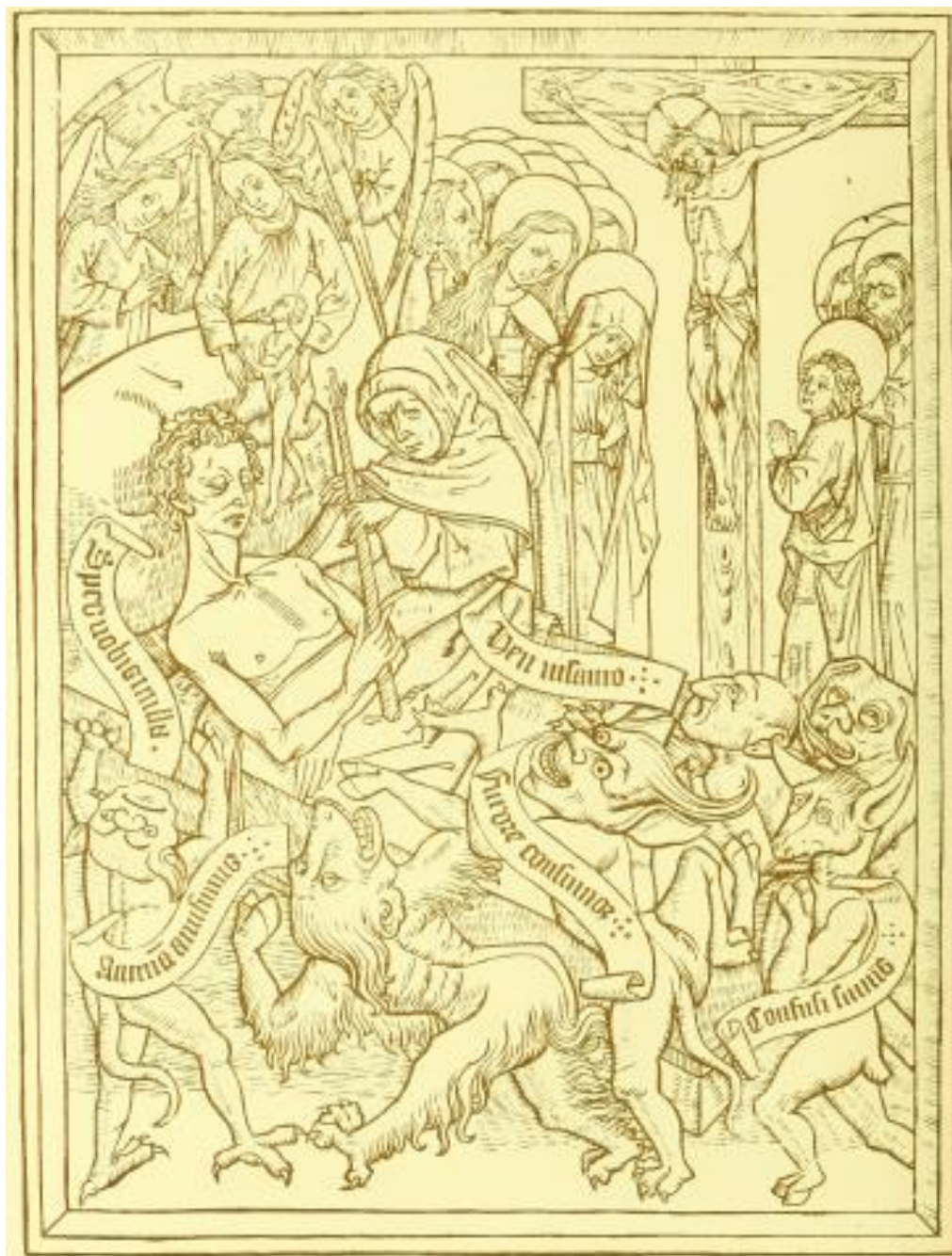


Morgan 1501469

Death Dying and the Macabre in the Late Middle Ages (HPHI6002)

Portfolio



The Good Death from the illustrated *Ars Moriendi*, c.1450

This image 'Triumph over temptation' is the last image taken from a series of eleven illustrations from the *Ars Moriendi*, which was published in the 15th century. The first ten images are dedicated to the five temptations and the required inspirations for resisting these temptations (Houlbrooke 2000:151).

The first thing that draws your attention in this image is the portrayal of Jesus Christ's crucifixion. In this portrayal, Christ's crucifixion is being shown in the three-nail style. This style of crucifixion as opposed to the earlier four-nail style of crucifixion, which is said to have the advantage of looking more excruciating (Binski 1996:46). Christ is surrounded by saints in prayer, with the majority looking at the image of Christ as they pray with the remaining saints looking down on the demons. Angels at the head of the bed are there to receive the dying man's soul.

The image of the man on his death bed is that of one who is just deceased, this can be shown with the surrounding angels receiving his soul. The belief of this time was that your soul exited your mouth at the time of death (Binski 1996: 42). The man in this image has his hands around the bottom of a lighted taper which the priest has bought. Holding this taper could indicate that he is putting his faith in Jesus Christ to help him ascend to heaven.

Around the bedside dance six demons carrying five banners. The Banners reading, *Animus amissus, Furore consumer, Spes nobis nulla, Heu infame & confuse sumus* (Ames 1812:104). Roughly translated these banners suggest that they will take his soul, devour it with rage, he has no hope, it will be painful/dreadful & confusion of where he should be. It is said that a single mental lapse in concentration at the time of death can help the devil take your soul and make any previous preparations futile (Daniell 1997:39). The banners being shown here suggest that they could be trying to confuse the dying man. The confusion banner could also be showing that the demons themselves are confused as they have not succeeded in claiming the man's soul for themselves. Fortunately, in this instance it does appear as one of the angels is shown to have hold of his soul therefore saving him from this torment. Four of the demons seem to have seen the soul being received by the angels whereas two of them seem to be so engrossed in their pursuit of the soul that they may not have noticed this happening yet, this is a further indication that this image is of the exact time of death itself.

The expression on the face of the priest appears to have one eye on the dancing demons, he looks to have a strained expression as if this endeavour had been a hard task. The sheer volume of individuals in this depiction, angels, saints, demons a priest and Jesus himself could illustrate how fine a line it was between who was to receive his soul. It also shows in the final moments it can turn either way. Right up until the last minute the demons are dancing and the angels and other subjects are praying.



Other depictions of this scene include the one pictured to the left, ('Triumph over all temptations in the hour of death' by Master of the Blumenrahmen) this image is held in the British Museum (museum number 1892,1201.1.12). The museum describes it as depicting 'a man on his deathbed, holding a lit candle; he is surrounded by a monk, the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ, St John the Evangelist along with angels, fourteen auxiliary saints, angel and six demons (British Museum). This image does not have the Latin text and everyone one in it seems more relaxed, especially the monk and the dying man.

Image 1

There are many versions of this image and that is not surprising, after all this was one of the first books to be widely produced. Essentially this was religious propaganda, after the black death had devastated much of Europe in the middle part of the 14th century many people were afraid of dying, especially dying quickly which was ultimately a bad death. This book originating in Europe helped people die well, it was an instruction book for the dying and the people around them, essentially a treatise on the technique of dying well (Aries 2000:107). Many priests were infected when administering extreme unction to victims of the plague so this book could help train people in the art of dying where the priest have died. The lack of Latin in many of the images could help this book reach the *laici*, as well as the *literati* (Aries 2000:107). The period in which the *ars moriendi* was produced only the upper echelons of society could read. The fact that people understood these images and who was in them helped the pictures say a thousand words to people who otherwise would not have known.

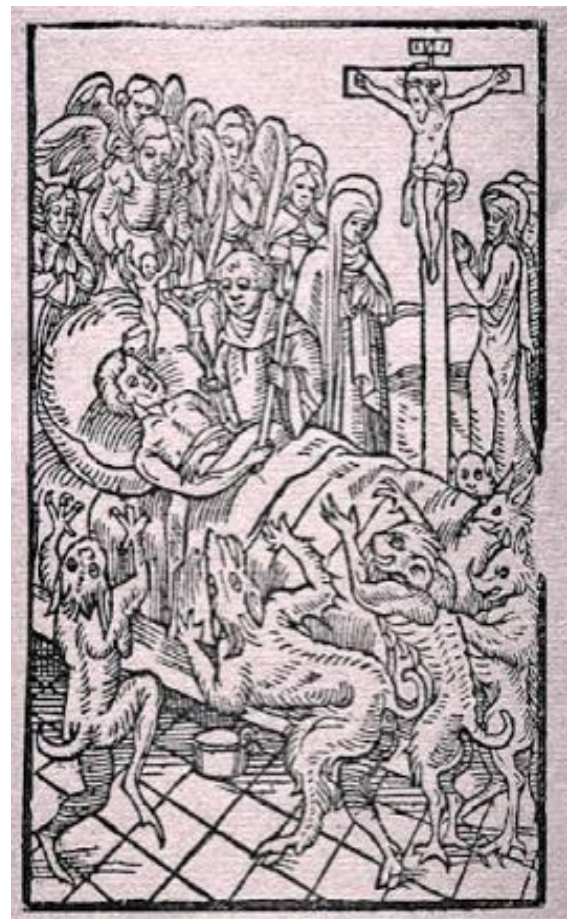


Image 2

The woodcut shows that dying is a battle to the very last moment. With the fear of purgatory and the hope of going to heaven on completion of purgatory, it shows death was a critical point for the dying person. The struggle between the forces of good and evil are evident, angels and saints at the head of the bed with the demons raging at the base. The dying man had won his final battle, with his soul being received by angels and his hand clasped around the lit taper. The demons had tried to remind him of his sins and confuse him as to where he should end up, but in the end a good death was had by this person, eventually.

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list of illustrations.

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