases to be a normal or "natural" phlegmatic, melancholic, etc. He falls sick and may ultimately die; we still speak of "melancholy" and "cholera" as mental or physical diseases.

Obviously the four humors or temperaments could not be considered as equally desirable. The sanguine temperament, associated with air, spring, morning and youth, was, and in some measure still is, regarded as the most auspicious one. Favored with a well-knit body and a ruddy complexion, the sanguine seemed to surpass all other types in natural cheerfulness, sociability, generosity and talents of all description; even his faults, a certain weakness for wine, good food and love, were of the amiable and pardonable kind. Blood is, after all, a nobler and healthier fluid than the two kinds of gall or phlegm. We remember that certain theorists considered the sanguine temperament as the original, or perfectly balanced, condition of man; and even after this ideal equilibrium had been destroyed by the sin of Adam the predominance of the blood was much preferred to any of the other alternatives.

As the sanguine condition was greeted as the most fortunate, so the melancholic was hated and feared as the worst. When excessively augmented, inflamed, or otherwise disturbed, the black gall causes the most dreaded of all diseases, insanity; this disease can befall anybody, but the melancholics by nature are its most likely prey. And even without a downright pathological disturbance the natural or constitutional melancholics—generally considered as *pessime complexionati* ("the most ill-mixed")—are both unfortunate and disagreeable. Thin and swarthy, the melancholic is "awkward, miserly, spiteful, greedy, malicious, cowardly, faithless, irreverent and drowsy." He is "surly, sad, forgetful, lazy and sluggish"; he shuns the company of his fellow-men and despises the opposite sex; and his only redeeming feature—and even this is frequently omitted from the texts—is a certain inclination for solitary study.

Before Dürer, pictorial representations of melancholy were chiefly found, first, in technical treatises on medicine; second, in popular books or broad-sheets which dealt with the theory of the four humors, especially in manuscript or printed Calendars. In the medical

books melancholy was discussed as a disease, and the main purpose of the illustrations was to show different methods of treatment—how melancholy derangement could be cured by music, or by flogging, or by cauterization (*fig. 211*). In the popular broad-sheets, Calendars and "Complexbüchlein," on the other hand, the Melancholic was depicted not as a pathological case but as a type of human nature. He appeared within a series of four figures or scenes intended to bring out the more or less desirable but, each in its way, perfectly "normal" features of the Four Temperaments.

We have said "four figures or scenes" because the representations of the Four Temperaments fall, roughly speaking, into two classes, one of a purely descriptive, the other of a scenic or dramatic character.

In illustrations of the descriptive type (which ultimately derive from Hellenistic cycles representing the Four Ages of Man) each temperament is typified by one figure only. These four figures—usually on foot, but occasionally on horseback—are differentiated according to age, social status, and profession. In the woodcut illustrated in *fig. 214*, for instance, the sanguine temperament is represented by a youthful, fashionable falconer who walks on a band of clouds and stars which indicates his congeniality with the element of air. The Phlegmatic—always hard to characterize because, as was already observed by Galen, his humor does not make for "characteristic" qualities—appears as a fattish burgher who stands in a pool of water, holding a rosary. The Choleric is a warlike man of about forty briskly walking through fire; to show his irascible temper he brandishes a sword and a stool. The Melancholic, finally, is depicted as an elderly, cheerless miser standing on the solid ground. Leaning against a locked desk the top of which is all but covered with coins, he gloomily rests his head on his right hand while with his left he grasps the purse hanging from his belt.

In illustrations of the scenic or dramatic type the four temperaments are typified by couples. As a rule, there is some indication of the elements, but the figures themselves are not differentiated as to age, social standing and occupation. They reveal their temperament only by their behavior, and it is interesting to note that they do this by reenacting scenes originally used for the characterization of vices. During the high Middle Ages the types of human behavior had been studied and depicted not for their own sake but with reference to the system of moral theology. They were not illustrated in secular monographs but, under the guise of Vices, in the reliefs of such Cathedrals as Chartres, Paris, and Amiens, or in the miniatures of such moral treatises as the *Somme le Roi*. Toward the end of the Middle Ages these moralistic patterns were gradually converted into characterological specimens, the accent on good and evil being lessened and ultimately abolished. Many a trait in Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" derives from the negative examples adduced in sermons of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and many a "Fool" in Sebastian Brant's *Narrenscheyff* had originally been—and to the surly author's mind still was—a reprehensible sinner. Thus, when a fifteenth century artist sought models which he might use for a dramatic instead of a merely descriptive representation of the Four Temperaments he had nothing to turn to except the traditional types of the Vices.

In this way the dramatic interpretation of the sanguine temperament, as found in several illuminated manuscripts and printed Calendars, reverts to the high medieval picture of Luxury. As in the *Luxuria* relief at Amiens Cathedral, the Sanguines are depicted as a couple clasped in a fervent embrace (figs. 216 and 217). Similarly the choleric temperament is exemplified by a man striking and kicking a woman, which is merely a transformation of what at Amiens Cathedral had been a representation of Discord. Now, as the main characteristic of the melancholy man in popular medieval writing was glumness and drowsiness, his type was modelled upon the pattern of Sloth or "Acedia." This pattern—freely employed, as we remember, in Dürer's "*Dream of the Doctor*" (fig. 98)—is based on the idea of the sinful sleep, the pictures showing a farmer asleep by his plow, a burgher asleep by a crucifix to which he ought to pray, a woman asleep by her distaff; the last of these three types (figs. 103 and 210) was so popular that Sebastian Brant adopted it for his "Fulheit" (Laziness)—with the kind-hearted amendment that the lazy spinner burns her leg in her sleep.

Consequently the dramatic representations of Melancholy show a woman asleep by her distaff combined with a man asleep at a table or even in bed (fig. 212); at times the man has a book over which he has dozed off, and in some later instances the slothful couple is joined by a hermit, a humble representative of study and solitude.

Blasphemous toward Dürer as it may sound—these homespun images must be counted among the ancestry of his famous engraving. Primitive though they are, they supplied its basic compositional formula, as well as the general idea of gloomy inertia. In both cases a woman, prominently placed in the foreground, is accompanied in a diagonal grouping by a less important representative of the opposite sex, and in both cases the essential characteristic of the main figure is her inaction. Needless to say, however, the differences outweigh the similarities. In the miniatures and woodcuts of the fifteenth century the secondary figure is as sleepy and slothful as the principal one, while Dürer's engraving shows a deliberate contrast between the inaction of the Melancholia and the strenuous efforts of the scribbling *putto*. And, more important, the Melancholia is idle and the women in the earlier illustrations have abandoned their distaffs for entirely opposite reasons. These lowly creatures have gone to sleep out of sheer laziness. The Melancholia, on the contrary, is what may be called super-awake; her fixed stare is one of intent though fruitless searching. She is inactive not because she is too lazy to work but because work has become meaningless to her; her energy is paralyzed not by sleep but by thought.

In Dürer's engraving the whole conception of melancholy is thus shifted to a plane wholly beyond the compass of his predecessors. Instead of a sluggish housewife we have a superior being—superior, not only by virtue of her wings but also by virtue of her intelligence and imagination—surrounded by the tools and symbols of creative endeavor and scientific research. And here we perceive a second and more delicate thread of tradition which went into the fabric of Dürer's composition.

From the middle of the twelfth century, with the "Portail Royal" of Chartres as the first known example, we find, in ever increasing numbers, personifications of the Arts. Their circle

was originally limited to the aristocratic Seven Liberal Arts enumerated by Martianus Capella, but it was soon enlarged by a less definite number of "Mechanical Arts" so as to illustrate the Aristotelianizing definition of art as "every productive effort based on a rational principle." The composition of these images followed a constant formula. A female figure, typifying one of the arts—or, on occasion, art in general—and at times accompanied by assistants or subsidiary personifications, is surrounded by the attributes of her activity, holding the most characteristic ones herself. A fourteenth century miniature—one of the rare examples of "Art in General" (fig. 218)—fairly bristles with all kinds of scientific and technical implements, and when these implements came to be scattered in three-dimensional space instead of being displayed on a plane surface the general effect began to approach that of Dürer's *Melencolia I*.

In one specific instance a definite iconographic connection can be established. In the 1504 and 1508 editions of Gregor Reisch's *Margarita Philosophica*, one of the most widely read encyclopedic treatises of the period, we find a woodcut entitled "Typus Geometriae" which includes nearly all the devices appearing in Dürer's *Melencolia I* (fig. 219). It synthesizes, so to speak, the type of the Liberal Arts with that of the Technical, for it is intended to show that almost all the crafts and many branches of "natural philosophy" depend on geometrical operations.

Geometry, depicted as a richly attired lady, is engaged in measuring a sphere with her compass. She sits at a table on which are drafting instruments, an inkpot and models of stereometrical bodies. An unfinished building, with an ashlar still in the prongs of a crane, is checked over by an assistant while two others work at a drafting board and make a topographical survey. Scattered about the ground are a hammer, a ruler and two molder's forms; and clouds, the moon and stars, announcing the celestial phenomena in Dürer's engraving, are observed by means of quadrants and astrolabes. Not only meteorology and astronomy—a further allusion to the latter, by the way, is the peacock's feather on the hat of Geometry, the peacock's plumage being an ancient symbol of the starry firmament—but also all the technical arts are thus interpreted as applications of geometry; and to this Dürer's conception conforms. His *Unterweysung der Messung* is dedicated, "not only to painters but also to goldsmiths, sculptors, stonemasons, carpenters and all those who make use of geometry"; and in a draft probably written just about 1513-15 the "plane and the turning lathe"—the operation of both being based on a geometrical principle—are mentioned together just as the plane and the turned sphere are juxtaposed in the *Melencolia I*. In fact, the whole array of implements in the engraving can be summed up under the heading "Typus Geometriae," the book, the inkpot and the compass standing for pure geometry; the magic square, the hourglass with the bell, and the pair of scales for measurement in space and time ("Geo ponderat," "geometry weighs," to quote from an old mnemonic verse); the technical instruments for applied geometry; and the truncated rhomboid for descriptive geometry, particularly stereography and perspective.

Thus Dürer's engraving represents a fusion of two iconographic formulae hitherto distinct: the "Melancholici" of popular Calendars and "Complexbüchlein," and the "Typus Geometriae" of philosophical treatises and encyclopedic decorations. The result was an intellectualization of melancholy on the one hand, and a humanization of geometry on the other. The former Melancholics had been unfortunate misers and sluggards, despised for their unsociability and general incompetence. The former Geometries had been abstract personifications of a noble science, devoid of human emotions and quite incapable of suffering. Dürer imagined a being endowed with the intellectual power and technical accomplishments of an "Art," yet despairing under the cloud of a "black humor." He depicted a Geometry gone melancholy or, to put it the other way, a Melancholy gifted with all that is implied in the word geometry—in short, a "Melancholia artificialis" or Artist's Melancholy.

Thus almost all the motifs employed in Dürer's engraving can be accounted for by well-established textual and representational traditions pertaining to "melancholy" on the one hand, and to "geometry" on the other. But Dürer, while fully aware of their emblematic significance, also invested them with an expressive, or psychological, meaning.

That the conventional tools and symbols of the "geometrical" professions are arranged, or rather disarranged, so as to convey a feeling of discomfort and stagnation has already been mentioned. The comet and the rainbow, causing the scenery to phosphoresce in an uneasy twilight, not only serve to signify astronomy but also have a weird, ill-boding emanation of their own. Both the bat and the dog were traditionally associated with melancholy, the former (*vespertilio* in Latin) because he emerges at dusk and lives in lonely, dark and decaying places; the latter because he, more than other animals, is subject to spells of dejection and even to madness, and because he looks the more woebegone the more intelligent he is ("the most sagacious dogs are those who carry a melancholy face before themselves," to quote an author of the early sixteenth century who obviously thought of what we call bloodhounds). But in Dürer's engraving the bat and the dog are not merely emblems but, even more, living creatures, one squeaking with evident ill-will, the other shrivelled up with general misery.

What is true of the accessories is no less true of the main figure. Her book and compass belong, of course, to the typical attributes of Geometry; but that she does not make use of either reveals her torpid dejection. That she rests her head on her hand is in keeping with a tradition which can be traced back to ancient Egyptian art. As an expression of brooding thought, fatigue or sorrow this attitude is found in hundreds and thousands of figures and had become a standing attribute of melancholy and "Acedia" (figs. 210-214); and even that her hand is clenched to a fist is not as unusual as it may seem. The *pugillum clausum* was a typical symbol of avarice—we still speak of "tight-fistedness," and Dante says that misers will be resurrected "col pugno chiuso"—and it was supposed that if this melancholy vice assumed the proportions of real insanity the patients would never unclench their fingers because they imagined themselves holding a treasure or even the whole world in their fist. But in Dürer's engraving the motif has a totally different meaning. In medieval miniatures

the Melancholic displays his clenched fist as a symptomatic attribute, much as St. Bartholomew displays his knife, or the Magdalen her ointment jar (fig. 211). Dürer, in making the fist support the head, the center of thought and imagination, transforms a characterological or even medical symptom into an expressive gesture. His Melancholia is neither a miser nor a mental case, but a thinking being in perplexity. She does not hold on to an object which does not exist, but to a problem which cannot be solved.

One of the chief characteristics of the traditional melancholic is his swarthy, "earthlike" complexion which under certain circumstances can deepen to actual blackness. This *facies nigra* was still in Milton's mind when he described his "divinest Melancholy" as one

"Whose saintly visage is too bright
To hit the sense of human sight,
And therefore to our weaker view
O'erlaid with black, staid wisdom's hue."

Dürer, almost as subtle as Milton, substituted a luminary effect for the material discoloration of the skin. The face of his Melancholia—like that of Michelangelo's "Penseroso"—is overcast by a deep shadow. It is not so much a dark as a darkened face, made all the more impressive by its contrast with the startling white of the eyes.

The wreath which she wears on her head is primarily a palliative against the dangers of the *humor melancholicus*. To counteract the bad effects of "dryness" it was recommended to put on one's head "the leaves of plants having a watery nature," and it is precisely of such plants that the wreath is composed; it consists of water-ranunculus—which also occurs in the "Aqua" section of Dürer's cosmological woodcut for Celtes (fig. 215)—and watercress. But the very idea of a wreath—normally a symbol of joy or superiority, as in many portraits of humanists or in Dürer's own representations of the Emperor Sigismund (fig. 176), a Wise Virgin (645), Hercules (fig. 108) and the poet Terence (fig. 36)—is here belied by the gloom of the general atmosphere. Again a mere emblem is used as a vehicle of psychological expression.

Perhaps we have no right to assume that practically every detail in the *Melencolia I* has a special "meaning." But the selection of two inconspicuous plants which have nothing in common except their "watery" nature—Copernicus still believed that the seeds of watercress caused "unhealthy humidity" because the plant grows in humid places—can hardly be an accident. Moreover, we know by Dürer's own testimony that in the context of this engraving even the most conventional and commonplace accessories of a "Hausfrau's" costume are meant to have an emblematic significance. Attached to the belt of the Melancholia are a purse and a bunch of keys. Compared with the neat and orderly appearance of these objects in an engraving like the *Virgin by the Wall* (147), they, too, express the distraught condition of their owner, for the keys are disarranged and the purse trails on the ground with its leather strips twisted and partly unfastened. But in addition to revealing that

"careless desolation" which still marks the "melancholic" of the Elizabethan stage, they signify two definite concepts. On one of Dürer's sketches for the *Melencolia I* (1201) we find the following note: "Schlüssel betewt gewalt, pewtell betewt reichthum" ("Key denotes power, purse denotes wealth").

The purse is still a common symbol of wealth, particularly in its less enjoyable aspects of parsimony and avarice, and the papal "power of the keys" is still as proverbial in English as the matrimonial "Schlüsselgewalt"—already mentioned in connection with Dürer's *Glorification of the Virgin* (315)—is in German. The purse is therefore a frequent attribute of the miserly Melancholic (figs. 213 and 214), and the keys, too, can be connected with the concept of melancholy. As we shall shortly see, the melancholy humor was associated with the planet Saturn who, as the oldest and highest of the planetary divinities, was held to wield as well as to bestow "power," and was in fact occasionally represented with a key or bunch of keys.

However, since Dürer's Melancholia is no ordinary Melancholy, but, as we expressed it, the "Melancholia Artificialis" or Artist's Melancholy, we may well ask whether there might not be a special connection between the qualities of power and wealth and professional artistic activity. This seems indeed to be the case. In his theoretical writings Dürer not only insists that wealth is, or at least should be, the well-deserved reward of the artist (his earliest draft, composed about 1512, emphatically closes with the sentence: "If you were poor, you may achieve great prosperity through such art"), he also uses the German word for power, "Gewalt," as a specific term denoting that consummate mastery which is the final goal of every artist and can be attained only by passionate study and the grace of God: "And the true artists recognize at once whether or not a work is powerful [*gewaltsam*], and a great love will grow in those who understand"; or: "God gives much power [*viel Gewalts*] to ingenious men."

Now this consummate mastery results, according to Dürer—and to all other thinkers of the Renaissance—from a perfect coordination of two accomplishments: theoretical insight, particularly a thorough command of geometry ("Kunst" in the original sense of "knowledge"), and practical skill ("Brauch"). "These two must be together," Dürer says, "for the one without the other is of no avail."

This explains not only the deranged and neglected condition of the Melancholia's keys and purse, which indicates a temporary absence of wealth and power rather than their presence, but also the significant contrast between her torpid inaction and the bustling activity of the *putto*. The mature and learned Melancholia typifies Theoretical Insight which thinks but cannot act. The ignorant infant, making meaningless scrawls on his slate and almost conveying the impression of blindness, typifies Practical Skill which acts but cannot think (whereby it should be noted that Dürer's expression for theoretical insight, "Kunst," is of the feminine gender whereas his term for practical skill, "Brauch," is masculine). Theory and practice are thus not "together," as Dürer demands, but thoroughly disunited; and the result is impotence and gloom.

Three questions remain to be answered. First, with what right could Dürer substitute a spiritual tragedy for what had been the sluggishness and obtuseness of an inferior temperament? Second, on what grounds could he associate, or even identify, the idea of melancholy with that of geometry? Third, what is the meaning of the number "I" which follows the word "Melencolia"?

The answer to the first question lies in the fact that the whole concept of melancholy had been revised, or rather reversed, by Marsilio Ficino, the leading spirit of the Neo-Platonic "Academy" at Florence, and that this new doctrine, developed in Ficino's "Letters" and conclusively formulated in his treatise *De Vita Triplici*, had met with great success in Germany as well as in Italy. The "Letters" had been published by Koberger, and the first two Books of the three "Libri de Vita" had even been translated into German. Of these developments Dürer was certainly aware, for he quotes the "Platonic ideas" as early as 1512.

Marsilio Ficino, himself a man of delicate health and melancholy disposition, tried to alleviate the real and imaginary tribulations of his humor by the time-honored devices of exercise, regular hours, a careful diet and music (Dürer, by the way, also recommends the "cheerful tunes of the lute" in case "a young painter should overwork, from which his melancholy might exceed"). But he found greater consolation in an Aristotelian discourse which, though occasionally quoted by scholastic philosophers, had thus far failed to change the general dislike and fear of melancholy. According to this brilliant analysis of what may be called the psycho-physiology of human greatness (*Problemata*, xxx, 1), the "melancholics by nature"—as opposed to the downright insane—are marked by a peculiar excitability which either over-stimulates or cripples their thoughts and emotions and may, if not controlled, cause raving madness or imbecility; they walk, as it were, on a narrow ridge between two abysses. But they walk, just for this reason, way above the level of ordinary mortals. If they succeed in keeping their equilibrium so that "their very anomaly behaves somehow in a well-balanced and beautiful way," as Aristotle admirably puts it, they may still be subject to depression and overexcitement, but they outrank all other men: "All truly outstanding men, whether distinguished in philosophy, in statecraft, in poetry or in the arts, are melancholics—some of them even to such an extent that they suffer from ailments induced by the black gall."

The Florentine Neo-Platonists were quick to perceive that this Aristotelian doctrine supplied a scientific basis for Plato's theory of "divine frenzy." The action of the melancholy humor, which Aristotle had likened to that of strong wine, seemed to explain, or at least to concur with, those mysterious ecstasies which "petrify and almost kill the body while they enrapture the soul." Thus the expression *furor melancholicus* came to be synonymous with *furor divinus*. What had been a calamity and, in its mildest form, a handicap became a privilege still dangerous but all the more exalted: the privilege of genius. Once this idea—utterly foreign to the Middle Ages where men could become saints but not "divine" philosophers or poets—had been reborn under the joint auspices of Aristotle and Plato, the hitherto disparaged melancholy became surrounded with the halo of the sublime. Outstanding

achievements automatically included the reputation of melancholy—even of Raphael it was said that he was “malinconico come tutti gli huomini di questa eccellenza”—and soon the Aristotelian tenet that all great men were melancholics was twisted into the assertion that all melancholics were great men: “Malencolia significa ingegno” (“Melancholy signifies genius”), to quote from a treatise which tries to demonstrate the excellence of painting by the fact that the better class of painters were just as melancholy as poets or philosophers. Small wonder that persons with social ambitions were as anxious to “learn how to be melancholy,” as Ben Jonson’s Stephen puts it, as they are today to learn tennis or bridge. A climax of refinement is reached in Shakespeare’s Jaques who uses the mask of a melancholic by fashion and snobbery to hide the fact that he is a genuine one.

This humanistic glorification of melancholy entailed, and even implied, another phenomenon: the humanistic ennoblement of the planet Saturn. As physical bodies, the seven planets were held to be determined by the same four combinations of qualities as the terrestrial elements; as sidereal personalities, on the other hand, they had retained the characters and powers of the classical gods after whom they were named. They, too, could thus be correlated with the four temperaments, and a complete system of coordination is already found in Arabic sources of the ninth century. The sanguine temperament was associated with friendly Venus, who was considered as moist and warm like air, or, even more frequently, with the equally well-tempered and benevolent Jupiter; the choleric with the fiery Mars; the phlegmatic with the Moon whom Shakespeare still calls the “watery star”; and the melancholic—as has already been mentioned in passing—with Saturn, the ancient god of the earth. We still use the expression “saturnine” almost as a synonym of “melancholy”—much as we do with the expressions “jovial” and “sanguine”—and in the German woodcut previously mentioned as a specimen of “descriptive” illustrations of the Four Temperaments (*fig. 214*) the unflattering characterization of the Melancholic concludes with the line; “Saturnus und herbst habent die schulde” (“Saturn and autumn are guilty of this”).

Once established, this “consonance” between melancholy and Saturn was never questioned. Every human being, mineral, plant or animal supposed to have a melancholy nature—among them, for instance, the dog and the bat—*ipso facto* “belonged” to Saturn, too. The very posture of sadness, with the head resting on the hand, is melancholy as well as Saturnian; and as the black gall was considered the most ignoble of humors, so the “Saturnus impius” was held to be the most unfortunate of celestial influences. As the highest of the planets, as the oldest of the Olympians, and as the former ruler of the Golden Age, he could give power and riches. But as a dry and icy star, and as a cruel father-god dethroned, castrated and imprisoned in the bowels of the earth, he was associated with old age, disablement, sorrow, all kinds of misery, and death. Even under favorable circumstances those born under him could be wealthy and mighty only at the cost of generosity and goodness of heart, and wise only at the cost of happiness. Normally, they were hard-working peasants or laborers in stone and wood—for Saturn had been a god of the earth—privy-cleaners, grave-diggers, cripples, beggars, and criminals (*fig. 213*).

The Florentine Neo-Platonists, however, discovered that Plotinus and his followers had thought as highly of Saturn as Aristotle had thought of melancholy. Since that which is higher is more “exalted” than that which is lower, and since that which begets is closer to the source of all things than that which is begotten, Saturn was thought superior to Jupiter, let alone the rest of the planets. He symbolized the “Mind” of the world where Jupiter merely symbolized its “Soul”; he had thought out what Jupiter had merely learned to govern; he stood, in short, for profound contemplation as opposed to mere practical action. Thus interpreted, the domination of Saturn was willingly accepted by those “whose minds are bent to contemplate and to investigate the highest and most secret things.” They hailed him as their celestial patron just as they reconciled themselves to melancholy as their terrestrial condition. The most illustrious members of the Florentine circle—among them, besides Ficino, Pico della Mirandola and Lorenzo the Magnificent—referred to themselves, only half playfully, as “Saturnians,” and they discovered to their immense satisfaction that Plato, too, had been born under the sign of Saturn.

This philosophical rehabilitation of Saturn could not weaken the popular belief that he was the most malignant of planets; and Ficino himself, whose horoscope showed “Saturnum in Aquario ascendentem,” lived under a permanent cloud of anxiety. He took, and advised his fellow-scholars to take, all possible precautions. He even used and recommended astrological talismans which might counteract the influence of Saturn by invoking the power of Jupiter, and this, by the way, explains the magic square in Dürer’s *Melencolia I*. It can be identified as the sixteen-celled *mensula Jovis*; engraved upon a slab of tin, it will “turn evil into good” and “dispel all worries and fear.” However, all said and done, Ficino bravely submitted to his Saturnian destiny: “Not only those who take refuge to Jupiter, but also those who wholeheartedly and sincerely concentrate on that divine contemplation which is signified by Saturn, will escape from the latter’s pernicious influences and only enjoy his benefits. . . . To the spirits that dwell in the spheres of the sublime Saturn himself is a benevolent father [*juvans pater*, that is, Jupiter].”

It is this new and most humanistic conception of the melancholy and “saturnine” genius that found expression in Dürer’s engraving. But what, to turn to the second of our questions, is the specific connection between the ideas of melancholy and Saturn on the one hand, and of geometry and the geometrical arts on the other?

It has been mentioned that Saturn, as god of the earth, was associated with work in stone and wood; in one of the earliest pictorial surveys of what may be called the Saturnian professions, the murals in the “Salone” at Padua, we already encounter the stonemason and the carpenter, here still conceived as lowly manual laborers. But as god of agriculture Saturn had also to supervise the “measurements and quantities of things” and particularly the “partition of land.” This is precisely the original meaning of the Greek word *Γεωμετρία*, and it is not surprising to come upon several manuscripts of the fifteenth century where the rustic attributes of Saturn are supplemented by a compass (*fig. 220*). Jacob de Gheyn was to monumentalize this concept of a Saturn-Geometrician in one of his most impressive engrav-

ings (fig. 221). One or two of those fifteenth century manuscripts add the explanation: "Saturn the planet sends us the spirits that teach us geometry"; and in a Calendar published in Nuremberg exactly one year after the *Melencolia I* we read the phrase: "Saturnus . . . bezaichet aus den Künsten die Geometrei" ("Of the arts, Saturn denotes geometry").

In addition to this astrological connection between geometry and Saturn there existed, however, a much subtler psychological connection between geometry and melancholy—a connection brilliantly expounded by the great scholastic philosopher Henry of Ghent who had been greeted as a kindred spirit by Pico della Mirandola, and whose analysis of melancholy was extensively quoted and endorsed in the latter's *Apologia de Descensu Christi ad Inferos*. There exist, to summarize this argument, two kinds of thinkers. On the one hand, there are the philosophical minds which find no difficulty in understanding such purely metaphysical notions as the ideas of an angel or of extramundane nothingness. On the other hand, there are those "in whom the imaginative power predominates over the cognitive one." They "will accept a demonstration only to that extent as their imagination can keep step with it. . . . Their intellect cannot transcend the limits of imagination . . . and can only get hold of space [*magnitudo*] or of that which has a location and position in space. . . . Whatever they think is a quantity, or is located in quantity as is the case with the point. Therefore such men are melancholy, and become excellent mathematicians but very bad metaphysicians, for they cannot extend their thought beyond location and space which are the foundations of mathematics."

Melancholics, then, are gifted for geometry—for, Henry's own definition restricts the field of "mathematics" to a science of *situs et magnitudo*—because they think in terms of concrete mental images and not of abstract philosophical concepts; conversely, people gifted for geometry are bound to be melancholy because the consciousness of a sphere beyond their reach makes them suffer from a feeling of spiritual confinement and insufficiency.

This is precisely what Dürer's Melancholia seems to experience. Winged, yet cowering on the ground—wreathed, yet beclouded by shadows—equipped with the tools of art and science, yet brooding in idleness, she gives the impression of a creative being reduced to despair by an awareness of insurmountable barriers which separate her from a higher realm of thought. Was it perhaps in order to emphasize this idea of a first, or lowest, degree of achievement that Dürer added the number "I" to the inscription? This numeral can hardly refer to the other temperaments, for it is difficult to imagine that Dürer should have planned three more engravings of a similar kind, and no less difficult to find a series of the Four Humors which would begin with Melancholy. The number "I" may thus imply an ideal scale of values, rather than an actual sequence of prints, and this conjecture can be corroborated, if not proved, by what seems to be the most important literary source of Dürer's composition: Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim's *De Occulta Philosophia*.

As published in 1531, this famous book appears to be an item from the study of Dr. Faustus, fairly confused in plan and full of cabalistic charms, astrological and geomantic tables and other magical devices. The original version of 1509/10, however, which had been

dedicated to a friend of Pirckheimer's, the Abbot Trithemius of Würzburg, and was circulated among the German humanists in manuscript form, was a much shorter and more "reasonable" book. It is only about one-third as long as the printed version, and the already noticeable emphasis on magic does not yet obscure a clear and, in its way, consistent system of natural philosophy. The author, largely basing himself on Marsilio Ficino, sets forth the Neo-Platonic doctrine of cosmic forces whose flux and reflux unifies and enlivens the universe, and he tries to show how the operation of these forces enables man not only to practice legitimate magic—as opposed to necromancy and commerce with the Devil—but also to achieve his greatest spiritual and intellectual triumphs. Of these man is capable through direct "inspiration" from above (it is worth noting that Dürer, too, refers to "öbere Eingiesungen"); and this inspiration can come to him in three forms—through prophetic dreams, through intense contemplation, and through the *furor melancholicus* induced by Saturn.

In the original version of Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia* this theory of melancholy genius—later arbitrarily tucked away in the First Book of the printed edition—is expounded near the end of the last Book and thus marks the climax of his whole work. That it is derived from Ficino's *Libri de Vita Triplici* goes without saying; whole sentences are taken over almost verbatim. But Agrippa differs from Ficino in one important point, and in so doing reveals himself as the intermediary between Ficino and Dürer.

Ficino had little interest in politics and no interest whatever in art. He conceived of geniuses primarily in terms of "studiosi" and "literati," and according to him the creative, Saturnian melancholy is a prerogative of theologians, poets and philosophers. It is only the purely metaphysical and therefore highest of our faculties, the intuitive "mind" (*mens*), which is susceptible to the inspiring influences of Saturn. Discursive "reason" (*ratio*), which controls the sphere of moral and political action, belongs to Jupiter; and "imagination" (*imaginatio*), which guides the hands of artists and craftsmen, to Mars or to Sol. According to Agrippa of Nettesheim, however, the *furor melancholicus*, that is, the Saturnian inspiration, can stimulate each of these three faculties to an extraordinary or even "superhuman" activity.

Agrippa thus distinguishes among three kinds of geniuses, all of whom act under the impulse of Saturn and his *furor melancholicus*. Those in whom "imagination" is stronger than the "mind" or "reason" will turn out to be wonderful artists and craftsmen such as painters or architects; and if they should be blessed with the gift of prophecy their predictions will be restricted to physical phenomena ("elementorum turbationes temporumque vicissitudines") such as "storms, earthquakes or floods, epidemics, famines, and other catastrophes of this kind." He in whom discursive "reason" predominates will become an ingenious scientist, physician or statesman, and his predictions, if any, will refer to political events. Those finally in whom the intuitive "mind" outweighs the other faculties will know the secrets of the realm divine and excel in all that is implied in the word theology; if prophetic, they will foresee religious crises such as the appearance of a new prophet or a new creed.

In the light of this system Dürer's Melancholia, the "Artist's Melancholy," can in fact be classified as "Melencolia I." Moving as she does in the sphere of "imagination"—which is, by definition, the sphere of spatial quantities—she typifies the first, or least exalted, form of human ingenuity. She can invent and build, and she can think, to quote Henry of Ghent, "as long as her imagination keeps step with her thought"; but she has no access to the metaphysical world. Even if she were to venture into the realm of prophecy she would be limited to the domain of physical phenomena; the ominous apparitions in the firmament, in addition to denoting the science of astronomy, may also allude to Agrippa's "elementorum turbationes temporumque vicissitudines," and the fact that some of the trees in the background are surrounded by water may suggest those "floods" which he explicitly mentions among the natural catastrophes foreseen by the "imaginative" melancholic—and which, incidentally, were believed to be caused by Saturn or Saturnian comets. Thus Dürer's Melancholia belongs in fact to those who "cannot extend their thought beyond the limits of space." Hers is the inertia of a being which renounces what it could reach because it cannot reach for what it longs.

The influence of Dürer's *Melencolia I*—the first representation in which the concept of melancholy was transplanted from the plane of scientific and pseudo-scientific folklore to the level of art—extended all over the European continent and lasted for more than three centuries. Its composition was simplified or made even more complicated, and its content was either reconciled with earlier traditions—as is the case with most of the variations produced by Northern artists of the sixteenth century—or reinterpreted according to the taste and mental habits of the day. It was mythologized by Vasari and emblematically transformed by Cesare Ripa; it was emotionalized by such Baroque artists as Guercino, Domenico Feti, Benedetto Castiglione or Nicolas Chaperon who frequently fused it with the then fashionable allegories of Transience and tried to gratify the popular enthusiasm for ruins; it was sentimentalized in English eighteenth century art; it was romanticized by J. E. Steinle and Caspar David Friedrich; and it inspired poetic and literary paraphrases—such as the famous one in James Thomson's *City of Dreadful Night*—as well as paintings, drawings and prints.

In spite of this universal appeal, it has always been felt that Dürer's engraving has an eminently personal connotation. It has been suggested that its somber mood might reflect Dürer's sorrow at the death of his mother who had passed away on May 17, 1514; and it has even been supposed that the numerical elements of this date—17, 5, 15, 14—are in some way referred to in the magic square which consists of 16 cells, and where (therefore) each row of four figures adds up to 34. However, even if the numerological treatment of the date were less arbitrary than it is, even if the *Mensula Jovis*, like all the other "Seals of the Planets," could not be traced back to Arabic sources of the ninth or tenth century, and even if its presence in Dürer's engraving could not be accounted for by good internal reasons; even then this hypothesis would be hard to believe. Dürer respected his "poor and pious mother"; as a dutiful son, he felt sorry for her hard life, and he admired her patience in "many a painful illness, great poverty, derision, contempt, sneering words, anxieties and

other troubles on end." But his real love belonged to his father, and no personal grief would have occasioned an engraving so esoteric and, at the same time, so programmatic in character. Instead of saying that the death of Dürer's mother caused him to create the *Melencolia I*, one might rather contend that only an artist pregnant with the *Melencolia I* could have interpreted the face of an old woman—her squint bringing to mind Shakespeare's Paulina, "one eye declined for the loss of her husband, another elevated that the oracle was fulfilled"—in such a manner as Dürer did when he portrayed his mother two months before her death (1052, fig. 222).

In fact the *Melencolia I* reflects the whole of Dürer's personality rather than a single experience, however moving. In a drawing of about 1512/13, apparently made for the purpose of consulting a doctor (1000), Dürer represented himself in the nude, his finger pointing to a mark on the left side of his abdomen. The inscription reads: "Where the yellow spot is, to which I point with my finger, there it hurts"; and the sore spot is obviously the spleen, supposedly the very kernel of melancholy disease. Melanchthon, on the other hand, extols the "melancholia generosissima Dureri" ("Dürer's most noble melancholy"), thus classifying him as a melancholic in the sense of the new doctrine of genius.

Dürer himself, then, was, or at least thought he was, a melancholic in every possible sense of the word. He knew the "inspirations from above," and he knew the feeling of "powerlessness" and dejection. But, more important still, he was also an artist-geometrician, and one who suffered from the very limitations of the discipline he loved. In his younger days, when he prepared the engraving "Adam and Eve," he had hoped to capture absolute beauty by means of a ruler and a compass. Shortly before he composed the *Melencolia I* he was forced to admit: "But what absolute beauty is, I know not. Nobody knows it except God." Some years later, he wrote: "As for geometry, it may prove the truth of some things; but with respect to others we must resign ourselves to the opinion and judgment of men." And: "The lie is in our understanding, and darkness is so firmly entrenched in our mind that even our groping will fail"—a phrase which might well serve as a motto for the *Melencolia I*.

Thus Dürer's most perplexing engraving is, at the same time, the objective statement of a general philosophy and the subjective confession of an individual man. It fuses, and transforms, two great representational and literary traditions, that of Melancholy as one of the four humors and that of Geometry as one of the Seven Liberal Arts. It typifies the artist of the Renaissance who respects practical skill, but longs all the more fervently for mathematical theory—who feels "inspired" by celestial influences and eternal ideas, but suffers all the more deeply from his human frailty and intellectual finiteness. It epitomizes the Neo-Platonic theory of Saturnian genius as revised by Agrippa of Nettesheim. But in doing all this it is in a sense a spiritual self-portrait of Albrecht Dürer.



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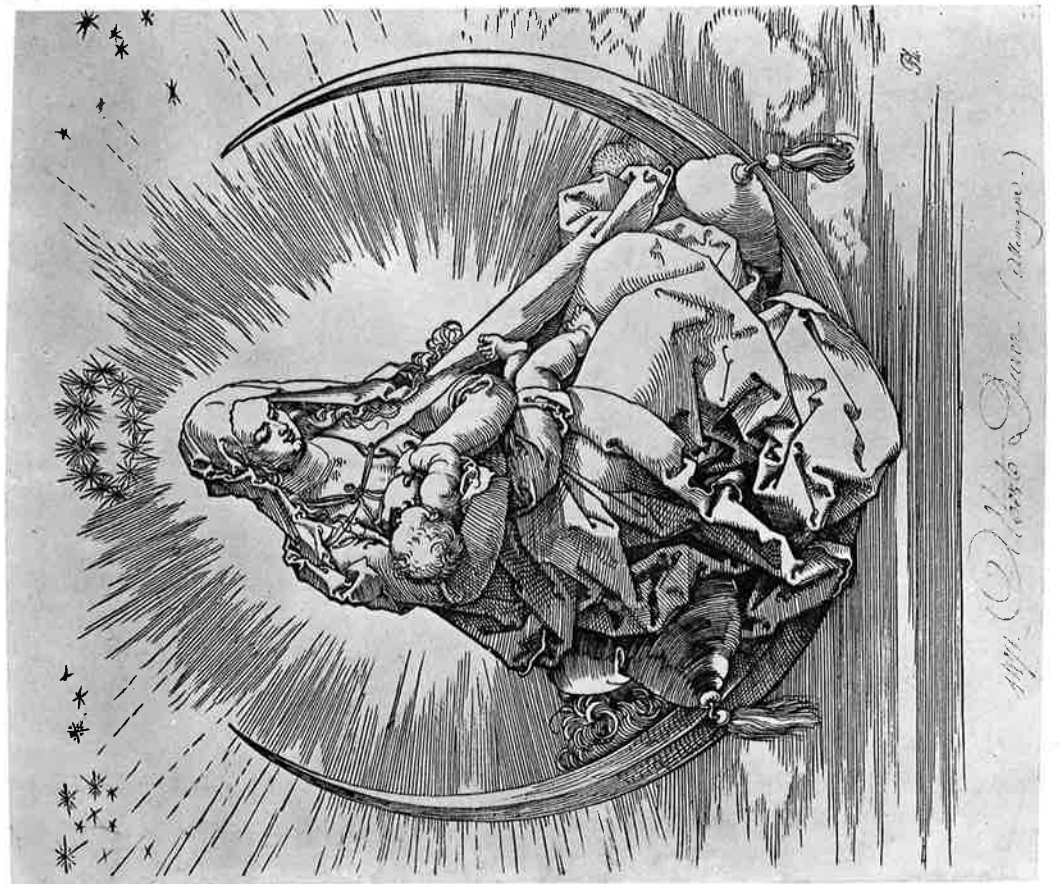
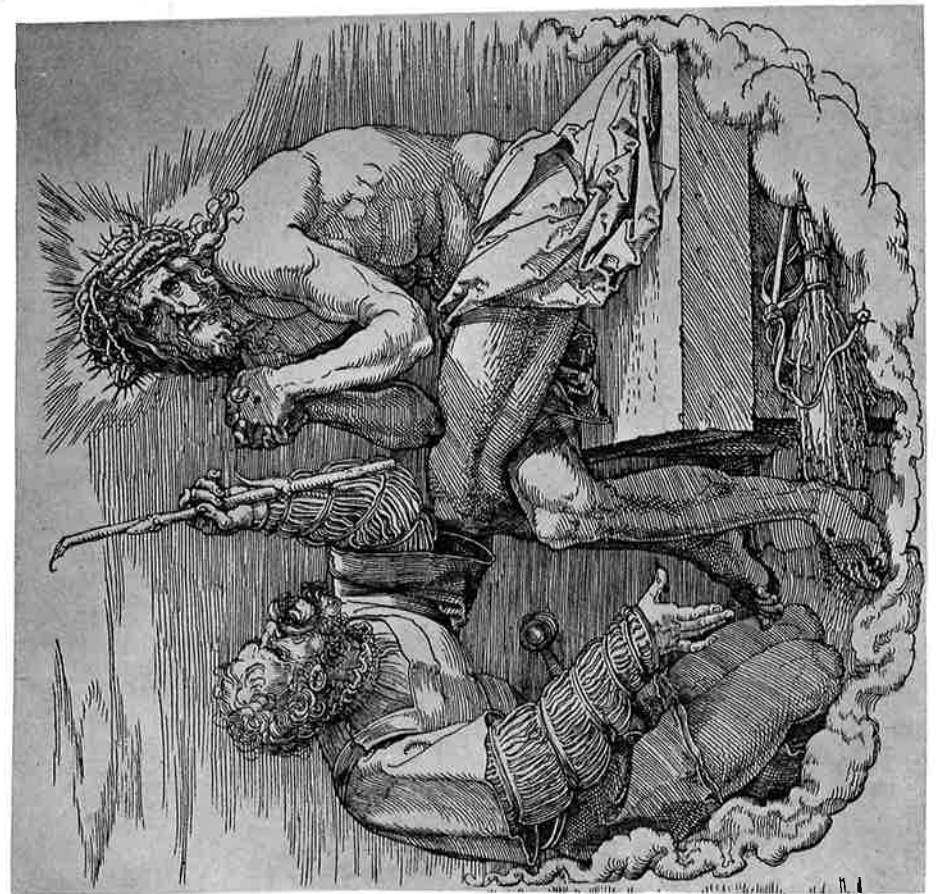


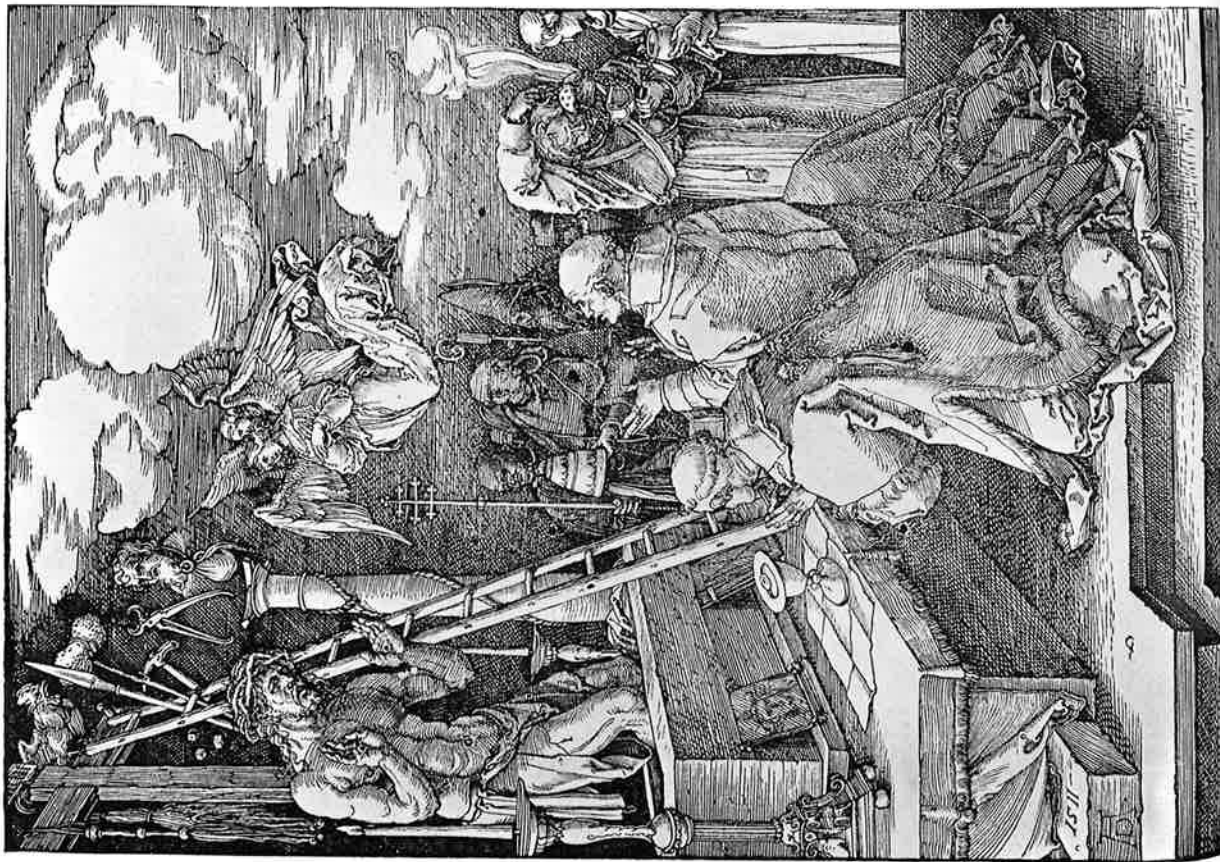
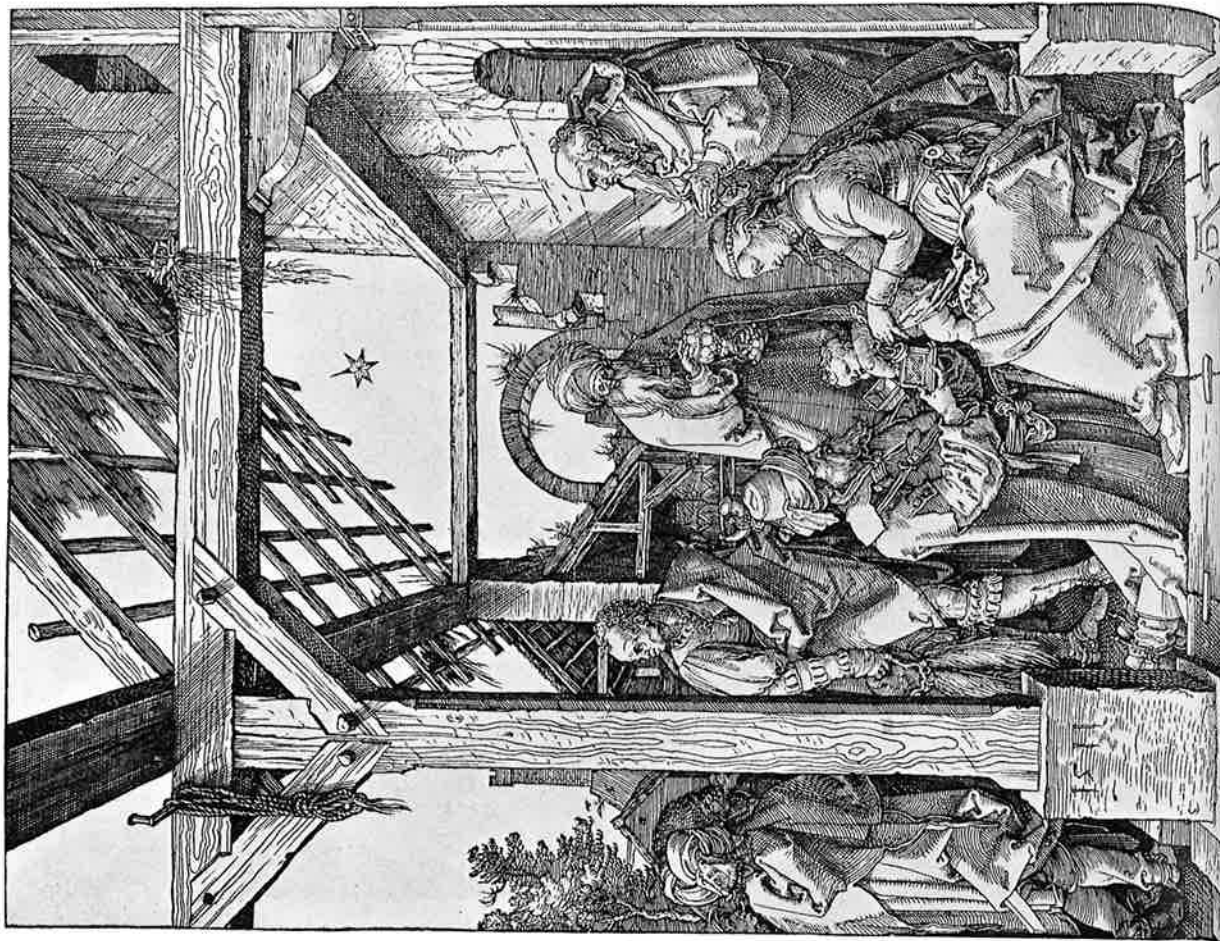
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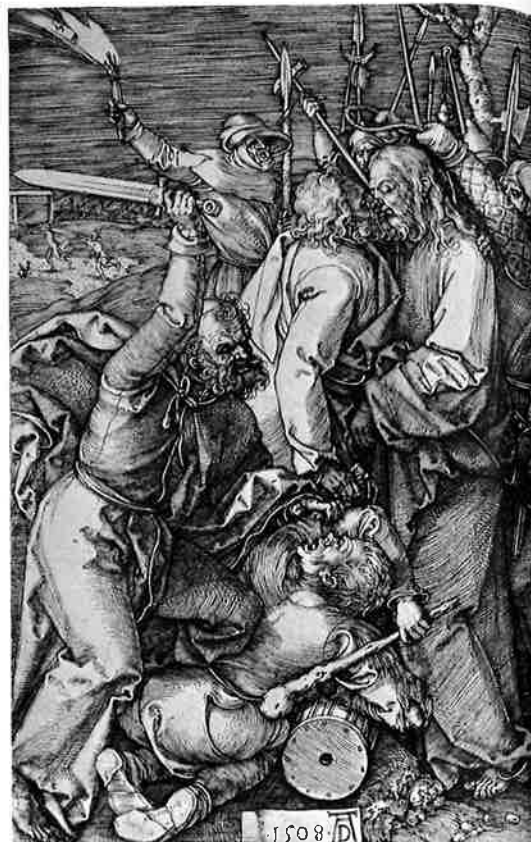
Apocalypsis in figuris







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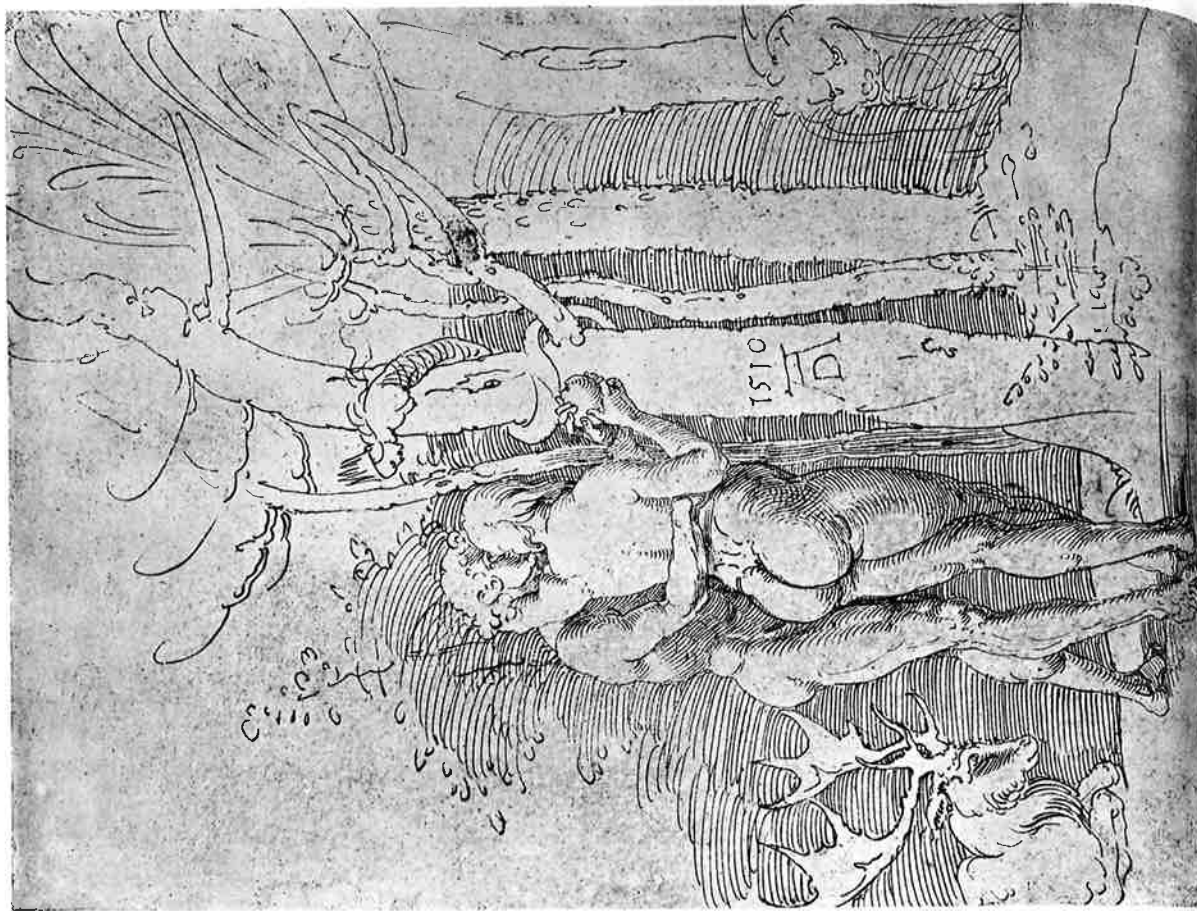
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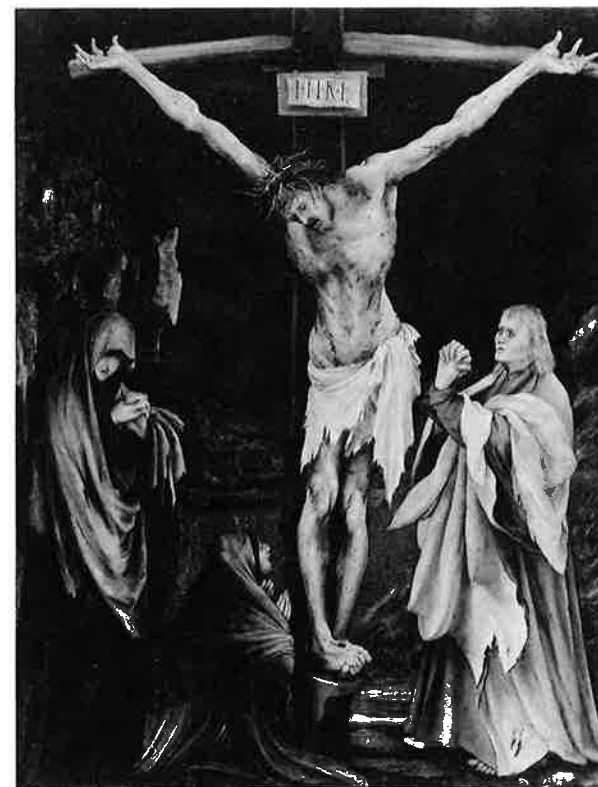
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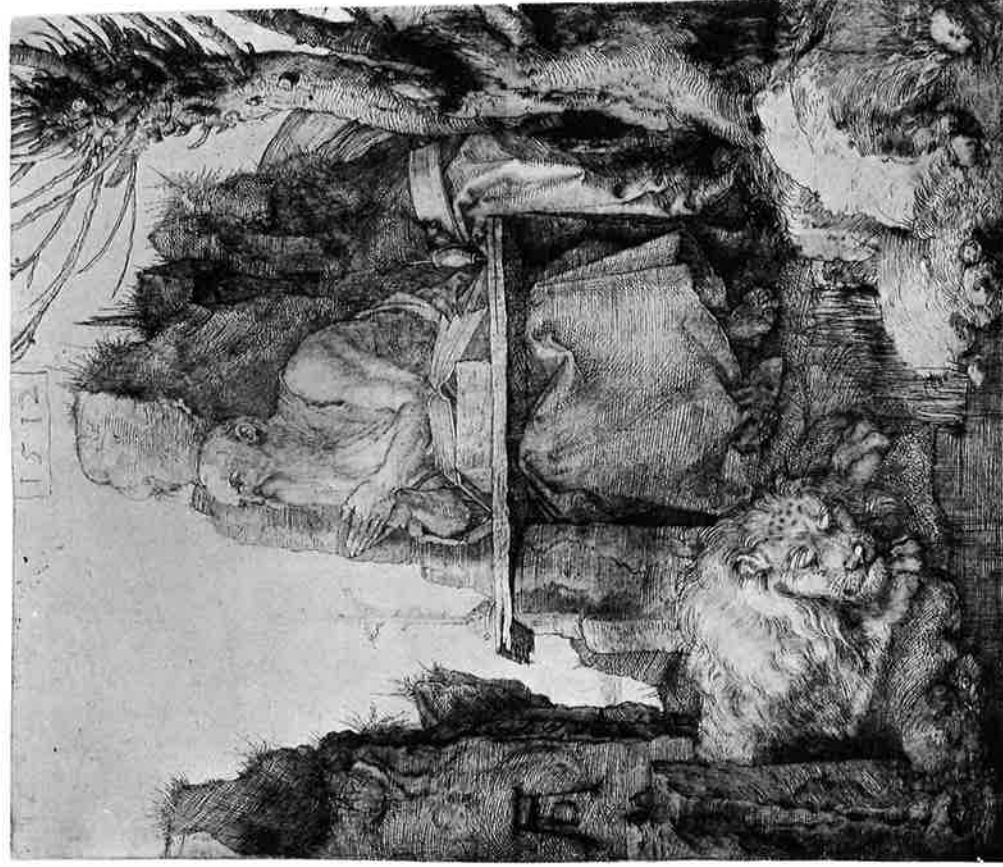
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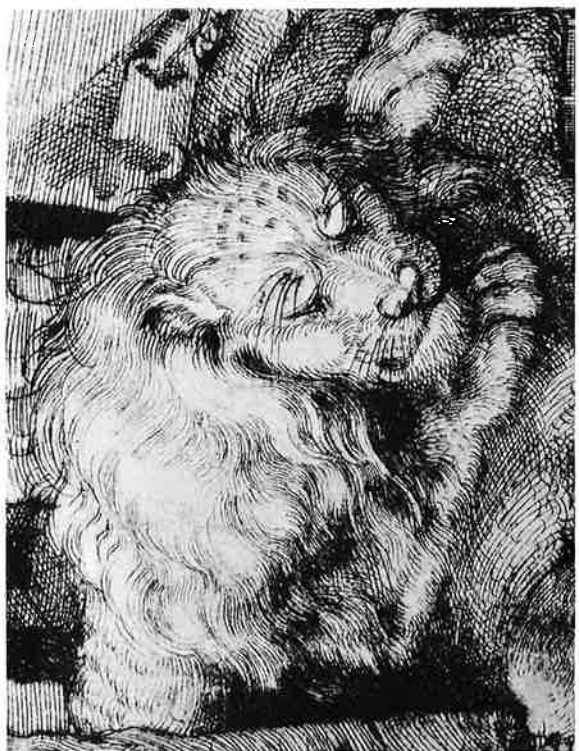
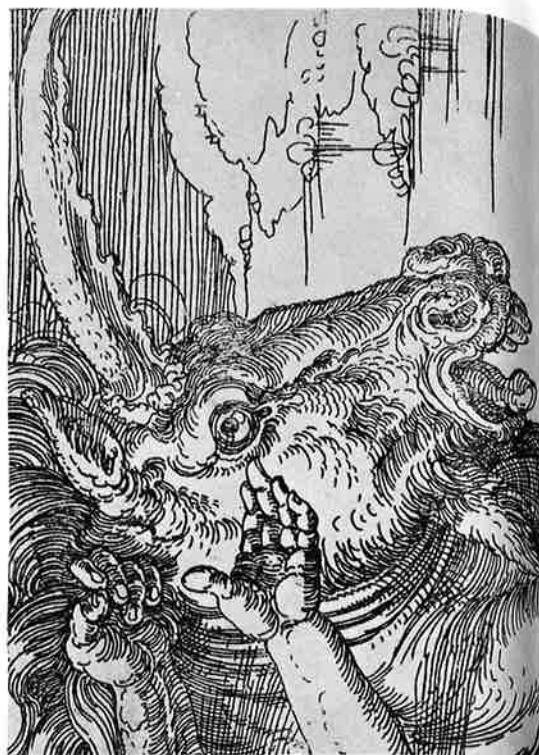
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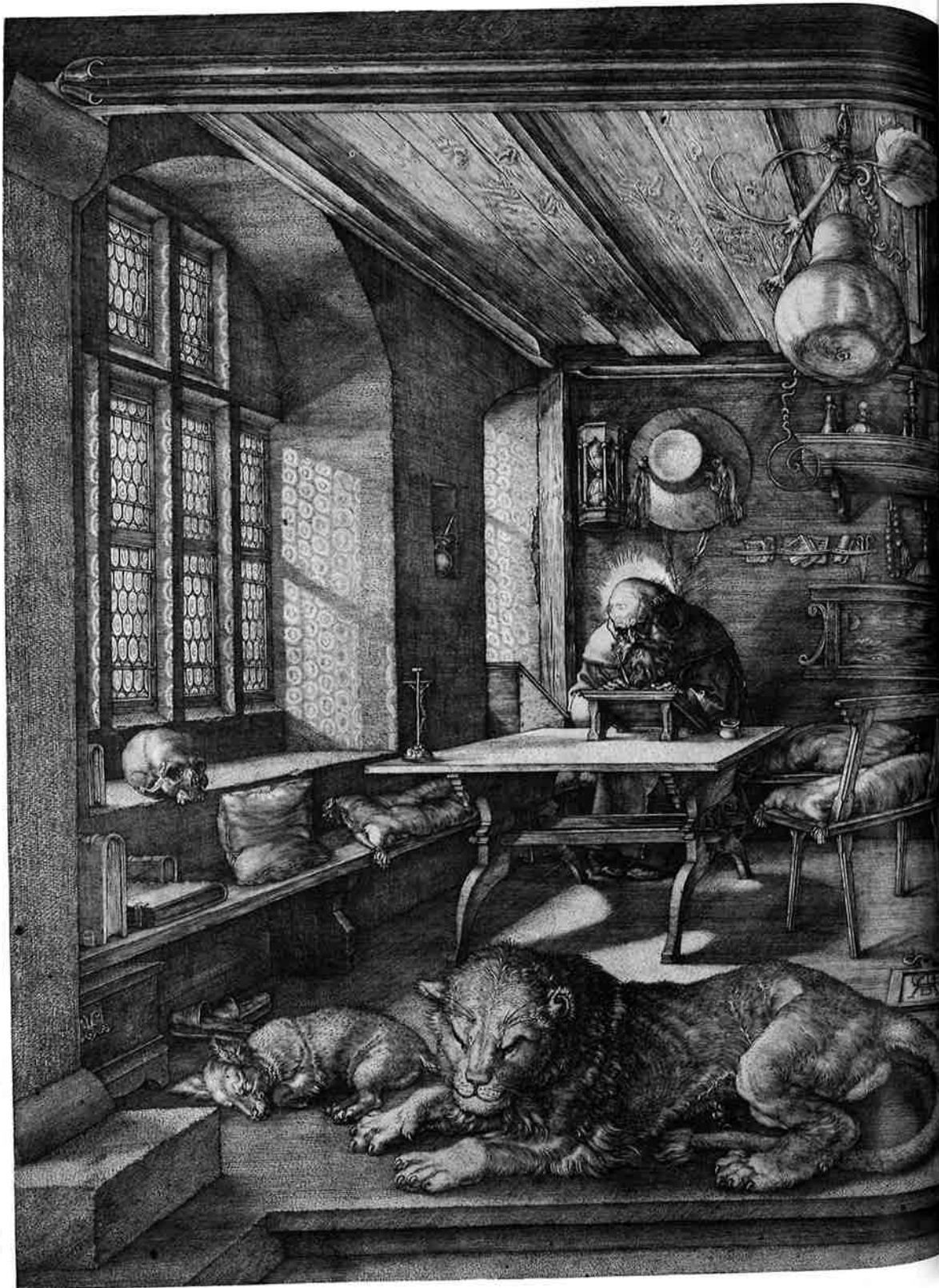
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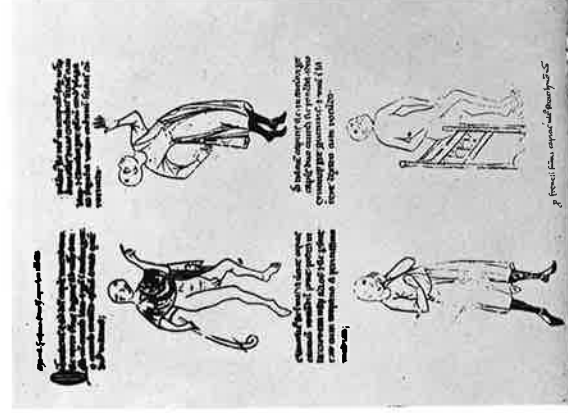
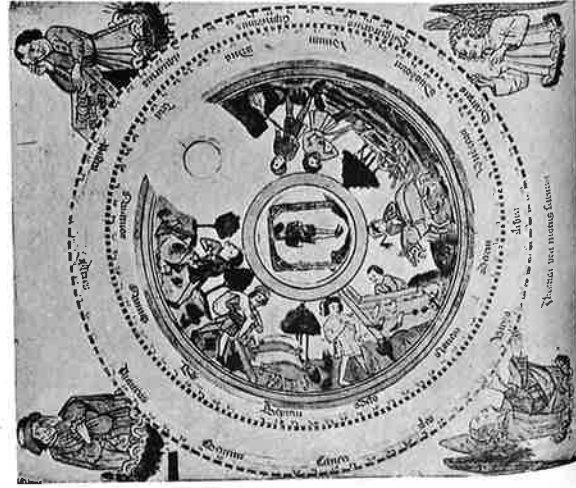


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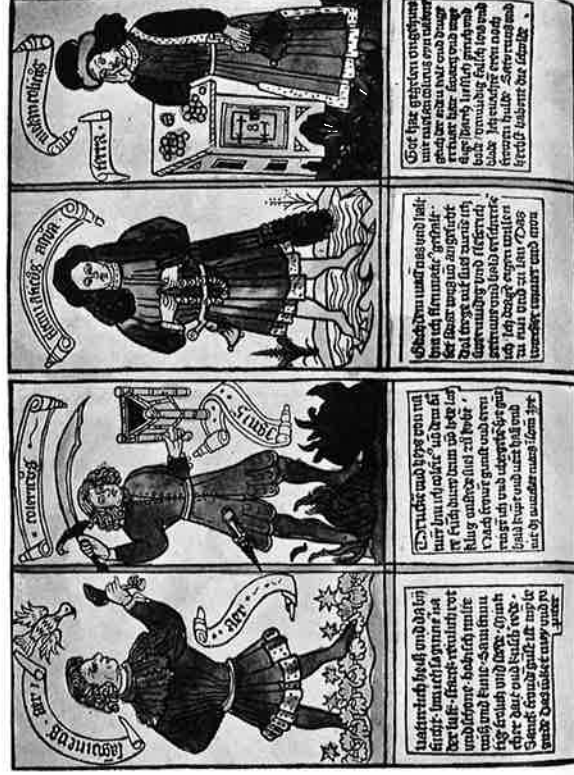




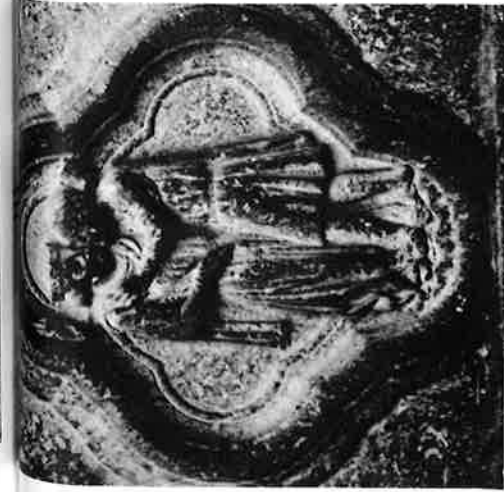
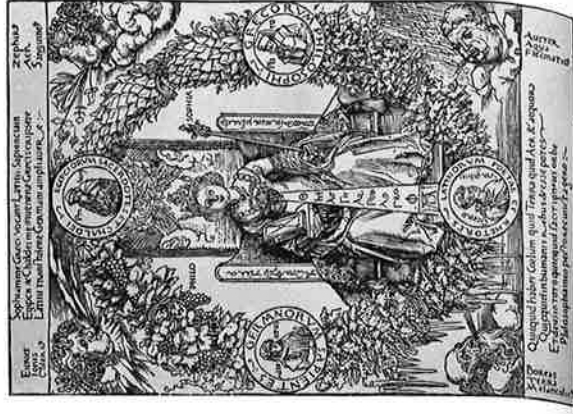
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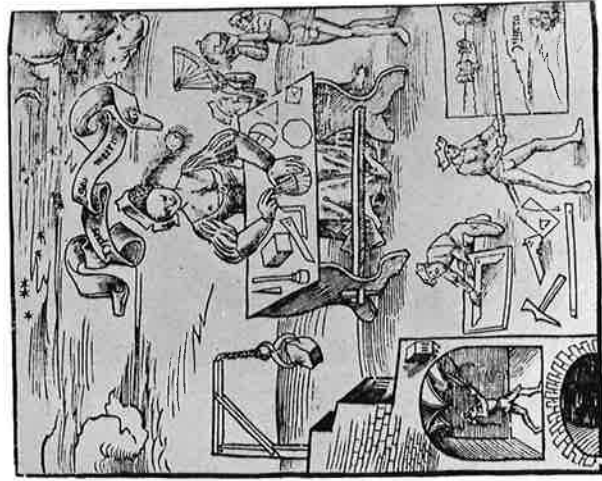
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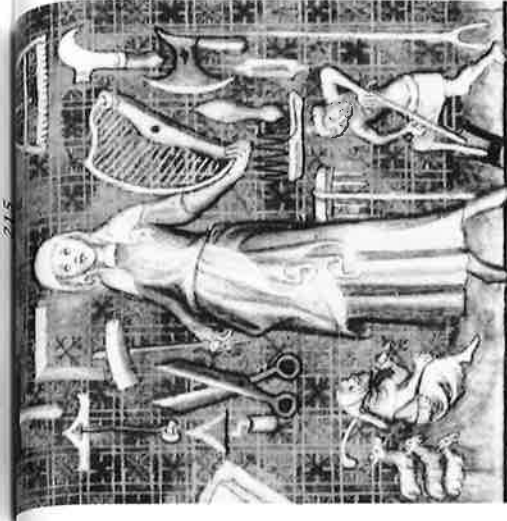
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