

Marginality versus Centrality: Depicting Gout and Stomach Illness in Petrarch's Illustrated *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae*

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Introduction

Between 1354 and 1360, the prolific scholar and poet Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374)—anglicized as Petrarch—composed his most ambitious work within his catalogue titled *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae* (*Remedies for Fortunes*).¹ Following the manuscript's second redaction in 1366, the book was rapidly disseminated across Latin-speaking Europe, with later translated editions flowing into the low countries.² As Petrarch takes considerable inspiration from classical philosophers like Cicero, and Stoic philosophers such as Seneca, *De Remediis* is a book of Neo-Stoic psycho-therapeutic wisdom and is one of the most prominent works within the humanist revival of ancient moral thought in the Renaissance period.³

Alongside his hyperbolic reputation for being “the first modern man and the first humanist,” as per scholar Stanley W. Jackson, Petrarch

¹ Timothy Kircher, “On the Face of Fortune: *De Remediis Utriusque Fortune*,” in *Petrarch: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, ed. Margaret J. Osler (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 245.

² Karl A.E. Enenkel, “Pain as Persuasion: The Petrarch Master Interpreting Petrarch’s *De Remediis*,” in *The Sense of Suffering: Constructions of Physical Pain in Early Modern Culture*, eds. Jan Frans Van Dijkhuizen and Karl A.E. Enenkel (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 91.

³ Stanley W. Jackson, “Consolation and Comfort,” in *A History of Psychological Healing*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 175.

was renowned specifically for his work in *De Remediis*. The high regard with which the manuscript is held is due to it being much ahead of its time in its length, intricacy, and later establishment as a core humanist text of the fourteenth century.⁴ As its popularity continued to flourish, the text was later accompanied by 261 intricately designed woodcut blocks, produced in Augsburg in 1532 by the long-time anonymous ‘Petrarca Meister,’ Hans Weiditz.⁵

The book is comprised of two parts, “Remedies for Prosperity” and “Remedies for Adversity,” with each section being comprised of philosophical dialogues between the characters of *Ratio* (Reason), and the emotions: *Gaudium*, *Spes*, *Dolor*, and *Metus* (Joy, Hope, Sorrow, and Fear). This paper is concerned with a minute section of the second volume, which devotes itself to moral and psycho-therapeutic wisdom in response to physical ailments and pain. This paper argues that the psycho-therapeutic moralist dialogues within the second book of *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae*, titled “Remedies for Adversity,” and the woodcut blocks which accompany them showcase a distinctive clash between the interpretations of pain, death, and religiosity of both the author, Francesco Petrarca, and the woodcut artist, Hans Weiditz.

Popularity and Publishing Developments

De Remediis was arguably Petrarch’s most popular work over the centuries, as it was extensively disseminated across Europe, with more copies being printed—both in Latin and translated editions—than any other of Petrarch’s Latin works. This popularity was in part due to the developments of the printing industry, which prolonged the text’s marketability and distribution into the seventeenth century, cementing its significance and influence on literary and philosophical

⁴ Stanley W. Jackson, “Consolation and Comfort,” 175; Karl A.E. Enekel, “Pain as Persuasion: The Petrarch Master Interpreting Petrarch’s *De Remediis*,” 91.

⁵ Letizia A. Panizza, “Stoic Psychotherapy in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Petrarch’s *De Remediis*,” in *Atoms, Pneuma, and Tranquility*, ed. Margaret J. Osler, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 63-64.

trends in the Renaissance era.⁶ The first translation was a French edition, completed by Jean Daudin in 1377. Typically, these early translated editions were adorned with opulent miniatures on their frontispieces, alongside additional images at the beginning of each section's prologues. Yet, no illustrations were meant to depict a specific dialogue within the larger work (Figure 2).⁷

Instead, the French editions often showcased the personified character of Fortune, alongside her wheel. Attached to her wheel are the bodies of humans, being cranked from one side of the social strata to the opposite, or from peasantry to nobility (Figure 4). This imagery, which had been revived from classical times, has frequently been interpreted as the societal manifestation of the rise and fall of good to adverse fortune for some, and its simultaneous reversal for others.⁸ The German editions, translated by theologian and humanist Georg Spalatin, began to appear with the dialogical woodcuts in copies printed in Augsburg after 1532.⁹ These early codices, which had this ornamentation, functioned as signifiers of the commissioner's wealth, status, and resources—making the 1620 coloured edition, printed in Frankfurt, truly spectacular in its design, quality, and condition (Figure 1).¹⁰

In comparison to older editions, namely the 1572 and 1604 intact manuscripts, the design makes considerable developments by way of boldness in line quality, roman numerals to pagination, and changes in type face (Figures 3 and 5). The lack of delicacy is presumably due to the poorness and softness in paper quality, which

⁶ J.B Trapp, "Illustrated Manuscripts of Petrarch's *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae*," in *Poetry and Philosophy in the Middle Ages: A Festschrift for Peter Dronke*, ed. J. Marenbon (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 218; Letizia A. Panizza, 63.

⁷ J. B. Trapp, "Illustrated Manuscripts of Petrarch's *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae*," 218.

⁸ Charles M. Raddling, "Fortune and her Wheel: The Meaning of a Medieval Symbol," *Mediävistik*, Vol. 5 (1992), 127.

⁹ Letizia A. Panizza, "Stoic Psychotherapy in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Petrarch's *De Remediis*," 64.

¹⁰ Trapp, 219.

does not do the detailed woodcut images any justice.¹¹ INC.03 is printed on bright white paper, which is in pristine condition with minimal damages. Moreover, it has been redesigned to have two columns of text, making this edition's overall page count longer and adding additional cost to production value. It comes from a limited selection of manuscripts that have colour added, increasing its remarkable qualities within the larger catalogue of *De Remediis* copies.

Interpreting *De Remediis* in Humanist Thought and *Consolatio*

The practice of proffering consolation was a central theme within humanist literature and moral conscience.¹² Considering that *De Remediis* is a Neo-Stoic consolatory text, it also is situated within the medieval genre of *speculum* literature, meaning that it functions as a moralist instructional manual, or encyclopedic guide to virtue.¹³ As previously mentioned, Petrarch had taken substantial inspiration from his Stoic predecessors' works, notably Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes*. This was essentially a source book—or encyclopedia of types—for readers which established that *philosophia* was meant to heal the soul, treat vain anxieties, and free oneself from desires and fears through its set of dialogues, which treated the problems of death, enduring physical pain, and distress.¹⁴ Moreover, Seneca's similarly titled *De Remediis Fortuitorum* was a collection of often one-line maxims that responded to readers' emotional lamentations, and were targeted to the general experiences of the laymen of the

¹¹ Alfred W. Pollard, *Early Illustrated Books: A History of the Decoration and Illustration of Books in the 15th and 16th Centuries*, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd, 1893), 76.

¹² George W. McClure, "Introduction: The Classical and Christian Traditions," in *Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 3.

¹³ Reindert Falkenburg, "Speculative Imagery in Petrarch's *Von Der Artzney Bayder Glueck (1532)*," in *Petrarch and his Readers in the Renaissance*, eds., Karl A.E. Enenkel and Jan Papy, (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 173.

¹⁴ McClure, 7.

times.¹⁵ Overall, the basic Stoic belief is that although one does not have the ability to alter the outside world and providential fate, one does maintain the capacity to alter their inner emotions and find peace from the innately distressing human experience.¹⁶

Continuing this trend of *consolatio*, the Renaissance humanists looked to create an identity for themselves in the likes of a specialized consoler. They had the dual ability to self-console, while also functioning as a “doctor of the mind” for others. As George W. McClure explains, “as doctors tended to the *body*, and priests to the *soul*, a figure such as Petrarch wanted to fashion a therapeutic wisdom for [...] the *mind*.”¹⁷ Petrarch felt strongly about the distinctive divide between the contemporary medical practitioners and the rhetoricians. Any incursions into the humanist domain were frowned upon, as he felt that the mechanical and mute nature of fourteenth century doctors and their medical practices should be maintained.¹⁸ In comparison to the aids that philosophers could provide to the ill through metaphysical concepts, doctors’ attempts of verbosity were of no aid to the patient. In his own words, Petrarch stated that doctors should use “herbs not words” and exclusively focus on healing the body.¹⁹ Furthermore, considering his identity as a Christian Neo-Stoic, Petrarch also argued that any medical intervention interfered with the will of God, essentially turning one away from the most practical medicine, which was patience and fearless acceptance of one’s divine fate.²⁰

The development of Petrarch’s identity as a consoler was the result of a great trauma in his lifetime. In 1348, prior to the writing of *De*

¹⁵ Letizia A. Panizza, “Stoic Psychotherapy in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Petrarch’s *De Remediis*,” 53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁷ George W. McClure, “Introduction: The Classical and Christian Traditions,” 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Stanley W. Jackson, “Consolation and Comfort,” 177.

²⁰ George W. McClure, “Petrarch as Universal Consoler: The *De Remediis Utriusque Fortune*,” in *Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 51.

Remediis, the Black plague—one of the most fatal pandemics in human history—suddenly killed several of Petrarch’s closest friends, patrons, his son, and his long-time love, Laura.²¹ As many scholars have noted, this event had an everlasting effect on his worldview, as it provided him with a deep-rooted need to meditate on his life prior to these losses and judge it with utmost severity in its vanity, which is expressed through the dialogues in *De Remediis*.²²

Though the conception of his consoler identity was rooted in providing solace for himself in his book titled *Secretum*—or *the Soul’s conflict with Passion*—*De Remediis*, Book II was his transition into the role as *animorum medicus* for others.²³ *De Remediis* is comprised of dialogues between the personified characters of *Ratio* (Reason) and the emotions: *Gaudium*, *Spes*, *Dolor*, and *Metus* (Joy, Hope, Sorrow, and Fear). The manuscript is made up of two books, each dealing with the positive and negative aspects of fortune respectively. Book I, titled “Remedies of Prosperity,” consists of 122 dialogues, each of which demonstrate the moral remedies against good fortune, or the implicit dangers that arise alongside prosperity, as it propels one away from morality and virtue. Book II, titled “Remedies of Adversity,” is 132 dialogues and looks at the reactions to misfortune, which include many instances of illness and physical pain, and is where INC.03 (Figure 1) is situated.²⁴ Ultimately, Petrarch argues that reason, will, and memory, the higher powers of the soul, will guide one through the vicissitudes of life, through contemplation of God.²⁵

²¹ Renee Neu Watkins, “Petrarch and the Black Death: From Fear to Monuments,” *Studies in the Renaissance*, Vol. 19 (1972), 198.

²² Renee Neu Watkins, “Petrarch and the Black Death: From Fear to Monuments,” 198.

²³ Stanley W. Jackson, “Consolation and Comfort,” 175; For more on Petrarch’s self-consolatory work in *Secretum*, see George W. McClure, “Petrarch as Self-Consoler: The *Secretum*,” *Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016).

²⁴ Thomas G. Benedek and Gerald P. Rodnan, “Petrarch on Medicine and the Gout,” 411.

²⁵ Reindert Falkenburg, “Speculative Imagery in Petrarch’s *Von Der Artzney Bayder Glueck* (1532),” 172; George W. McClure, “Petrarch as Universal Consoler: The *De Remediis Utriusque Fortune*,” 59.

Relations between Text and Image in *Trostspiegel in Glück und Unglück* (1532)

As art historian Reindert Falkenburg explains, according to the prologue of *De Remediis*, the woodcut designs were loosely based on the designs of ‘visierlicher Angebung des Hochgelehrten Doctoris Sebastiani Brant’ (Visual Indication of the Highly Learned Doctor Sebastian Brant), and that the German visual artist Sebastian Brant had helped provide anecdotal details and philosophical outtakes from Petrarch’s text to Weiditz. This was because the woodcut illustrations had been completed around 1520, which was before the German translation of the Latin text had been fully finalized, and Weiditz supposedly could not speak or read Latin. However, this also indicates that there was a relative freedom within the designing process, as is made clear through the often-loose associations between the text and accompanied image.²⁶

Many scholars have argued for several different interpretations regarding the thematic connections between text and image. These can be distilled to three relatively consistent arguments that appear in scholarship. Firstly, there are those who see the images as *Schaubilder*—meaning a realistic proto-genre scene that functions as an expression of Petrarch’s humanist and Renaissance world view—which was a style that was later made popular across seventeenth century Europe.²⁷ Considering that the images focus particularly on the physical ailments, usually in a relatively grotesque manner, this explanation is unlikely. A second interpretation argues that although the text itself is rooted in Christian Stoicism, the images have become a form of moral satire with political and religious polemic interplay.²⁸

²⁶ Reindert Falkenburg, “Speculative Imagery in Petrarch’s *Von Der Artzney Bayder Glueck* (1532), 172.

²⁷ Karl A.E. Enenkel, “Pain as Persuasion: The Petrarch Master Interpreting Petrarch’s *De Remediis*,” 92.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

A final, more enticing interpretation is that the images are meant to be read didactically, or as *Lehrbilder*, with the goal of conveying Petrarch's Neo-Stoic and humanistic doctrines which creates an inversive structure between the conversing characters in the text. In using the visual medium's ability to convey each dialogical scene with sarcasm and emphasized grotesque imagery, the woodcut blocks can create additional complexity and discourse within the philosophical implications.²⁹ Although the image and the text do not align in their overt messaging, it does not negate their complimentary qualities. Bearing in mind that Weiditz chose to create images which emphasize the grotesque within this section of the book, it is used in a way to evoke emotional reactions of grief, disgust, distress, and fear in the viewer, almost instantaneously as they open the page.³⁰ Yet, as explained, Petrarch's goal, and that of other Neo-Stoic humanists alike, was to find ways within oneself to control them. The text in this way became an encyclopedic book, which readers could simply open to any page and thereby practice becoming a self-consoler of their own accord.

The translated text that accompanies the image (INC.03) suggests that the goal of the text is not to provide medical wisdom in any capacity, but instead functions as a way for Petrarch to establish his stoic wisdom of conquering the *perturbationes* of fear in the face of illness and death.³¹ In the dialogue on gout and stomach illness, which is the subject matter of INC.03, the personified Pain exclaims, "I make the horrible stomach, bowels, and loins wail with pain. Deal with it. It will get worse," which aligns with Petrarch's overall Stoic goal—for readers to *deal* with their pain.

The character Reason responds with, "The sick one has no other consolation than hope. It is however a bad thing when one is neither able nor willing to suffer. He who has pain and is afraid of it is an

²⁹ Falkenburg, 172.

³⁰ Enenkel, 161.

³¹ See translation by Marcus Schneider in Appendix.

unfortunate man.”³² Yet, within INC.03, each pictorial character has a clear indication of pain, discomfort, and fear in their presentation. Some are openly crying into handkerchiefs; others are standing over the sick with great concern in their expression. While the text immediately turns to the emotions of fear and hope, the accompanied image exemplifies the dislocations of perspectives between a consoled versus a distressed mind, as the characters dealing with the illnesses convey a clear expression of fear and sadness. Furthermore, as Falkenburg notes, the spatial composition of the images and their texts guide the reader to engage in their own self-reflection and contemplation on the relationship between bodily and material goods versus an impenetrable emotional stability.³³ This spatial composition centres the physical pain both literally and rhetorically to each dialogical experience, while the representation of reason is pushed to the margins of the image, if it even exists within it at all.

Notably, the dialogues within *De Remediis* refer to one another, signalling that the text is meant to be read in sequential order.³⁴ An extended translation by Dr. Thomas Twyne in 1579 includes another section of the book which imparts the complaints of a victim “vexed with the loathsome gout.” Yet, as Petrarch concludes, it is not simply old age that brings illness along with it, but it is also reported that gout commonly affects rich men.³⁵ The image that appears on the recto of INC.03 displays a man, seemingly outside the chambers of the ruler in the verso image, being catered to by other courtiers. The space is grand, there are gold vases on the table, and he is draped in expensive materials.

The verso image shows a man suffering in an extremely sickly state, as he has become immobilized and bedridden from his illness, while

³² Ibid.

³³ Falkenburg, 174.

³⁴ Timothy Kircher, “On the Face of Fortune: De Remediis Utriusque Fortune,” 246.

³⁵ Thomas G. Benedek and Gerald P. Rodnan, “Petrarch on Medicine and the Gout,” 411.

appearing lethally gaunt and distressed by his presumable demise. Yet, he continues to be adorned with his riches—most notably the large crown atop his head—and is surrounded by markers of his lavish lifestyle, with other courtiers appearing worried and frightened for him. As Falkenburg explains, there is an extended visual emphasis on man's attachment to the material goods of fortune, which is contradictory to the standard Neo-Stoic philosophies established by Petrarch, yet simultaneously emphasizes Petrarch's disdain for vanity and excessive wealth.³⁶

Another significant example of the use of didactics and moral satire within the images is in the dialogue on tooth pain. Within this dialogue, the author is not concerned with the bodily sensations of toothaches, but rather management of the *perturbatione* of grief. He does so by invoking classic Neo-Stoic principles, in that teeth are the temporary gift of God, but also in a moralist manner as the loss of teeth helps to prevent acts of gluttony, lust, and vanity through losing the ability to chew, but also by damaging one's beauty.³⁷ However, in the woodcut which accompanies this dialogue, Weiditz accentuates the sensations of toothache by producing a humorous image focused on the act of tooth-pulling in early modern dentistry (Figure 6).³⁸ The patient is clearly in extreme discomfort, with their face being contorted in pain, further denoting the notion of conflict between perceptions of pain between author and artist.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *De Remediis* is a poignant example of Neo-Stoic humanist consolatory literature. Though taking considerable inspiration in the works of other classical Stoics like Cicero and Seneca, Petrarch was able to accomplish an unimaginable feat by

³⁶ Reindert Falkenburg, "Speculative Imagery in Petrarch's *Von Der Artzney Bayder Glueck* (1532)," 174.

³⁷ Karl A.E. Ehenkel, "Pain as Persuasion: The Petrarch Master Interpreting Petrarch's *De Remediis*," 95.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 96-97.

creating a *speculum* which could be used by individuals to cure their mental anguish regarding physical ailments and bad fortune. The 1532-1620 editions which include the 261 woodcuts by Hans Weiditz demonstrate a distinctive difference in interpretations and inner philosophies of both the artist and the author. Considering that the Stoic and Neo-Stoic writers looked to largely ignore physical pain, Weiditz's woodcuts contrastingly amplify the pronouncement of that previously disregarded agony. As the author views it as negligible, the artist perceives it to be central.

Recommended Readings

To gain a critical understanding of the genre of *consolatio*, see *Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism* by George W. McClure. Though it is not entirely devoted to *De Remediis*, these two texts provide indispensable historical context, while also providing rich commentary on the contested relationship between rhetoricians of the Middle Ages. Furthermore, for extensive discussion of the influence of Cicero and Seneca's literature on Petrarch's worldview, see Letizia A. Panizza's "Stoic Psychotherapy in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Petrarch's *De Remediis*."

Regarding interpretations of the relationship between the text and accompanying woodcuts, the edited collection *Petrarch and His Readers in the Renaissance* edited by Karl A.E. Enenkel and Jan Papy is an excellent discussion of Petrarch through the centuries. Reindert L. Falkenburg and Enenkel both contribute their own chapters which explore their own interpretations. Enenkel also has a chapter titled "Pain as Persuasion: The Petrarch Master Interpreting Petrarch's *De Remediis*," and is concerned with the amplification of pain within the book of misfortunes, which is where the dialogue on gout is situated. Further reading on illustrated manuscripts can be found in Alfred W. Pollard's classic work titled *Early Illustrated Books: A History of the Decoration and Illustration of Books in the 15th and 16th Centuries*.

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Appendix



Figure 1. Gout Illness and Stomach Pain, by Francesco Petrarca, illustrated by Hans Weiditz, in *Trostspiegel in Glück und Unglück*. 32.3 x 20.32 cm. Frankfurt, Germany, c. 1590-1620. Incunabula—printed (woodcut technique), paper, hand painted. Private Collection.

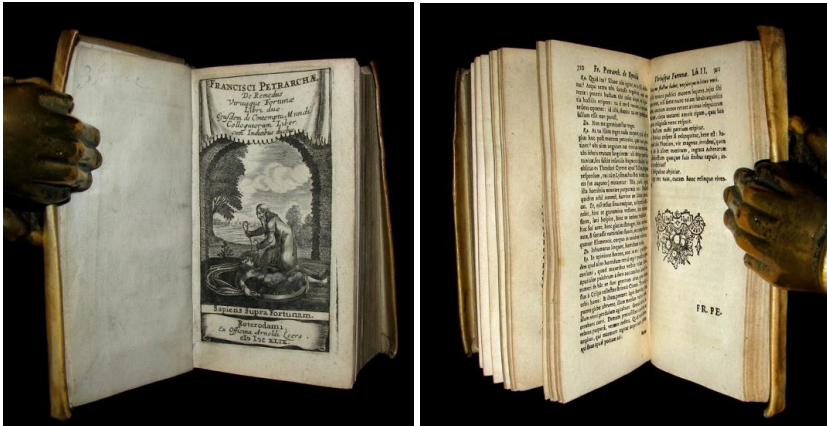


Figure 2. Francesco Petrarca, *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae*, Rotterdam, Netherlands, 1649. Private Collection. Note, this edition is a seventeenth century Latin edition, as no digital scans of early French editions were located. This image is to provide a similar idea to what the frontispieces would have looked like in the early sixteenth century manuscripts.

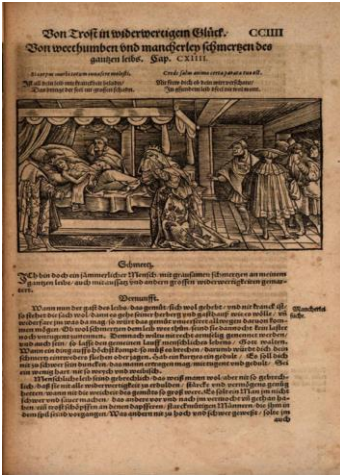


Figure 3. Francesco Petrarca, *Tröstspiegel in Glück und Unglück*, Germany, c. 1572, Bavarian State Library. Digitized January 4, 2012.



Figure 4. Jean Pichore, *Lady Fortune and her Wheel*, from Francesco Petrarca's *Les Remèdes de l'une et l'autre fortune*, c. 1503-1505, tempera and gold on parchment. Bibliothèque National de France, Paris. A secondary example of the frontispieces on earlier translated editions, though not the earliest editions.



Figure 5. Francesco Petrarca, *Trostspiegel in Glück und Unglück*, Germany, c. 1620, The British Library, published by V. Steinmayer. Digitized March 22, 2016.



Figure 6. Hans Weiditz, woodcut illustration to Petrarca's *Trostspiegel in Glück und Unglück*, Augsburg, 1532, book II, chapter 94.

Translation of INC.03 (Figure 1) by Marcus Schneider Of Loin Disease, Gout, and Bowel Pain

Ulcer, colic, and stomach-ache, and other similar diseases, are sharp but soon have an end, afterward health will come to you.

Pain:

I make the horrible stomach, bowels, and loins wail with pain. Deal with it. It will get worse.

Reason:

Have good hope! Don't despair! It will soon be better. You mustn't deal with anything so awful. Just as the beginning of pain comes after joy, so must the end of pain in turn be a beginning of joy and health. One comes from the other. The sick one has no other consolation than hope. It is however a bad thing when one is neither able nor willing to suffer. He who has pain and is afraid of it is an unfortunate man.

Fear, which is a part of misery, will be taken away by death, which frees one from everything one fears. Why then is anyone afraid? Thus, one should always learn here before dying, which one need not often try, just this one story. Intestinal disease is the same pain as that of death, except that death is lesser and shorter. He who can strongly suffer such pains may even more strongly suffer death. Otherwise, there might be a different result. The greater and heavier the pain, the nearer the end, because no one takes a long time to die. Long sought, one is blown out with a short breath. It succeeds in falling upon one who becomes unconscious, so that even robbed of his senses he fares thither. Blessed is he, therefore, who fares thither sleeping soundly. Unhappy is he who returns out of unconsciousness. One may taste death only once, because no one dies more than one time.

One has often disputed among the learned which one is the best and least death. Thus Julius Caesar, who shortly before his death fell unconscious, also resolved such a question: that the totally unexpected death is the best and most pleasant of all, which

opinion, even though it will perhaps be somewhat too harsh for the Christian faith and true godliness to see, every pious Christian should nonetheless live by, so that nothing yet to occur may be too fast and sudden for him.

Si corpus morbi totum invasere molesti, crede, salus anima certa parata tuo est.

(If disease invades the whole body, believe, blessed soul, that you are certainly prepared)

Is your whole body weighed down with disease?
That doesn't bring the soul great harm.
Don't look forward to being spared,
The soul doesn't dwell well in a healthy body.