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Monstrosity in Religious Art: An Analysis of Hieronymus Bosch's Temptation of Saint Anthony

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Monstrosity in Religious Art: An Analysis of Hieronymus Bosch's *Temptation of Saint Anthony*

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Art and Design Department
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Art History

At

Lindenwood University

By

Jennifer Beaudoin

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Monstrosity in Religious Art: An Analysis of Hieronymus Bosch's *Temptation of Saint Anthony*

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Art History

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the artist Hieronymus Bosch and his triptych *The Temptation of St Anthony* in an attempt to elucidate the creative adoption of medieval tropes to invent new forms of monstrosity in his art and exciting imagery. Throughout this paper, I will review how historians have viewed Bosch's art and an understanding of the ideas surrounding why Bosch chooses to take on the task of telling the stories of creation and St Anthony's torment. The Middle Ages saw a spike of creative freedoms and visual interpretations of exotic, otherworldly beasts, from dragon-like beings to inhabitants of far-off lands. Bosch was heavily influenced by this imagery, creating his sketches of the bellymae, a famous medieval creature. Bosch would move on to create large-scale paintings filled with small details of a two-legged horned and pale goblin-like creature alongside the heavenly Saint Anthony holding his hands in prayer in the symbol of the cross. The ugly and the monstrous are symbols of sin and mischievous behavior, something unknown and new to the viewer that can instill fear or excite and pique interest. Throughout this paper, I hope to convince you that Bosch's skill for inventing monstrous and creative images was his priority when creating his artwork. He chose specific religious stories and themes that would allow him to express this. This thesis will argue that the seemingly inventive subject matter used by Bosch in his works like his St. Anthony actually built on the medieval tradition, allowing him greater inventions.

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Introduction

Creatures unlike any of this world inhabit a dark land, covered in murky waters, with mountains and strange cities looming in the distance. A pale, two-legged creature with piercing wild eyes and a gaping, serpent-like mouth walks along with a group of misshapen humans and beasts, its large ears and horn being pulled along by what appears to be a human in the midst of all the chaos. Far above in the background, there is a cluster of huts and strange houses with people. Just above, horrible winged creatures with long tails fly in the night sky as buildings burn behind them. To the right, in the distance, large flames and billowing smoke engulf a town. There is peculiar architecture everywhere in this desolate landscape, allowing corners for monstrous beasts to lurk behind and dwell within. Saint Anthony and the creatures are the subjects of Bosch's triptych *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (fig. 1), completed c. 1500. The Saint Anthony triptych, when closed, features scenes of Christ during his final moments. The first panel is a grayscale painting of Christ's arrest; the second depicts him carrying the cross. The traditional iconography of these scenes is in striking contrast to the fantastical landscape within. Even the humans are deformed and perhaps, the hermit saint will also end up as one of these deformed shells if he succumbs to temptation.

The life of Antonio Abad, later known as Saint Anthony, began in Egypt, where he was born c. 241 CE to a well-off family.¹ He spent his days attending church with his pious mother and father. After his parents died, he continued to attend with his younger sister. One day, at the age of twenty, he experienced a change of heart, upon hearing the following words from the Gospel of Matthew:

¹ St. Athanasius. *The Life of St. Anthony: Part I: Prologue and sections 1-43*. The Fathers of the Church: a New Translation. New York: Cima Pub. Co., 1947.
<https://www.christianiconography.info/goldenLegend/anthonyAbbot.htm>

“If thou wilt be perfect go sell all that thou hast and give it to poor men; and come follow me and you shall have treasure in Heaven.”² Inspired by these words, Antonio sold all that he had, leaving a small amount, of course, for the sake of his younger sister. Not long after this departure from his hometown and his old life, Saint Anthony traveled to the desert, where he would live by the smallest of means, fasting, and rejecting all worldly pleasures in the name of God and the promise of pleasure and treasures in the eternal afterlife of heaven. While depriving himself of his worldly needs, traveling Egypt’s deserts as a hermit, he encountered many monsters and demons that plagued him and tormented him physically, tempting him to sin. It was during this time that the scenes depicted in Bosch’s *The Temptation of St Anthony* occurred. The story of Saint Anthony was very popular in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Bosch was one of numerous artists to depict this topic; others include his predecessor Martin Schoengauer (c. 1450) and his contemporary Matthias Grunewald (c. 1470).

What about this scene would entice artists to its story, and how do they visualize both the torment and the resilience of the Saint through their imagery? Nearly all depictions of Saint Anthony are side by side with depictions of monstrous demons that are very integral to his story. Bosch specifically uses the monstrous to emphasize all portions of the St Anthony tale, rather than just the torments. Both Schoengauer’s *St Anthony Beaten by Demons* (Fig. 3) c. 1480-c. 1490 and in Grunewald’s *Temptations of St Anthony* (Fig. 2.) c. 1512-1515 the saint is depicted in fear of these beasts or being beaten by them. In direct contrast, Bosch immerses the saint in an environment where the monstrous is all around him, yet he is not afraid. These monsters are embedded in the landscape and surround his person, an inescapable truth of the world in which the Saint has been placed. This thesis argues the work by Bosch is unique. These beasts are an inescapable truth, monsters in their inhospitable landscape becoming tools for evil and torment.

² St. Athanasius, *1-43*.

Bosch invents ways to integrate them into the environment in ways that make them seem natural in this strange landscape. He does not ignore the monstrous connotation and instead uses it to create a new inventive narrative for the story. They inhabit their own world but are still symbols of torment and evil for the saint.

The monstrous is used to represent temptation by combining symbols of sin with unnatural form.³ The monstrous becomes a vehicle for artists to explore unnatural forms. Hieronymus Bosch was one of many Northern Renaissance artists who explored this unknown nature, using his chimeras and monsters as symbols for the desires of man and evil within the known world. The symbolic tradition of using demons and monsters to depict evil was being reinforced. Bosch, being an innovative artist, builds upon this tradition to creatively insert his monsters into an environment where they can thrive, placing the needs of the religious figures below his desire to create monsters.

Why are images of demons depicted in paintings of holy figures? In the case of St. Anthony, it is his story and his resilience against the demons he faces that provide the moral of his tale. Religious connotation can turn a work that is brutal or chaotic art into something that holds high spiritual merit. During the fifteenth and sixteenth century, religious establishments and families controlled a large amount of wealth and, therefore, controlled the artistic world and its patronage. How, then, is artistic creativity and innovation used in judging the merit of a work of art? This creativity was rewarded with patronage, but Bosch's work was not always seen as religiously acceptable simply because it told the stories of saints. Instead, there is a direct correlation between his innovative skills to create devil beasts and the inclusion of holy figures, in combination, that make his art worthy of its merit. His ability to accurately represent the story of Saint Anthony gives his piece spiritual merit, while his creativity and revolt against traditional

³ Umberto Eco. *On Ugliness*. New York: Rizzoli, 2011.

iconography gives him artistic merit. This paper seeks to inform the reader of the historical use of the monstrous in religious subject matter by analyzing *The Temptation of St Anthony* by Hieronymus Bosch. This analysis will be assisted by works from the Middle Ages that depict ugly monstrous imagery and others of similar themes and subjects comparable to Bosch's *Temptation*. The monsters seen in *The Temptation of St Anthony* are tied to the question of aesthetic value and its relation to the quality and morality of a work of art. This research seeks to define Bosch's creativity as an artist by his ability to integrate the monstrous seamlessly into his religious artworks, placing them in the environment as fluidly as he would the other human figures in the famous triptych. This thesis argues that Bosch's inventive skills allow him to create an environment where the monstrous is able to thrive amongst holy figures, allowing his monstrous images to be regarded highly in art scholarship.

Literature Review

Historians from the Netherlands and Italy and Spain, sixteenth century kings, and modern art historians have interpreted the works of Hieronymus Bosch. Monsters have been equated with demons and the devil long before Bosch; his usage of them only confirms these interpretations. Bosch enjoys the creativity allowed by the unnatural appearance of monsters; focusing on religious stories that have monsters or demons as their subject matter allows him to exercise this creativity. The ugly and misshapen beasts are used to represent sins, temptations, or even allegorical storytelling. Often times these beasts would be the center focus of the piece or the torture of the main figure in the work of art. This was not a new tactic, as medieval art exercised similar techniques. Bosch builds upon this tradition by exemplifying creative freedom to include monsters and demons freely in his works rather than as a main subject or tormentor.

The amount of research on the creator of devil beasts, monsters, and chimeras is immense. Marchus van Vaernerwijck, a contemporary of Bosch, crowned him the “devil maker.”⁴ Vaernerwijck was a historian from the Netherlands who wrote on Bosch and the complexity of his demonic imagery during the mid-1500s. Being a contemporary of Bosch, Vaernewijck was submerged in the same culture and religious themes. This title of devil maker was applied to Bosch to congratulate him on his abilities to create such strange imagery. Subsequent scholarship on Bosch has continued to explore his creativity and ability to design monstrous creatures. Writing in the 1980s, Walter Gibson also emphasized this aspect of Bosch’s art, proclaiming him the “creator of monsters.”⁵ Who is this “devil maker,” and how did his contribution to the themes of the monstrous affect the history and the current translations of monsters?

His contemporaries saw Bosch as a competent artist. He was respected by many famous artists, including Giorgio Vasari, a renowned Italian painter who wrote during the Renaissance. Vasari wrote a collection of biographies of artists that he believed were competent and worthy of recognition.⁶ Vasari was mainly focused on Italian artists, yet Bosch was one of the few non-Italian artists he included because of his creativity and exploration of traditional iconography. Most well-known for his beasts, Hieronymus Bosch was a painter who reached across the veil of reality to create images that were not like this world. He created creatures and chimeras from a dream world of imagination that historians revere today, as they did then, as landmarks in art history's freedom of imagery. Hieronymus Bosch is one of the most famous northern Renaissance artists who contributed greatly to art history and has been analyzed from many different perspectives, with different goals in mind. Best known for his famous triptychs,

⁴Nils Buttner. *Hieronymus Bosch: Visions and Nightmares*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2016), 1

⁵ Walter S. Gibson, *Hieronymus Bosch*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973), 12.

⁶ Buttner, 1.

including *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (Fig. 12) and *The Temptation of St Anthony*, Bosch explores the actions and morality of man during this period while integrating his own creative imagination.

One of the first writers to critically address Bosch's monsters was Fray Jose de Siguenza. He defended Bosch against church officials who claimed that Bosch's figures were distracting, containing too much sinful significance and monstrous imagery. As discussed in Nils Buttner's *Hieronymus Bosch: Visions and Nightmares*, Fray Jose de Siguenza was a Spanish poet and historian from the late 1500s. If Bosch's work was questioned for being too extreme or vulgar to be appreciated for its religious significance, Siguenza claimed Bosch's work held themes based on religious stories and lessons that held righteous significance among his devil beasts. For example, in the third panel of the *Temptation of St Anthony*, Anthony is seen averting his eyes from the nude woman trying to tempt him with lust and sin. The viewer's eyes are not focused on this scene, as just behind the woman is a peculiar frog-like monster with large feathered wings on its back that draws the eye, as a new and exciting bit of imagery. This potential for distraction created an elaborate discussion between Siguenza and other Catholic Church members on the complications of having distracting monstrosities throughout Bosch's work. The argument came up as to whether or not Bosch was creating these works to merely amuse the viewer and use these devil beasts for entertainment purposes.

The idea of Bosch creating these images for degenerate entertainment was the main argument Catholic priests had for rejecting Bosch's work and his intentions, implying that Bosch was himself a degenerate, portraying a person as holy as St Anthony to entertain individuals by using monstrous visions of worldly temptation. Fray Jose de Siguenza attempted to shut down these ideas of Bosch using his images for degenerate entertainment. Siguenza justified Bosch's

works during the Counter-Reformation by calling out the idea that one of the most Catholic of kings, King Phillip II, admired Bosch's work. Siguenza used this as his basis for his argument that a king's authority was enough to push Bosch out of the realm of suspicion.⁷ King Phillip, the II of Spain, was a great collector of Bosch's works and praised Bosch for his edifying representations. In this case, Saint Anthony serves as an example of spiritual resilience amongst these monstrous demons.

As Buttner argues and Gibson mentions, the story of Saint Anthony is one of resilience and faith, a lesson of God's strength against the devil and his minions. The saint, seen several times throughout the triptych's continuous narrative, is not defeated by demons and instead continues his journey, strong and steadfast in his beliefs. He is seen, after being beaten in the first panel, holding up the symbol of the cross in the central panel to protect himself, and in the final panel reading scripture and maintaining his virtue against the demons of lust. The saint provides a model for the viewer to then insert themselves in the place of Saint Anthony and obtain the ability to overcome their demons through God. This was a sort of self-reflective quality that King Phillip II saw in Bosch's paintings and thought that it stood its ground as a solid interpretation when up against others who claimed the images were vile and filled with ugly and chaotic images made for entertaining.⁸

The usage of monsters as a symbol of sin made Bosch's monsters, and others like them, have to provide proof of this visual connection with traditional interpretations, having to elaborate that their monstrous visuals still held religious merit. Samuel Pepys, from 1661, wrote of his own explorations of new worlds describing beasts as part human, part animal and between nature and monstrosity. During this time, it was prevalent for people to believe in a world where

⁷ Buttner, 10.

⁸ Gibson, 9.

real monstrous beasts existed in other lands and were the product of evil acts. This thought process was not just represented in the deformities and alchemistic imagery during this period but went even further back to Aristotle's *Generation of Animals*, 350 BCE, where he wrote that anything not resembling its parents was a monster.⁹ This belief system forms the basis for Bosch's thought process when designing his beasts. His creative mind is able to combine and redefine what exists, using his artwork, to design these monsters. It was this admiration of Bosch that would lead to others discovering and using these design skills, creating images not of this world, and integrating them with stories of real people.

Another historian, Andre Brenton, a French author on the surrealism movement from 1969, wrote about Bosch in his *L'Art magique* as described in Hans Belting's *Hieronymus Bosch*. In this he described Bosch's works as, "a strange marriage of fideism and revolt."¹⁰ Fideism is described as knowledge that depends on faith, and revolt stands for Bosch's refusal to conform to the artistic standards of his time. This definition portrays Bosch and his artwork in a way that challenges the expectations of the Church and the traditional imagery, while still holding to his devout beliefs as a very religious man. Brenton praises Bosch for being unlike any of his time, with remarkable freedom and creativity in his imagery that is more like modern Surrealism than Renaissance art. This praise describes *The Temptation of St Anthony* and its many peculiar creatures. The ride Saint Anthony takes in the sky of the first painting tells the viewer that, despite descent into the insanities below, Saint Anthony will maintain that connection to the traditional and remain true to his faith, even when surrounded by monstrous beasts of temptation and evil. Brenton believed Bosch had modern freedom about his art and that he was not afraid to

⁹ Bettina, Bildhauer and Robert Mills. *The Monstrous Middle Ages*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003.

¹⁰Hans Belting. *Garden of Earthly Delights*. Munich: Prestel, 2002. 9.

create what he felt was true to him in his artwork, even if it meant strange, deranged critters were roaming the streets surrounding one of the holiest figures in biblical history.

Another more modern thinker, Peter S. Beagle, famous publisher and writer of *The Last Unicorn* from 1987, describes the artwork of Hieronymus Bosch as one that consumes us in its derangement. Bosch's art turns viewers into voyeurs with a desire to explore this place filled with intoxicating forms to discover the new and fascinating beasts that dwell within.¹¹ Beagle praises Bosch, not unlike Vasari did, in a way that focuses on Bosch's creativity and skill as an artist while creating such ugly and chaotic imagery.

So far, most of these historians and philosophers looked at Bosch as a devoutly religious man and interpreted his imagery through the lens of his religious beliefs. Both 20th-century historians, Wilhelm Fraenger and Laurinda S. Dixon, discuss Bosch and his connections with the heretical and the alchemical. They viewed *The Temptation of St Anthony* from a very different angle. Fraenger put forth that Bosch was a secret member of the Brethren of the Free Spirit, a group located throughout Europe, referred to as Adamites. Its members embraced sinful activities to reach a higher level of innocence and understanding. This was compared to Adam before the Fall and brought people closer to what God "intended" humanity's origin.¹² Fraenger's main basis for this belief was his interpretation of Bosch's triptych, the *Garden of Earthly Delights*. The triptych contains many scenes of sexual activity and promiscuity amongst its many nude figures and visual symbols of fertility, knowledge, and bounty. This interpretation, however, falls against the known documentation that Bosch was, in fact, a member of the Brotherhood of my Lady, which was a very devout group of religious men dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The accusation of Bosch being an Adamite has led many others to explore and

¹¹ Belting, 40.

¹² Gibson, 10.

come across Fraenger's writings and attempt to understand Bosch's seemingly sinful and chaotic monstrous imagery from a possibly different angle.

Laurinda S. Dixon did just that. Dixon looks at *The Temptation of St Anthony* from an alchemical perspective. She discusses the connections between his imagery, the contemporary cultural importance of alchemy in medical practice, and the connections between St Anthony's story and the associations of the saint with sickness, torture, and suffering. Saint Anthony being chosen by God to suffer the way he did is relatable for those who may be going through such physical ailments. Dixon analyzes Bosch from this perspective, in order to understand the fantastical aspects of Bosch's work that do not follow either of the previously mentioned ideas. She does not strictly state that Bosch was a devout man who used creative and expressive demonic imagery to portray the sins and real aspects of what people believed to be demons and hell. Nor does she stick to the idea that Bosch set out to entertain his viewers with monsters and intentionally sexual content from the perspective of an adamite.¹³

This rejection of the old sorcery and Devil worshipping theories embraced a man who perhaps was influenced by his contemporaries in medicine and the tribulations of the average person. Dixon went for a combination of both theories on Bosch, explaining the elaborate connections and symbolism seen in the work to both the medical practices of the time and alchemical beliefs surrounding the religious story. To start with, St Anthony is associated with sickness, and when people fall ill, they often turn to St Anthony in prayer, as he was the one who endured such illnesses and torment, but his faith led him through. The interpretation of *The Temptation of St Anthony* she gives is as follows. She first discusses the relations between the first panel and Anthony's life as a hermit, separating himself from everyone and traveling to a

¹³ Laurinda S. Dixon. "Bosch's 'St. Anthony Triptych'—An Apothecary's Apotheosis." *Art Journal* 44, no. 2 (1984): 119–31.

place inhabited in the central panel by demons and fantastical monsters. In this panel, she describes his contemplation and compares this to how some may feel who have fallen ill with what is referred to as "Saint Anthony's Fire," a form of ergotism caused by mold and infection in grains. In the central panel, he is seen praying to God for why he has yet to come to his aid while he suffers. She mentions the symbolism held in the burning flames in the back of the central panel in comparison to the sickness, "Saint Anthony's Fire". When the plague of *ignis sacer*, a form of ergotism, reached its peak, there were many who shared feelings of misfortune and pain with Saint Anthony and his torments.¹⁴

Dixon recognizes symptoms of illness and compares them to the afflictions of certain medicinal aides that would cause people to see visions and hallucinate. It is possible that Bosch may have, at some point, become ill and suffered hallucinations, due to his medical treatment, that led to his visions of demons and the depiction of Saint Anthony alongside so many tormented souls and monsters. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when someone of faith would fall ill, they would pray to Saint Anthony to guide their prayers directly to God for them: "Anthony, venerable shepherd who renders holy those who undergo horrible torments, who suffer the greatest maladies, who burn with hellfire: Oh merciful Father, pray to God for us."¹⁵

Some would say a prayer as they took medicine that would either cure maladies or kill them. Dixon wrote about the similarities in shape between the buildings seen in the triptych to furnaces used in medical facilities and the connection with the injured. In the central panel, the cylindrical and pear-shaped architecture mimics that of tubes and furnaces used during this time. Dixon's argument of Bosch being knowledgeable, yet not a heretic, allows for such strong interpretations

¹⁴ Dixon, 119–31.

¹⁵ Dixon, 119–31.

of his imagery as monstrous, demonic, and chaotic, yet at the same time remaining religious, devout, and creative. Andre Brenton stated, and as Dixon would likely agree, a "marriage of fideism and revolt," defines Bosch's work.

Research Methodology

To learn why Bosch designed compositions that include demonic and monstrous imagery amongst religious stories, it is useful to analyze Bosch from a biographical standpoint to deduce where he came from, his background, and his life while he was producing work and to see what the meaning behind some of these beasts could be. This is a compelling way to study Bosch. Although there is no autobiographical information, many have written about Bosch's life and his work. Every author mentioned above discussed, to some degree, his historical background. Gibson and Fraenger, in particular, discussed a great deal about what Bosch's early life was like in 's-Hertogenbosch. Instead of focusing on how Bosch was or was not a holy man, as Gibson and Fraenger deduced from his social background, I will use the historical approach to discuss what was special about Bosch's artistic abilities in comparison to others, discussing what other artists saw in his artistic innovations and creative abilities during his time. It is beneficial to take a more visual approach to analyze the strange beasts and figures within his artwork.

This approach is a qualitative one; sources have shown examples of semiotic research focusing on the iconography seen in his artwork. For example, Dixon believed that Bosch's painting, *The Temptation of St Anthony* was filled with alchemical symbolism used to represent the saint's connection to medicine and the mystical. Fraenger, when discussing Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, compared a key component of the Adamite beliefs to the symbolism of the fruits as sexual freedom. To understand the iconography seen in Bosch's painting, I will be breaking down the story of Saint Anthony and discussing which monsters and occurrences

symbolize certain parts of his journey. Certain symbols, like Bosch's fish creatures, I believe have yet to be discussed in relation to certain aspects of Anthony's story, as well as why Bosch uses the same creatures continuously.

A formalist approach is also taken when referring to other artists' opinions on Bosch's work, such as Vasari, who praised his complex composition and visual creativity. Instead of discussing just his creativity, I will also be comparing Bosch and his compositional innovations with other artists during the Northern Renaissance. A formalist approach is the best way to show the slight differences between Bosch's monsters and others of this time period, as it allows the reader to get a very detailed description of what is physically there, rather than any symbolic meaning or context.

Bosch's monsters are what can unmistakably be considered ugly. Ugliness during this time is derived from being unlike nature or incorrect in physical form.¹⁶ Why, then, do people appreciate ugly imagery? It is this idea that Karl Rosenkranz, a German philosopher from the 1800s, studied. The comparison of the beautiful works of the Italian Renaissance against the ugly works of Hieronymus Bosch in the Northern Renaissance, it is plain for anyone to see that Bosch held no value in making his artwork beautiful or classical in any way. Bosch and his paintings, including *The Temptation of St Anthony*, are held at such aesthetic merit, yet contain no beauty in the landscape's forms or creatures, proving Rosenkranz's theories on ugliness and merit. He believed that ugliness should not be a synonym for aesthetic failure. He also argued that art should provide insight into our imperfect world, instead of only presenting moral righteousness. He is speaking directly to the triptych when he discusses how ugliness is a tool that not all artists have the skill and creativity to wield.¹⁷

¹⁶ Eco, 35.

¹⁷ Karl Rosenkranz, Andrei Pop, and Mechtild Widrich. *Aesthetics of Ugliness: a Critical Edition*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

When analyzing a complex work such as *The Temptation of St Anthony*, as well as other large works by Bosch, it is vital to examine the painting in its historical context and relate the symbols and iconography seen in work to the historical events and other artists working at that time. This historical approach to research will be a basis for the analysis of this paper. There are many other artists, around the time of Bosch, who have created similar depictions of demonic creatures or combination monsters, yet there are small differences in the presentation of these creatures that separates others from Bosch. The historical context places emphasis on the fact that Bosch was not studying these monstrous depictions in a vacuum. Bosch was discussed in comparison to others during his time, yet none have pointed out the stark difference in creative innovation between these artists and their works. The reaction of the contemporary audience to Bosch's work is important to the discussion of religious connections and monsters in the painting. Some, like King Phillip II of Spain, saw the way Bosch's Saint Anthony invites spiritual self-reflection, inviting the viewer to insert himself in the shoes of the Saint to contemplate his own resilience, yet others saw them as complicated works filled with demons that have no place in religious art. I believe that one of the key reasons contemporaries were against Bosch's art proves there is a difference in the way other Northern Renaissance artists use demons versus Bosch. In my analysis, I will use this as a key contributor to the argument that people noticed that Bosch's imagery was different from other painters in some fashion but did not in any sources discuss this specifically.

Bosch was creating these images that, during the Middle Ages, were often seen in connection to alchemic traditions and heresy, as well as sin and hell, as discussed by Dixon. Does this mean that Bosch is using them in the same way? Whether or not these images are meant to represent Bosch's personal beliefs, the value placed on them by others throughout

history, and now by art historians, is real. Why would King Phillip II of Spain stand firm in his opinion that Bosch's work expresses spiritual strength if the images surrounding the saint are so whimsical and nonsensical? An analysis of the historical context, as well as what types of religious symbols and imagery were being used, must be done, as well as a biographical study of Bosch and his religious connections that made him able to justify his monstrous creations. Throughout the analysis, Bosch's *Temptation of St Anthony* will be broken into separate interpretations of his monsters in comparison to historical periods and his connections to previous art movements.

The first is a biographical description of Bosch's life. There is little known about his life autobiographically, including how it could have influenced the visuals within his work and any other artworks and inspirations he may have discovered throughout his life. Next, there will be an in-depth study of his symbolism and the references to alchemic structures, medical practices, and traditional religious motifs within his artwork. Lastly, a formal discussion on the quality and aesthetic of Bosch's works, compared to the previous medieval art movement and his contemporaries will be done.

Analysis

Hieronymus Bosch, the creator of devil beasts, has an extensive catalog of works that contain his monstrous creatures. Bosch uses his artistic inventions to convince the viewer that what they are seeing is something new and something to be appreciated. He does this by combining the religious themes and strengths with his whimsical monsters. One that stands out from others is *The Temptation of St Anthony*, completed c. 1500. This work, in particular, stands out as one of Bosch's visually balanced compositions, as well as one that follows a very specific

story with specific intent. This work consists of three panels, each telling a specific tale or section of the story of St Anthony and his torments, trials, and temptations faced during his long journey through the desert.

The Influence of Medieval Thought on Bosch

The origins of monstrous imagery and Bosch's previous influences, illuminated manuscripts and religious figures, coming from the Middle Ages, need to be analyzed to understand the significance of the changes he made. During the Middle Ages, understanding of the outside world emerged through the visual symbolism of monsters.¹⁸ As stated earlier, there were two concepts of understanding the world: either a mimetic approach or a rhetorical and allegorical approach.¹⁹ To discern which of these categories of thought Bosch's monsters belong to, the way Bosch depicts his monsters must be analyzed. Bosch uses monsters in tandem with religious themes and stories yet does not overshadow his monsters with the religious figures and does not obscure the religious morals of the painting by presenting clear references with the holy figures. It is understood that a lot of these artistic styles and religious symbolism would trickle into the Northern Renaissance and influence artists of that time. People believed in the existence of demons and monsters as plainly as they believed in the existence of God and heaven.²⁰ An important individual who contributed to this large array of beasts and chimeras that exist in medieval art was Ktesias from Knidos. (364 CE) His writings survived, containing tales of the East and the strange populated lands.²¹ These include stories of people with a single large foot that shields them from the sun and bestial creatures that do not use speech and instead bark like

¹⁸ Asa Simon, Mittman, and Peter Dendle. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*. (London: Routledge, 2016), 4.

¹⁹ Williams, D. *Deformed Discourse: the Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014. 4

²⁰ Williams, 11.

²¹ Rudolf Wittkower. "Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 159-97.

dogs. These beasts were fascinating to medieval authors, and they used their lack of European knowledge and biblical righteousness as reasoning for their sinful disposition and monstrous appearance.²² All monsters are our own constructions, based on real beings and used to categorize, name, define, and grant anthropomorphic representations and moral interpretation onto those figures.²³ Artwork during the Middle Ages featured all sorts of monsters mixed into their religious imagery, not only as stand alone representations of mythical beasts from distant lands. Two examples that could have directly influenced Bosch and his usage of monsters alongside religious figures are depictions of the Holy Trinity and Christ alongside the phoenix. Combining monstrous features near or around religious figures was common during the Middle Ages and was sometimes used to explore the supernatural or symbolic powers and holiness of individuals. *The Allegory of the Phoenix* (Fig. 15) is an illuminated manuscript from the thirteenth century that depicts Christ at the top, separated by text, a second image is seen at the bottom of a phoenix lay on a table with a monk reading next to it. This piece is an example of a work that included a mystical and monstrous creature being symbolically connected with the figure of Christ. This connection was drawn due to the significance of the Phoenix and its powers to rise from the dead or its ashes and was in reference to Christ rising once again after death.²⁴ The depictions of monsters began symbolically and then the monstrous became more integrated with religious representations with the Holy Trinity being represented as a three-headed being. Two artworks that display the Trinity in this fashion are the *Three-headed Trinity* (Fig 14) and the monstrous races, *Bestiary* (Fig 13). There was originally a correlation between devils and the mocking of the Trinity by using three figured forms or horned forms.

²²Rudolf Wittkower. "Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters."159-97.

²³ Bettina Bildhauer, and Robert Mills. *The Monstrous Middle Ages*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003.

²⁴ Bettina, Bildhauer, and Robert Mills. *The Monstrous Middle Ages*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003.(57)

Despite this, during the Middle Ages a tradition was born depicting the Trinity with a tricephalic form, meaning it had three entirely separate heads but was also very commonly depicted with three faces on a singular head, seen in the monstrous races, *Bestiary*. This exploration and design choices of medieval artists to portray holy figures as or metaphorically connected to monstrous forms was a precursor to Bosch and his usage of monstrous forms. It shows a direct correlation with Bosch's inventions and those of his medieval predecessors. Instead of simply depicting one figure or form with metaphorical connections Bosch immerses the figure in an environment filled with the monstrous. This gave Bosch freedom to express the guzzling frog butterfly beast seen in the third panel of the *Temptation of St Anthony*, as people believed that the existence of these demons represented Anthony's holiness and his ability to resist their temptation, rather than being a fantasy that was for viewing pleasure. The depictions of monsters during the Middle Ages was, in some ways, an attempt to understand the outside world, as well as create representations of beings or concepts people did not yet understand. This is not unlike the creation of Gods to represent lightning in other cultures. During the Middle Ages, things like dreams and sickness were not understood medically and would oftentimes be explained using symbolic representations of monsters or demons to explain their suffering. Dixon touches on this when referring to Bosch's triptychs and their references to the sick and suffering, in comparison to the monsters and Anthony seen in the painting.²⁵

The Story of St. Anthony

The journey of Saint Anthony from a simple man, Antonio Abad, to the saint worshiped today goes through many stages. Beginning in Egypt, he was part of a small family that included his mother, father, and younger sister. At age twenty, Antonio and his sister lost their parents, and

²⁵ Dixon, 119–31.

Antonio was called by God during a church service when he heard the gospel speak to him.²⁶ It was after this calling that Antonio gave up all he had saved, left a small amount of wealth for his younger sister, and left his hometown to travel the desert in service to God. He would, from then on, spend time in solitude and prayer. During this time the legends and stories that earned Antonio Abad the title of Saint would occur in this deserted landscape. Saint Anthony, in his travels, would encounter many demons or disguised devils with the intention of leading him off the path of righteousness and God. One of the first was that of temptation. Anthony encountered a vision of lust, attempting to seduce him into sin, but when he refused the devil's temptation, the demon showed its true self. It was a fully dark and deformed child devil. It was after that that Saint Anthony confessed that he would never again doubt the rejection of such temptation, having seen its true form and being repulsed by its visage.²⁷

There were many other instances of these temptations. Some came in the form of money, like that of the tale of the silver platter. One day, while walking, Saint Anthony spotted a silver platter, seemingly out of nowhere. He realized, however, that this was another devil's trick and rejected the temptation, ignoring it. Saint Anthony, the next time he encountered such temptation, did not idly sit by and ignore it. Instead, when a pile of unclaimed riches and gold was found, he instead tossed it into the fires, denouncing the devil and praising God as the gold simply vanished. Being constantly denied, the demons became frustrated and came to Anthony. One night, Anthony was bombarded by demons and monsters in a cave. He was beaten nearly dead by these monsters and tormented through the night. In the morning, others came to check on the Saint in his isolation, bringing him minimal food, and found him beaten near to death. They carried him away, ready to mourn his death, when, suddenly, he revived and asked them to

²⁶ St. Athanasius, *1-43*.

²⁷ St. Athanasius, *1-43*.

assist him in returning to the cave willingly to suffer again.²⁸ This was Saint Anthony's way of refuting the power of the demons to harm him, as God was there and would protect him and keep him safe.

During another journey, the Saint encountered a figure who spoke out to him, teaching him the sign of the cross, a two-fingered gesture to evoke the name of Christ in self-defense. In another act on part of the devils, they dragged him into the air once and accused him that his childhood sin was still with him and that they would continually drag him higher, threatening him to scare him. This did not work, however, as instead, the Saint ignored the demon's accusations and believed that God would understand him and the atonement of his previous sins. After such a pain-filled, and intense spiritual journey, Saint Anthony desired martyrdom and to die in the name of Christ yet was denied this glory. Instead, he ended up spending his days becoming a teacher to other monks and hermits. He taught the faith that one should have no fear for demons and only faith in God. He would come to be known as a healer, and people would travel to see him for prayers. One teaching that is particularly interesting was a conversation had between Anthony and another. The saint posited that a fish out of water is like that of a hermit without a shell--that it must die and has no other choice if it is to remain natural. This would pose that the unnatural things that go against God and his will of creation are evil or at least lead to death.²⁹

In the *Temptation of St Anthony*, Bosch uses his monsters as a vehicle for religious expression combined with fantastical invention.³⁰ Painting creatures unlike any known in this world brings the viewer to question whether Bosch's images were used merely to titillate and

²⁸ St. Athanasius, *1-43*.

²⁹ St. Athanasius, *1-43*.

³⁰ Büttner, 183.

entice people with its ugly and complicated fantasy. Or, was the piece made with the creative intentions valued in the coming Renaissance to combine religious art with new thought and design? This would give the image the capability of both fascinating the viewer through the creativity displayed and educating them on the story of Saint Anthony.

The Left Panel: The Cave and Anthony's Prayers

The left panel of *The Temptation of St. Anthony* depicts the first instance seen of Saint Anthony in the triptych. Following the compositional flow of the piece, the first cluster of figures at the bottom features Saint Anthony being carried along a path by other hermits. This illustrates a direct excerpt from the cave story, where the saint was tortured and beaten almost to death by demons. The landscape seen in the first panel consists of a winding road with a small bridge in the foreground. This leads the eye back towards a hill with a cave and then into the background and sky above. In this first panel, there are many monsters that can be discussed in reference to the saints' torments. Bosch creates the cave by embedding a large human figure, roaring into the mountainside with an arrow in his head, his backside and legs spread, opening the entrance of the cave from the saint's tale.

When discussing the artwork of Bosch, it is impossible not to discuss in detail the possible meanings and interpretations of his monsters. Flaubert, a 19th-century author on medieval origins of monsters, discusses Aristotle's philosophy of substance and form. He comments on the etymological origin of the monster containing a kinship with heuristic understanding, allowing viewers to learn their own lessons through the symbols. Bosch's monsters are more than their symbolism, they communicate a moral message but are also in larger quantities and multitudes of actions, unlike the monsters created by his contemporaries. This is shown by contemporary thought from Siguenza and King Phillip II about the morality of

his monsters. Bosch was able to take this moral story and invent new and creative beasts and monstrosities, letting them take over his pieces to tell the tale of St Anthony's torment and mental tribulation.

To continue discussing the interpretations of Bosch's monsters, there must be an understanding of the discourse surrounding the idea of monsters and deformities. David Williams, the author of *Deformed Discourse* from 1996, attempted to do just that. He broke down what monsters and deformities have traditionally been used for. He claimed that there are two ways of thinking about the monstrous during the era of Bosch, after and around the Middle Ages. The first is the "context of the monstrous," a way of pursuing the logical truth and revealing what existed physically in the world, also referred to as "mimetic." The second is a rhetoric or allegorical representation used primarily as a vehicle for human knowledge or morality. This rhetoric representation equates the monstrous as a symbol for sin. Williams understood that, in the Middle Ages and Northern Renaissance the monstrous was, in some ways, tangible and real.³¹ To believe in God meant to also believe in the Devil, and therefore, these beasts and evils that Bosch breathes form into are tangible and symbolize the fear of the contemporary viewer.

The tale Bosch tells in this piece provides a vehicle for his inventions and creative work. His piece differs from those of his contemporaries in the way that he uses his monsters in relation to St. Anthony. The second instance of St. Anthony is seen at the top of the left panel. St. Anthony's expression in this section is that of confusion and intense prayer. He reaches his hands to the sky as he is surrounded by strange flying beasts. Just beyond St. Anthony is a round, armed monster holding a scythe, a symbol of death and one's closeness to it. During this stage of St Anthony's journey, he is beginning to feel the effects of his fasting and arduous travels

³¹ Williams, 4.

through this deserted land. He has been taken into the sky to be tormented. They mock him with his childhood sin, claiming he is sinful as they torture him. This same scene, the moment when Anthony is whisked away into the sky to be tormented by demons, was depicted by Martin Schongauer (Fig. 3) in an engraving dated c. 1480.

Schongauer was a prominent printmaker from northern Europe who explored the theme of the temptation of St. Anthony fifty years before Bosch. His print was widely circulated and was even copied by the young Michelangelo. Schongauer's work illustrates Saint Anthony's ecstasy during his trials in the desert. During a moment of doubt where the saint was about to eat and thus fall into temptation, he arose to his feet and prayed instead, and after long hours of praying, he felt that he was whisked off into the sky.³² This is the same scene from Bosch's triptych where he depicts the demons lifting him into the sky and accusing him of his sin to make him feel guilty. This is seen in the torment while Anthony is being prodded at by multiple strange creatures in the sky, representing his psychological state. People were beginning to take an interest in the inner workings of the human body and mind. Schongauer could have wanted to relay this spiritual torment and vision in his work by showing the moment when Anthony is whisked off in ecstasy of prayer and then tormented to test his resilience. Imagine the physical and psychological toll spending days in the desert without food or water would do. This story may have been written about from a hallucination type state to describe the pressures and pain felt by the saint at the time. The difference between Bosch's scene and Schongauer's is clear in the way it uses monstrosity in their environments. They are both depicting St. Anthony in the sky suspended by demons that are there to torment him, yet the painting and print, when looked at side by side, give off a very different aura. Schongauer's print shows the Saint writhing in the

³² Jean Michel Massing. "Schongauer's 'Tribulations of St. Anthony' Its Iconography and Influence on German Art." *Print Quarterly* Vol. 1, no. No. 4 (December 1984): 221–36.(224

sky, with demons pulling and prodding him, his facial expression is one of pain and discomfort. The monsters surrounding him are in the act of beating him and pulling at his body, which presents the viewer with a sense of immediacy and fear for what the Saint is going through.

In Bosch's triptych, the feeling is very different. Saint Anthony lies on his back, carried by demons who do hold weapons but are not in the current act of beating the Saint. Instead, Bosch chooses to create these monsters that, on their own without action, provide you with an understanding of the scene. The focus is instead on St Anthony, his trial, and his strength. The monsters are simply integrated into the setting, something that is visually interesting, creative, and exciting to look at, without causing fear from their current actions.

Matthias Grunewald (1470-1528) was a contemporary of Bosch. Grunewald is best known for his Isenheim Altarpiece, which was completed c. 1512. Grunewald's *Temptation of St Anthony* was created to be a panel of the Isenheim altarpiece and stands out in comparison to the rest of the altarpiece, as it is the only one that features such monstrous images. This *Temptation of St Anthony* was definitely influenced by Bosch and the Middle Ages before them. Chimera creatures and this style of including heavily altered natural forms amongst religious figures was something begun during medieval art. In the altarpiece wing, Grunewald depicts the story of St Anthony and his visitation by demons, as told in the text *St. Athanasius Life of St. Anthony* from Late Antiquity. This text describes the time the saint spent in a cave being tormented and attacked by beasts that were driven away by Christ. The first wave of beasts consisted of wolves, scorpions, lions, bears, and others. When that failed an onslaught of monsters and demons was brought upon the saint which Christ could not protect him from, and thus, Saint Anthony was tormented, left almost dead from the attack.³³ The composition of Grunewald's piece is very

³³ Jean Michel Massing. "Schongauer's 'Tribulations of St. Anthony' Its Iconography and Influence on German Art."(2)

similar to that of Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights Hell* panel and clusters these demons atop one another, continuously adding more forms and strange combination creatures throughout the entire piece. Since both of these were being created at the same time, it is possible that they had direct influences on one another. A specific monstrous demon to draw attention to is the bird-like creature that is swinging down at the Saint in the right of the panel. This representation of birds and bird-like creatures is seen in multiple monsters throughout Bosch's and Grunewald's work.³⁴ One detail in common is the bird striking the saint and others, seen in Bosch's *Garden and Temptation*. The main monster seen in the Hell portion of the *Garden of Earthly Delights* is a large bird headed figure devouring humans, similarly, a large bird like humanoid monster sits atop a horse that looks like a jug of water in the central panel of *The Temptation of St Anthony*. These direct representational connections stand as a confirmation that Bosch was not alone in his usage of monstrous and demonic figures in religious artworks. Grunewald focuses on one scene of torment, while Bosch dedicates an entire triptych and develops the landscape to suit his demonic and monstrous figures.

This panel serves as the beginning of Bosch's story for St Anthony and is the first in a continuous landscape throughout the triptych. This panel is significant because of its importance in being the beginning, to set the tone of the other two panels and relay the origins of the religious tale. To compare this with another of Bosch's triptychs, the *Garden of Earthly Delights* was completed in 1515, just a few years after the St. Anthony piece. Bosch uses a similar three sequenced storytelling to immerse the viewer in the piece. In the first panel of the Garden, Bosch sets up the origin of man, telling the story of Eden, and its fall into sin looming in the canvas amongst strange creatures of Bosch's creation, that exemplify God's own creativity and Bosch's

³⁴ Stefan Fischer, and Karen Williams. *Hieronymus Bosch: The Complete Works*. Köln: Taschen, 2013.

powers over the canvas. Each of these left panels serves as a jumping-off point for the main story. The left panel of *The Temptation of St Anthony* has done its job in introducing us to the peculiar realm inside the mind of Bosch and Anthony's descent into torment and madness to come in later panels, as his resilient faith guides him through.

The Central Panel: Resilience through Faith

Following down the spiraling path leads to the central panel, St. Anthony's torment. To find the instances of Anthony's tale amongst this vast and peculiar landscape, the central panel will be divided into three different sections. The foreground features creatures surrounding the main architecture, the central structure in the middle, and the chaos of the background as the last make up the panels surrounding the central structure in the front are many different forms, some humanoid and others not. Bosch separates each of these into smaller groups, allowing the figures to cluster together. The first of these clusters is at the bottom left of the central panel and features a very large, apple-like fruit. Emerging from that fruit are multiple monstrous figures, some featuring skeletal body parts and others forms that are not like any identifiable creature. Common in many of Bosch's paintings, including the *Temptation of St Anthony* and *Garden of Earthly Delights*, is that Bosch often paints birds amongst his monsters. These birds are sometimes symbolic and represent things like the owl of knowledge and, in general, birds symbolize freedom.³⁵ This is due to their ability to fly and be free, something that we humans are not capable of doing. Seen in Bosch's central panel amongst the monsters, he includes many different birds. These birds are possibly in reference to Bosch's freedom of imagery and his ability to create and design new things.

The second cluster, seen in the front to the right of the central panel, is of many different steeds mounted by monstrous riders. Each of these steeds features strange forms and

³⁵ Fischer, 10.

combinations of known or existing animals to create peculiar and questionable mounts for their equally questionable riders. One of the strange figures is seen holding a baby. There are also more babies seen in this section further down on the ground, combined with bird-like features. There is a strange sense amongst this group, almost as if they are a caravan traveling through the desert together, perhaps tormenting the saint with their monstrous steeds, flaunting their superior way of travel against him.

The third group surrounding Anthony in the central panel is that of another march of crippled humanoid figures and monstrous beasts. They all lead up to the figure of Anthony in the center by a table and perhaps are being given offerings or water from the same creatures offering to the Saint in the central structure. The silver dishes being passed about and offered around the Saint could be in reference to the story of the silver platter rejected and ignored by the Saint. This is one example of how Bosch ingrained the symbolism and religious tales of Saint Anthony with deformed beings and monsters. This leads us in the line unto the large structure in the central panel.

Anthony is in the very center and is seen holding up his fingers in prayer and is looking out directly at the viewer. This connection of direct eye contact with the viewer is not something seen anywhere else in *The Temptation of St Anthony*, and where Bosch is attempting to make the connection between Anthony at that moment and the viewer. Anthony rejects any and all offerings to him and resorts exclusively to prayers. During this moment, the individual connects with the character of Saint Anthony through eye contact and is the strongest connection between the viewer and the illustrations. This means that individuals viewing Bosch's work are meant to connect with the resilience and strength of the saint able to reject worldly temptations and sin. The hand gesture is in reference to the story, where he encountered a towering figure who taught

him the sign of the cross in order to protect himself from sin and temptation and to assist him in focusing directly on prayer. This hand gesture that Anthony gives is mimicked by another figure in the structure. Based on the look of the figure and the continuous narrative style of Bosch's painting, it is likely that this figure is of Saint Anthony. Adorned with a halo, deep within this structure, he is not bothered or affected by any of the strangeness happening around them. He instead is highly focused on Christ and his prayers. This is a message to the viewer that, despite Saint Anthony's struggles, he remains devout, creating an effective devotional image. It is as if the small structure where the saint is praying to Christ is his inner fortress for his innermost self. The monsters, deformity, and temptation surrounding Saint Anthony run the risk of distracting him from prayer as much as the viewer but are instead meant to focus on the saint and become guided to the same solution-- devotion and prayer to protect themselves from self-doubt, and to have the strength to reject sin.

The third and final section in the central panel is the background, consisting of a burning city and demon-like monsters flying about in the sky above the ashen landscape. The burning city could represent the sinful receiving the wrath of God while St Anthony is seen praying in the foreground, or it could be a reference to St Anthony's fire, a medicinal cure that would be given to those suffering ergotism in attempts to save their lives.³⁶ The fire would either kill them or heal them, referring to the Saint's relation to those suffering from sickness and that he is the saint of medicine and the ill.

The Right Panel: Temptation

Moving through the connected backgrounds to the final right panel of the triptych, there is much less going on. In the background, there is a man and woman riding on a flying fish over a small town, while further down the canvas, we see the last instance of the Saint in the triptych.

³⁶ Dixon, s 119–31.

In this panel, St Anthony is holding a book, likely the Bible, and is turning his gaze away from a nude woman. Surrounding the saint in the bottom panel are many monstrous forms and nude figures who either drink their fill or are fully nude and expose their sexual desires. This sinful behavior and temptation, rejected by St Anthony, is seen in the clear aversion of his gaze from the figure tempting him. A specific monster amongst this piece stands out as the representation of the small black child demon from the St Anthony's story that is the true demonic form of lust and temptation. This small monster pokes his head out from under the structure where the nude woman peers to Anthony. The location and the connection with the saint's story confirms that this is the representation of that specific demon in Bosch's work. Being the last panel in the triptych, it is strange that there is no climax or extreme situations in it. Instead, Bosch chooses to end this tale with the Saint remaining resilient and showing his confidence and strength against yet another temptation from the devil.

Flying fish and other fish-like creatures are seen multiple times throughout the Saint Anthony piece. The intention behind these creatures might, at first, be seen as a whimsical play at the unnatural. When analyzing the story of Saint Anthony further, it is seen that this is likely not the case. During the saint's journey, when approached about his hermit lifestyle, he spoke to the individual, saying that a hermit without a shell, his protection from temptation, is doomed to die, much like a fish that leaves the water. They are unnatural and no longer of God's creation and will undoubtedly die. The fact that, multiple times throughout this piece, these fish creatures are seen both as vehicles on land and in the sky shows that they are symbolic of this evil. They are being used to further this environmental story of being surrounded by sin and strangeness that the Saint is experiencing in the Bosch work.

Monstrosity as a Form of Invention

Each of the panels seen in *The Temptation of St Anthony* contain strange creatures and walks the viewer through the Saint's trials as he secludes himself in the desert to pray. These monstrous forms relay themes of torment, and visions were not entirely new or uncommon. The Middle Ages saw many strange combinations of forms, animal and human and evil and sin, represented by monstrosity. How Bosch combined these monstrous forms, and religious themes and stories, allowed him to become a creative and innovative artist. Bosch follows the general religious iconography when depicting both heaven and hell, still maintaining a separation between actions of religious figures in the piece and the actions of the monsters.³⁷ This does not seem to be the case in Bosch's *St. Anthony*, in comparison to Schongauer or Grunewald's pieces. Bosch, Schoengauer, and Grunewald each portray the actions of monsters and their visual purpose differently. Bosch presents his themes as flights into nightmares and fantasy, allowing the creative mind to design new terrain, creatures, and modes of travel in each section of the triptych. He includes the creatures and monsters throughout the entire piece, designating specific aspects of Anthony's story to specific panels while still maintaining an air of curiosity and chaos with the many monsters. By showing more than one scene, Bosch is able to spread out his monsters and demons in the painting in a way that does not focus them directly on tormenting the Saint and rather imbeds them into the entire scene, so that they become the normal. They are what this world is like and not an anomaly of sin meant only to cause suffering. They are representative of sin and evil; they also exist freely within the landscape. Siquenza wrote on Bosch to describe this same feeling, that,

³⁷Gibson, 7.

“Others try to paint man as he appears on the outside while he alone had the audacity to paint him as he is on the inside”³⁸ To demand that art only exhibit moral correctness and not an insight into our imperfect world is boring and results in a lack of artistic creativity.³⁹ Siguenza posits that Bosch had the determination and creativity to change his figures and paint what men’s sins look like on the inside. This relates to the story of lust from the triptych where Bosch paints the small black demon critter as a physical representation of the woman seen next to it, her true form. Through this usage of a combination of medieval influence and artistic ability, Bosch was able to gain a freedom of imagery that placed him in a visual realm that was no longer medieval but not yet modern.⁴⁰ Bosch felt a desire to create outside the realm of reality and the normal, therefore creating a freedom of artistic innovation in his works. Modern freedoms in art are this desire to throw away previous rules and revolt, using new and inventive visuals. This modern freedom allowed Bosch to create a visual narrative that could make use of religious iconography to tell an accurate and religious story yet still maintain an aura of mystery and intrigue about the landscape with his inclusion of devil beasts.

What, exactly, were inventions in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and how did the Northern Renaissance embrace invention and creativity in religious artwork? Artists like Bosch, Schongauer, and Grunewald are all incredible in their abilities to maintain their religious themes while still innovating and imagining new and interesting images to integrate into their religious artwork. Albrecht Durer, born c. 1471, never actually saw or wrote about seeing the works of Hieronymus Bosch yet was an artist and scholar focused on the innovative creativity of the renaissance and the importance for an artist to stand out. Even though Durer did not write about

³⁸ Büttner, 10.

³⁹ Rosenkranz, 25.

⁴⁰ Belting, 10.

Bosch's work, it is impossible to deny that he fits his definition of an inventive and creative artist deserving of adoration.

The mind of artists is full of images which they might be able to produce; therefore, if a man properly using this art and naturally disposed therefor, were allowed to live many hundred years he would be capable - Thanks to the power given to man by God - of pouring forth and producing every day new shapes of men and other creatures the like of which was never seen before nor thought of by any other man⁴¹

Durer writes these words to explain the importance contemporary thinkers of the northern Renaissance placed on originality and creativity. In *Northern Renaissance Paintings: The Discovery of Invention* a chapter on *Invention in Northern Renaissance Studies*, Gibson states that there is no place with more evidence to back up this claim than in the devils designed by Bosch and in his sent to torment the holy man of God in the Saint Anthony triptych. The triptych is full of many creatures that exemplify this ability to create and design new and exciting forms never seen before by man.⁴² To create such creatures as the long-necked white beast seen in the bottom central panel or the large swan ship that flies through the sky in the central panel of the *Temptation of St Anthony*, while maintaining his religious themes and concepts, is incredible.

This ability to create something with unnatural form, like a Godly vision or dream, was a skill Bosch, Grunewald, and Schongauer all held in common.⁴³ These men must hold the skills to understand the dichotomy between heaven and hell, good and evil, and they use their deformities to depict these identities.⁴⁴ Schongauer and Grunewald are alike in the sense that they each chose to depict St Anthony in a state of torment and pain, differing from Bosch. Bosch

⁴¹ Maryan Wynn, Ainsworth, and Molly Faries. "Northern Renaissance Paintings: The Discovery of Invention." *Saint Louis Art Museum Bulletin* 18 (Summer 1986): 4-43.

⁴² Ainsworth, 4-43.

⁴³ Büttner, 11.

⁴⁴ Gibson, *The Garden of Earthly Delights by Hieronymus Bosch: The Iconography of the Central Panel*. 9,12.

chose to display the Saint in scenes of poise and control over his actions. The only instances where this is not the case are in the left panel, where we see him whisked away in the sky like the scene of his ecstasy seen in Schonegauer's piece, and the lower instance, where he is being carried by other hermits like himself. Bosch, in this specific piece, does not directly make his monsters cause any physical damage or seem entirely threatening to the Saint. Instead, it focuses on the temptation and the moral psychological process that Saint Anthony is going through, which he weathers with spiritual fortitude, rather than physical pain and torment.

Conclusion

Analyzing the triptych, *The Temptation of St Anthony* by Hieronymus Bosch, has shown that the mind of Bosch is capable of being understood by compiling biographical, semiotic iconography, and historical context surrounding him and his contemporaries. Historians have described Bosch as the creator of "devil beasts", a man of creativity and of religious depiction. His dedication to depicting religious imagery from a perspective that would be understood by his contemporaries was not overshadowed by his innovations; instead, these innovations enhanced his religious works. Bosch chose to create an understanding between visual monstrosity and symbolic sin, while allowing his monsters to become integrated naturally into his environment. They are immersed in the inhospitable landscape just as much as Saint Anthony. It allows them to have an interplay of connections and storytelling that makes Bosch innovative and original in his depictions of monsters. In the Saint Anthony triptych, Bosch chooses to tell the tale of torment because it would allow him to represent strict iconography, the belief in faith that St Anthony had led him through his torments with resilience whilst being surrounded by Bosch's peculiar and unnatural beasts. This is their role, and they inhabit their own world but are still symbols of torment and evil for the Saint.

Bosch is an innovative artist whose ability to integrate the monstrous into his art fluidly and creatively defines his place in art history. Bosch's skills are the critical reason that his chimeras and monstrous images are regarded so highly in art scholarship. Using the monstrous as a tool for artistic invention and building an environment where the monstrous can thrive amongst religious figures Bosch makes his mark on the timeline of creative freedom and innovation throughout art history.



Figure 1: Bosch, Hieronymus, d. 1516. c.1500-05. Triptych: Temptation of St. Anthony Int.: scenes from temptation story. Place: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga (Portugal).



Figure 2: Matthias Grünewald. Begun in 1512-1513 and believed to have been completed in 1515. Isenheim Altarpiece; Temptations of Saint Anthony. painting. Place: Musée d'Unterlinden (Colmar, France)



Figure 3: Martin Schongauer. c. 1480-c. 1490. Saint Anthony Beaten by Demons. engraving.

Place: Fondazione Magnani Rocca.



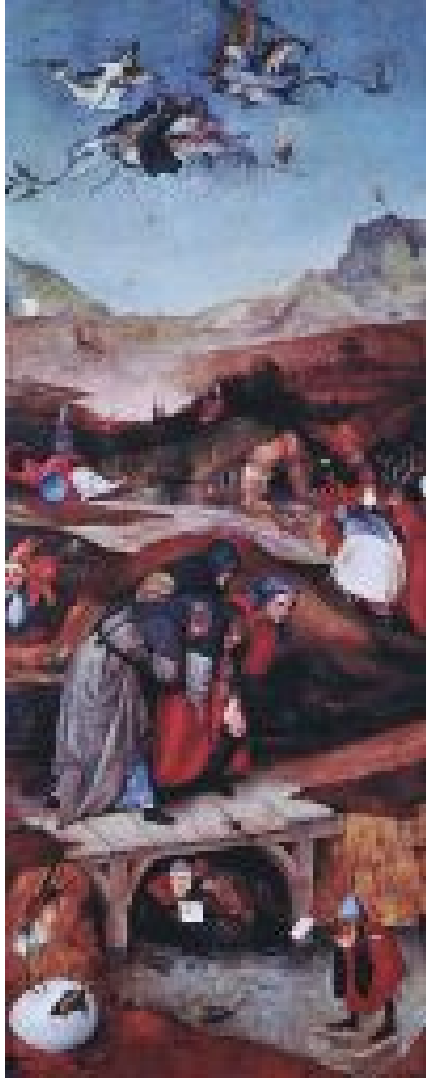


Figure 4: Bosch, Hieronymus, d. 1516. c.1500-05. Triptych: Temptation of St. Anthony Int: left panel: scenes of Anthony's temptations. Place: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga (Portugal).



Figure 5: Bosch, Hieronymus, d. 1516. Triptych: Temptation of St. Anthony Int.: center: det.: demons. Place: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga (Portugal).



Figure 6: Bosch, Hieronymus, d. 1516. c.1500-05. Triptych: Temptation of St. Anthony Int.: left panel: det.: under bridge. Place: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga (Portugal).



Figure 8: Bosch, Hieronymus, d. 1516. c.1500-05. Triptych: Temptation of St. Anthony Int: center panel: scenes of Anthony's temptations. Place: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga (Portugal).



Figure 9: Bosch, Hieronymus, d. 1516. c.1500-05. Triptych: Temptation of St. Anthony Int.:
Right Wing: det.: Curtained Tree. Place: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga (Portugal).



Figure 9: Bosch, Hieronymus, d. 1516. c.1500-05. Triptych: Temptation of St. Anthony Int: center panel: scenes of Anthony's temptations. Place: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga (Portugal).



Figure 10: Bosch, Hieronymus, d. 1516. c.1500-05. Triptych: Temptation of St. Anthony Int.: center panel: det.: fantastic fish. Place: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga (Portugal).



Figure 11: Hieronymus Bosch, c. 1500-1505. *Temptation of St. Anthony*. Tryptich . Place: Lisbon: Mus., National.



Figure 12: Hieronymus Bosch. circa 1504. Garden of Earthly Delights (open): left wing: Paradise (Garden of Eden), central panel: Garden of Earthly Delights, right wing: Hell (Inferno). Place: Museo del Prado. (Madrid).

Figure 13: Monstrous Races, Bestiary (c.1270-90), London, Westminster Abbey.



Figure 14: Three-headed Trinity, Psalter (c. 1200), St. Johns College, Cambridge.

Figure 15: Allegory of the phoenix. Guillaume le Cherc, Bestiaire (c. 1265-70) Paris, Bibliotheque nationale de France.

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