INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6” x 9” black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700     800/521-0600
RICE UNIVERSITY

THE PRESENCE OF GUSTAVE FLAUBERT AND SAINT ANTHONY IN ODILON REDON'S TEMPTATION ALBUMS

by

NADINE OLEVA COCHRAN

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE MASTER OF ARTS

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE

William A. Camfield,
Professor of Art History

Joséph Manca,
Associate Professor of Art History

Linda Neagley,
Associate Professor of Art History

Houston, Texas

April, 1997
ABSTRACT

The Presence of Gustave Flaubert and Saint Anthony in
Odilon Redon's Temptation Albums

by

Nadine Oleva Cochran

Odilon Redon looked to Flaubert's novel, *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, as inspiration for much of his œuvre during the 1880's and 1890's. Redon and Flaubert shared a stylistic taste noted for destabilized meaning and deliberate ambiguity. To understand how Redon accomplished the disruption of a single meaning in his artistic productions, I will use a semiotic analysis of several of the lithographs from his Temptation albums to examine the verbal and visual sign systems, as well as the semiotic potential of the medium of lithography. The third part of the paper will focus on issues not previously addressed in art historical literature: the thesis that Redon empathized with St. Anthony to such an extent that he was continually drawn back to Flaubert's novel for inspiration for both his works in charcoal and lithography that he called his "noirs" and, later his works in color.
Acknowledgments

My years at Rice have been a time of enormous intellectual development for me and an opportunity I feel privileged to have experienced. I am grateful to my thesis readers, Professors Bill Camfield, Joe Manca, and Linda Neagley for their time and patience. My classes with Bill Camfield and Joe Manca are highlights of my academic experience at Rice; thus, it was particularly gratifying to have them both on my thesis committee.

Lastly, to all who have loved, nurtured, and guided me during these recent, arduous years -- this paper would have not been possible without you. You have my heartfelt gratitude.
# Table of Contents

Abstract  
ii  
Acknowledgments  
iii  
List of Figures  
v  
Introduction  
1  
Part One  
9  
Part Two  
42  
Part Three  
58  
Bibliography  
90
List Of Figures

For research purposes, Odilon Redon’s collection of lithographs, now owned by the Art Institute of Chicago, was consulted. Most of the illustrations for this paper are from Odilon Redon, 1913 by Andre Mellerio. Where applicable, illustrations are denoted by Mellerio’s number.

Figure 1  “D’abord une flaqué d’eau, ensuite une prostituee, le coin d’un temple, une figure de soldat, un char avec deux chevaux blancs qui se cabrent” 1888 (M. 84)

Figure 2  “C’est le diable, portant sous ses deux ailes les sept péchés capitaux…” 1888 (M. 85)

Figure 3  page from La Tentation de Saint Antoine by Gustave Flaubert

Figure 4  Eye-Balloon, 1878

Figure 5  “Partout Des Prunelles Flamboient” 1888 (M. 92)

Figure 6  “Il y eut peut-être une vision première essayée dans la fleur” 1883

Figure 7  “La sirène sortit des flots, vêtue de dards” 1883 (M. 48)

Figure 8  “La mort: Mon ironie dépasse toutes les autres” 1889 (M. 97)

Figure 9  “Oannès: Moi, la première conscience du chaos, j’ai surgi de l’abîme pour durcir la matière, pour régler les formes” 1896 (M. 147)

Figure 10  “Je me suis enfoncé dans la solitude. J’habitais l’arbre derrière moi” 1896 (M. 142)

Figure 11  “Un FOU dans un morne paysage” 1885 (M. 56)

Figure 12  “Antoine: Quel est le but de tout cela? Le Diable: il n’y a pas de but!” 1896 (M. 151)

Figure 13  “…Une longue chrysalide couleur de sang” 1889 (M. 96)

Figure 14  “Des fleurs tombent, et la tête d’un python parait” 1896 (M. 138)

Figure 15  page from Un Coup de Dés by Stéphane Mallarmé
Figure 16  “Et partout ce sont des colonnes de basalte..., La lumière tombe des voutes” 1896 (M. 136) 54
Figure 17  “Quand s’éveillait la vie au fond de la matière obscure” 1883 (M. 45) 61
Figure 18  The Crying Spider, 1881 63
Figure 19  Strange Flower, 1880 64
Figure 20  “Ensuite paraît un être singulier, ayant une tête d’homme sur un corps de poisson” 1889 (M. 88) 65
Figure 21  “Les Sciapodes: La tête le plus bas possible, c’est le secret du bonheur!” 1889 (M. 100) 66
Figure 22  Frontispiece A Gustave Flaubert, 1889 (M. 94) 72
Figure 23  “Saint-Antoine: Au secours mon dieu!” 1896 (M. 135) 73
Figure 24  Homage to Cézanne, 1900 74
Figure 25  Portrait of Odilon Redon, cover from Les Hommes d’aujourd’hui, 1890 75
Figure 26  Self-Portrait 76
Figure 27  La Peur, 1866 (M. 6) 79
Figure 28  Hagar, 1866 80
Figure 29  “…et il distingue une plaine aride et mamelonneuse” 1896 (M. 140) 81
Figure 30  “Dans l’ombre des gens pleurent et prient entourés d’autres qui les exhortent...” 1896 (M. 139) 83
Figure 31  The Little Abbot Reading the Ramayana, 1883 85
Figure 32  “Saint-Antonine: Il doit y avoir quelque part des figures primordiales dont les corps ne sont que les images” 1889 (M. 98) 88
Introduction

Although Gustave Flaubert had been one of the great novelists of the generation preceding Odilon Redon, his *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (1874), was not an immediate success. It would take the ambiance of fin-de-siècle angst for the book to be truly appreciated by the Symbolist artists and writers of Redon's sphere. Emile Hennequin, a literary critic and proponent of Redon, gave a copy of the book to him in 1882. Redon liked the book immediately, claiming it to be a "literary marvel" and a "mine for himself"; it proved to be a fecund mine — one-fourth of his lithographic output, including three albums, was based on the novel as well as many of his later oils and pastels.

Redon was drawn to Flaubert's novel because he recognized a similar style — a style noted for destabilized meaning. Both Flaubert and Redon seemed to gravitate to representations of the obscure, uncertain, and illusory in their respective disciplines. It is the purpose of this paper to understand, at least in part, how Redon accomplished the technique of deliberate ambiguity in his artistic productions; to do that I will use a semiotic analysis of several of the lithographs from his Temptation albums. By examining the visual and verbal sign systems, as well as the semiotic potential of the medium of lithography, we

---

will have a greater understanding of how Redon generated the ambiguous and mysterious meanings for which he is so well known.

Stephen Eisenman's book, *The Temptation of Saint Redon* (1992), convincingly argues that both men were led into artistic expressions of the grotesque and the use of ambiguous signifiers. He further argues that each man shared an obvious contempt for convention, cliché and the received ideas of their social class, claiming that this shared class guilt is the reason Redon was so drawn to Flaubert's novel.² While I find the argument of shared class guilt unconvincing, I do agree that Redon recognized a writer with similar taste and style, despite whatever motivations each may have had for their peculiar technique.

As defined by Eisenman, those artists, critics, and writers that Redon associated with and those who inspired his work, "...gave literary form to the late Romantic anomie rife among a generation that matured after 1848: Baudelaire, Hennequin, and Huysmans by their strident expressions of despair over French cultural decadence, and Poe, Mallarmé, and Flaubert by their modernist dream of creating a new literature, freed from the task of signification."³ Claiming Flaubert to be more in line with Mallarmé, and hence Redon's milieu, rather than his own generation, Eisenman states, "Words and phrases in Flaubert are

---


³ Eisenman, p. 2-3.
destabilized, narrative is disrupted, and descriptions appear abstracted from their object, as Flaubert's style approaches the formal condition which we now designate as modernism. He also places Redon in the modern realm, stating that Redon had lost the innocence of his early lithographs and had turned to the "...graphic complexity and literary subtlety of the prints and drawings from the middle 1880's through the 1890's, beginning with Origins and culminating with those dedicated to Gustave Flaubert's novel The Temptation of Saint Antony. From this point on, Redon's art was modern, and fully as failed and triumphant as that term implies."

Clearly, Redon was influenced by and drawn to Flaubert's technique of disruption and both men were modern in the sense that they abandoned previous codes of artistic production. Two scenes near the beginning of Flaubert's book and Redon's decision to illustrate those scenes, demonstrate this point. The book is divided into seven chapters and it is only at the end of the first chapter that the reader begins to notice the author's subtle shift into a bizarre realm. Most of the chapter is a recounting of St. Anthony's early life, the beginnings of his monastic existence, and a description of his current circumstances and surroundings. As St. Anthony slowly begins to sink into an irrational mind, he recalls a vision of a black child who called himself the spirit of

---

4 Eisenman, p. 183.

5 Eisenman, p. 159-160.
fornication and begins to hear voices. It is at this point that the reader realizes that everyday reality as depicted in the opening of the book is beginning to dissolve into a place of the peculiar. Flaubert begins introducing fantastic images such as an old palm tree that becomes the torso of a woman and a book in Anthony's cabin that he mistakes for a bush crammed with swallows. Anthony puts out the torch thinking his visions are a trick of the light.

At that moment his visions become hallucinatory as he sees, even in darkness, a puddle of water, a prostitute, a temple corner, the figure of a soldier, and a chariot drawn by two white horses (fig. 1). Anthony is terrified and falls on his mat. At the beginning of the next chapter the scene continues with the Devil appearing out of a shadow holding the Seven Deadly Sins folded under his wings, "... - not unlike a gigantic bat suckling its young..."⁶ (fig. 2). What seems significant is that Redon was not interested in depicting scenes of ordinary reality in the beginning of the book, but chose instead two scenes from St. Anthony's hallucinations; the moment that Flaubert radically changes the environment into the fantastic, is the same moment that Redon chooses to begin his first album of interpretations.

Eisenman's formal analysis of the second album, A Gustave Flaubert, offers biographical, cultural, historical, and psychological insights into the

---

Figure 1
"D'abord une flaque d'eau, ensuite une prostituée, le coin d'un temple, une figure de soldat, un char avec deux chevaux blancs qui se cabrent"
_Tentation de Saint-Antoine_ (final album), 1898
Lithograph, 19.8 x 14 cm
Figure 2
"C'est le diable, portant sous ses deux ailes les sept péchés capitaux..."
_Tentation de Saint-Antoine_ (first album), 1888
Lithograph, 25.4 x 20 cm
meaning of these lithographs. He carefully constructs an outline where Mallarmé, Redon and Flaubert share the same desire to negate conventional signification. However, it stops short of explaining how the visual and verbal work together to achieve multi-meanings and it does not address the issue of medium and what effects texture and chiaroscuro can have. In Redon's Temptation albums, one must be keenly aware of the interaction of two sign systems: visual and verbal. Flaubert's words affect Redon's images and vise versa, mystifying rather than clarifying meaning. The task at hand in this paper will be to examine a few of the lithographs from these three albums using a semiotic approach. Semiotics lends itself very well to an analysis of the visual and verbal sign systems; it is a management technique used to categorize and analyze incoming information generated by the image. By looking at each sign system separately, new light is shed on the mystifying aspects of these Symbolist works. I will also discuss the semiotic potential of Redon's medium, lithography, and how texture, inherent to this medium, affects meaning, briefly highlighting the similar affective nature of the medium of words for Mallarmé and Flaubert.

Besides a comparative philosophy of technique and shared similar style with Flaubert, I believe that Redon had an additional, more subliminal reason for selecting this book. There are biographical similarities between Redon and Anthony as well as obvious points about the three lithographic albums that
suggest Redon must have had some fondness or empathy for the saint.
Scholars such as Kitty Mrosovsky and Laurence M. Porter believe that Flaubert
identified with Saint Anthony and the similarities between Redon and Flaubert
are discussed at length in art historical sources. In addition to these two
parallels so often discussed, I argue that we must also consider the similarities
that Redon shared with St. Anthony.

 Several biographical similarities exist. Both Redon and St. Anthony were
intrigued with bizarre monsters; both existed in isolated circumstances —
Anthony by choice and Redon by familial dictation; both expressed profound
feelings of despair during certain periods of their lives. By comparing some
aspects of Redon's and Anthony's lives and examining several of the lithographs
from the albums, it will become evident that Redon empathized with the hermit in
at least a few ways, thus giving another, credible reason for dedicating so much
of his artistic output to this one particular novel.
Part One

Redon's arrival as a mature, well-developed artist seems to have coincided with his enormous affinity for the work of Gustave Flaubert. His early career is characterized by a slow start and indirection. However, by the 1880's Redon had acquired the admiration of important artists, authors, and critics as well as a more defined path for his art. Both the noirs and the works of color, contain images based on Flaubert's novel. The first album, Tentation de Saint Antoine, published in 1888 with eleven lithographs including frontispiece, is based only on descriptive passages from the book. The second album, A Gustave Flaubert (1889), with seven lithographs including frontispiece is based on descriptive passages as well, but also includes images and dialogue by La Mort, Saint Antoine, Le Sphynx and Les Sciapodes. The third album, Tentation de Saint Antoine (1896), with twenty-four lithographs including frontispiece contains both descriptions and dialogue and, according to Richard Hobbs, "...ranks with his finest achievements." There were sixty editions of the first two albums and fifty of the last album.

Excluding frontispieces, each of the lithographs is distinguished by the presence of text selected from Flaubert's novel. The text is set in type and appears just below the image imprinted by the lithographic stone. The captions fall into two categories: descriptions are printed in small type and dialogues in larger type.

---

Flaubert used the medium of words in the same manner in the novel: proper names were printed in very large type, dialogue in smaller type and descriptive passages were in the smallest type (fig. 3). Redon commonly used captions with his lithographs, both single works and those that were issued as part of a suite or album. He wrote his own captions and the inspiration came from a variety of literary sources. Baudelaire’s translations of Poe’s writings inspired the captions for the lithographs in the album A Edgar Poe (1882). Captions to the albums Dans le Rêve (1879) and Hommage à Goya (1885) were also composed by Redon in the form of a prose poem which had gained fashion in literary circles from mid-century to the 1880’s.⁸ Seen in this light, the captions for the Temptation albums were unique in that Redon did not write them, but incorporated the exact text from Flaubert’s novel. In this instance, Redon’s images were interpretations of an existing text by an established literary person.

It is natural to wonder why so much of Redon’s work was inspired by Flaubert’s novel. A casual glance at his prior works would confirm his relish for the monsters and grotesque creatures which populated Flaubert’s novel. This is manifested in Redon’s Œuvre in the disembodied eyeball in the charcoal drawing Eye-Balloon 1878 (fig. 4), an image which appears later in the first Temptation album, “Partout Des Prunelles Flamboient” (fig. 5). His prior album, Les Origins

---

⁸ Hobbs, p. 49.
LA TENTATION DE SAINT ANTOINE

— Endors-toi !
— Tu les égorgeras, va, tu les égorgeras !

En même temps, les objets se transforment. Au bord de la fosse, le vieux palmier, avec sa touffe de feuilles jaunes, devient le torse d'une femme penchée sur l'abîme, et dont les grands cheveux se balancent.

ANTOINE

se tourne vers sa cabane; et l'escabeau soutenant le gros livre, avec ses pages chargées de lettres noires, lui semble un arbre tout couvert d'hirondelles.

C'est la torche, sans doute, qui, faisant un jeu de lumière... Éteignons-la !

Il l'éteint, l'obscurité est profonde.

Et, tout à coup, passent au milieu de l'air, d'abord une flaque d'eau, ensuite une prostituée, le col d'un temple, une figure de soldat, un char avec deux chevaux blancs, qui se cabrent.

Ces images arrivent brusquement, par secousses, se détachant sur la nuit comme des peintures d'écrase-tane sur de l'ébène.

Leur mouvement s'accélère. Elles défilent d'une façon vertigineuse. D'autres fois, elles s'arrêtent et pâlissent par degrés, se fondent; ou bien, elles s'envolent, et immédiatement d'autres arrivent.

Antoine ferme ses paupières.
Figure 4
Eye-Balloon, 1876
Charcoal, 42.2 x 33.2 cm
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Figure 5
"Partout Des Prunelles Flamboient"
Tentation de Saint-Antoine (first album), 1988
Lithograph, 20.4 x 15.8 cm
1883, contains examples of two formal motifs found in the Temptations albums: the misplaced eyeball in "Il y eut peut-être une vision première essayée dans la fleur" (fig. 6) and the curled tail, "La sirène sortit des flots, vêtue de dards" (fig. 7). Instances of the curled tail are found throughout the three albums. "La mort: Mon ironie dépasse toutes les autres" (fig. 8), from the second album and "Oannès: Moi, la première conscience du chaos, j'ai surgi de l'abîme pour durcir la matière, pour régler les formes" (fig. 9), from the third album are just two examples. Thus, he already had a ready source of images that he was able to transform into lithographs for the Temptations albums. Many of these images seemed a suitable complement to Flaubert's text and could explain why such a large number of the lithographs contain images based on the last chapter of Flaubert's book which describes Anthony's encounter with La Luxure, La Mort, La Chimère and the monsters such as Les Sciapodes and Les Bêtes de la Mer. Richard Hobbs discusses specifically the relationship between Flaubert's literary images in his novel and Redon's visual interpretations. His book, *Odilon Redon* (1977), is biographical as well, but delves into the evolution of Redon's choice of themes. He discusses extensively Flaubert's motifs and the fact that both Redon and Flaubert had an interest in mythological, religious, and monstrous imagery, but states that Redon was not interested in the book's ideas or themes. "He saw it rather as a descriptive tour de force that coincided marvelously with the direction his own ideas on subject matter were
Figure 6
"Il y eut peut-être une vision première essayée dans la fleur"
Les Origines, 1883
Lithograph 22.3 x 17.2 cm
Figure 7
"La sirène sortit des flots, vêtue de dards"
*Les Origines*, 1883
Lithograph 30 x 23.5 cm
Figure 8
"La mort: Mon ironie dépasse toutes les autres"
A Gustave Flaubert (second album), 1889
Lithograph, 26.2 x 19.7 cm
Figure 9
"Oannes: Moi, la première conscience du chaos, j'ai surgi de l'abîme pour durcir la matière, pour régler les formes"

Tentation de Saint-Antoine (third album), 1896
Lithograph, 27.9 x 21.7 cm
taking. Thus, Hobbs believes it was Flaubert's style, or "descriptive brilliance" that attracted Redon rather than the book's content. Indeed, rather than depicting major incidences in the book and devoting a more evenhanded allotment to the narrative, Redon's choice of sequences for depiction is idiosyncratic and heavily loaded with the macabre. However, while I agree with Hobbs that Redon was attracted to the descriptive brilliance of Flaubert's work, I do depart from his belief that Redon was not interested in the book's content. In the Third Part of this paper, I will discuss my belief that Redon was very interested in the philosophical ideas that are presented in Chapter VI.

Additionally, it seems reasonable to assume that Redon recognized a literary work that in some ways paralleled his own visual style; that is to say, a style that aimed to negate conventional signification. While Stephen Eisenman does well in establishing the fact that the second album contains images that mystify and destabilize meaning, it is helpful to investigate the language (in the form of Flaubert's text) that Redon placed with each image and how the language and image operate together to form the complete meaning, albeit a meaning that is illusive. The semiotic analysis of several of Redon's Temptation lithographs which follows, gives insight into this characteristic destabilization. In many ways, meaning in Redon's Temptation is dependent on the interaction between text and image.

---


10 Hobbs, p. 104.
Multiple interpretations are possible and are completely based on each individual's subjective search for and apprehension of meaning. It is a difficult task. Redon's images juxtaposed with Flaubert's text elicit a response that is not fixed or stable, but gradually evocative. With close observation, the viewer finds that the two elements, Redon's images and Flaubert's text, do not necessarily complement or denote one another. A unitary meaning is elusive, floating between the verbal and visual. By placing Flaubert's words with his images, Redon achieved disruption and destabilization because meaning is apprehended in each sign system in two entirely different ways. Studying these two components using a semiotic approach will make it possible to come to some conclusions about how meaning is generated. With semiotics one can analyze each sign system separately; this approach echoes the fundamental human limitation of having to read and gaze at separate moments—having to identify the signifieds of the verbal and the visual and then pull them into alignment in order to grasp the meaning of the whole.

Jean Seznec explored Redon's reasons for using literary captions with his noirs and states that Redon used his captions as a device that enabled him to create art that is mysterious and obscure. "Redon's captions to start with, are intentionally deceptive," and "beautifully enigmatic." Redon wanted to produce art that was

---

dreamlike and ambiguous in content, creating for the spectator a mood that would inspire meditation. Redon said:

La désignation par un titre mis à mes dessins est quelquefois de trop, pour ainsi dire. Le titre n'y est justifié qu' lorsqu'il est vague, indéterminé, et visant même confusément à l'équivoque. Mes dessins inspirent et ne se définissent pas. Ils ne déterminent rien. Ils nous placent, ainsi que la musique, dans le monde ambigu de l'indéterminé.¹²

By placing Flaubert's text with his images, Redon created meaning that was constantly shifting and therefore destabilized. Immediately, a more involved method of looking is required from the viewer. In order to read the text, a change or shift in one's physical position is usually essential. The image can be viewed at a distance, even across a room, but one is compelled to abandoned the image for a closer stance in order to focus and read the text. Claude Gandelman refers to this as kinetic subversion or the perlocutionary force of inscriptions.¹³ He is referring to J. L. Austin's description of the acts performed by speech: locutionary, which is merely the act of saying something; illocutionary, which is a performance of an act just by saying something, such as when a minister pronounces a man and woman married; and perlocutionary which is a speech act that produces certain consequential effects or physical changes.¹⁴ Flaubert's text serves a perlocutionary


duty in that it asks the viewer to perform an action, in this case to physically move closer, focus, and read. Gandelman refers to this movement as kinetic subversion because it requires the viewer to ignore (subvert) the picture and move (kinetic).

The addition of text puts the image in competition, challenging the supremacy of the image and, most importantly, changing forever the meaning of the image because it has now been "...infected with textual meaning."^{15}

Traditional thinking, which puts the image in a dominant role, is questioned by Roland Barthes. Because pictures are no longer used just to stand for or illustrate the text, he reasons that an "historical reversal"^{16} has taken place. In the past, it was customary for artists to create images that precisely illustrated the story line of the novel; the image denoted the text. Barthes emphasizes the modern technique of using accompanying text to embellish the image, or to create additional signifieds not pictured explicitly in the image. In other words, "...the text burdens the image..." with additional meanings, content, or signifieds not readily apparent in the picture.^{17} Redon's exploitation of this technique is evident in, "Je me suis enfoncé dans la solitude. J'habitais l'arbre derrière moi" (fig. 10), a lithograph from the third album of the temptation series. Here is an example of text changing the meaning of

---

^{15} Gandelman, p. 148.


^{17} Barthes, p. 14-15.
Figure 10
"Je me suis enfoncé dans la solitude. J'habitais l'arbre derrière moi"
Tentation de Saint-Antoine (third album), 1898
Lithograph, 30 x 22.5 cm
the image by introducing added elements or signifieds not present in the image. In comparison with an earlier lithograph captioned, "Un FOU dans un morne paysage" (fig. 11) from the album, *Hommage à Goya* (1885), the Flaubert text accompanying the Temptation lithograph interjects a feeling of puzzlement. Both images relate to an old man in the wilderness. The Goya lithograph is a landscape with a man in front of a tree; the caption labels and identifies, denoting the image as in traditional illustration. In contrast, the Temptation lithograph does not depict the old man, only a solitary tree amidst foliage, and the caption seems to speak for the absent man or in some way supply a narration for the image. From Flaubert's novel one knows that the Temptation lithograph is about a gymnosophist, an old wise man who lived in solitary, mystical contemplation. Flaubert describes him in great detail, but Redon does not picture him at all, merely illustrating the tree in which the gymnosophist claims to have once lived. This would be traditional illustration if it were not for two things: Redon's choice of accompanying text and his decision to not picture the old wise man. By not portraying the speaker, the text fills the image with added meaning by creating new, unseen signifieds such as feelings of puzzlement and even disquiet. Redon instigates a movement between the verbal and visual sign systems which creates a new, complex signified not present in either the image or the text. By reading the caption, the viewer begins to sense that a living being has been introduced into the scene without actual depiction. The inclination is to wonder where the speaker is, even to wonder who or what the speaker is. The lack of a
Figure 11
"Un FOU dans un morne paysage"
Hommage à Goya, 1885
Lithograph, 22.6 x 19.3 cm
definitive location for the hermit is troubling. Does the speaker hover just out of the
scene, or is he perhaps behind the viewer?

While it is true that Redon purposely selected text that added mystery,
ambiguity, angst, moodiness and so on to his images, the question still remains as
to why added text has this facility. An answer can be found, in part, by realizing the
limitations of linguistic signs.

Flaubert's words accompanying the tree lithograph include the word "Je" or
"I" in English. This personal pronoun, along with "you," falls into a category of
linguistic signs known as "shifters." Otto Jespersen has noted that these words
create great difficulty for children in their struggle to acquire language because the
meaning or signified of the word changes according to whomever is uttering the
word. Because "I" is a word used by both the child's mother and father to refer to
themselves, it is understandable why a child would be confused as to its meaning.18

'Shifters are indexical symbols because they combine the function of symbol
and index.19 In using this term, Jakobson is referring to Peirce's semiotic categories
of icon, symbol and index. An icon represents something because it resembles it.
Redon's tree is recognizable because it resembles what we experience in the world
as a tree. A symbol represents something because of a conventional rule, as when

---


a head on a charger connotes Salome and John the Baptist. An index can only represent something when it has an existential relationship to what it is representing. For example, the pointing weather vane can only represent the direction of the wind when it exists with or touches the wind. The personal pronoun "I" is an indexical symbol because it is a word or linguistic sign that stands for or is a symbol for, a person. However, to know which person the word "I" is referring to, one must be in hearing distance of the utterer. In other words, to know to whom "I" refers, the symbol must be in an existential relationship to the referent; it must be obvious that "I" is the speaker. It follows that someone viewing Redon's tree image and reading the accompanying text would naturally be confused as to who "I" is. There is no existential relationship between the person uttering "I" and the symbol. The relay of this small bit of information has broken down because the signified is not obvious.

Only the language system or verbal signs have the capability of expressing personal pronouns. Visual texts (images) are iconic texts in the sense that they successfully depict something because of its similarity. One recognizes what is in the picture because it is an iconic sign of something in the real world. But the concept of the personal pronoun is impossible to depict in visual texts. If a person is depicted in a visual way, the viewer thinks of that person as another entity, not as "I."

---


"I" is a word or symbol that the viewer reserves for herself and evokes whenever she utters it.

The French word "cela" means "this" in English; it is a shifter or indexical symbol as well. "Antoine: Quel est le but de tout cela? Le Diable: il n'y a pas de but!" from the third album (fig. 12) uses the linguistic sign "this" as a symbol for something, but it is impossible to know what unless there is some existential relationship to its signified. There must be some immediate, timely, pre-existing event, concept, or object for the signified to be obvious. What "this" is the signifier for, will, of course, constantly change. "The object of a specific occurrence or token of 'this' is determined or selected by virtue of its being in some existential relation to the occurrence of the sign itself." Again there is a signified not realized in either the image or the text. Clearly the text indicates a dialogue, but the image depicts two individuals who display signs of aloneness. Each figure occupies a separate space. The Devil's face is in the foreground and Anthony is above, behind and much smaller, indicating physical distance between the two; they hover in an undefined spatial arena. Alienation is expressed in the demeanor of each.

The image and text taken together are ambiguous in meaning; the viewer has no way of knowing the signified or referent for the word "cela." Even the notion of a dialogue seems impossible because of the signs of alienation. For more complete understanding, the reader/viewer must refer back to the Flaubert's novel to know the

---

22 Burks, p. 674.
Figure 12
"Antoine: Quel est le but de tout cela? Le Diable: il n'y a pas de but!"
Tentation de Saint-Antoine (third album), 1896
Lithograph, 31.1 x 25 cm
meaning of "this." Anthony, at the time he made this remark, was riding between the Devil's horns on a tour of the stars. "Yes!...yes! I grasp it in my mind! This joy is superior to the pleasures of tenderness! I'm breathless and dumbfounded at the enormoussness of God!" Anthony is overwhelmed with what he sees, his head falls forward and he utters his plaintive remark. Only from reading the surrounding text in the novel, can one be certain of the signified for "this" and the reason for Anthony's thoughtful appearance in the lithograph. One is compelled to refer back to the book to fill in details that Redon chose not to include and to learn that Anthony is questioning the meaning of the universe when he refers to "this."

Although the lithographs can be enjoyed without referring to Flaubert's book, a more complete apprehension of meaning is possible if one chooses to do so. According to Richard Hobbs, the original viewers of Redon's work were very familiar with Flaubert's novel: "Prior knowledge of the Flaubert on the part of the spectator is not altogether necessary in viewing the lithographs but it is evidently helpful. Yet it was just such knowledge that Redon could safely assume to exist among his audience at the time he made the Flaubert albums. La Tentation de Saint Antoine was well familiar to the Symbolists and enjoyed a real vogue in the 1880's and 1890's." The book had even become somewhat of a cult object.

---

23 Flaubert, p. 207.

24 Hobbs, p. 122.

popular A *Rebours* published in 1884, a novel of fin de siècle decadence written by Huysman, even contained a scene based on the encounter between the Sphinx and the Chimera from Flaubert’s novel. A *Rebours* is also the novel that propelled Redon into instant notoriety when it was published because the protagonist in the story decorates his home with works by Redon.

Flaubert’s novel was not well received when it was finally published in 1874. The critic P. Douhaire of *Le Correspondant* criticized Flaubert for his historical inexactitudes, his fantastic interpretation of Saint Anthony and his taste for lascivious images and the “tableaux effrontés.” The story had been a favorite of artists in previous centuries, but during the nineteenth century a religious renewal contributed to its popularity. It was first written in Greek by St. Athanasius in his *Vita Beati Antonii Abbatis* in 357 AD and later translated into Latin by Evagrius. In the nineteenth century, the story was available in the *Golden Legend*, the *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, and the *Acta Sanctorium*. However, it was Gustave Flaubert’s novel with its flagrant venues, events, and creatures that was the most popular account of the saint to appear in France in the nineteenth century. The most favorable reception came from artists such as Cézanne, James Ensor, and of course

---


Odilon Redon, all of whom used the book as a rich source of motifs for their art.\textsuperscript{29} First written in 1848-49 and rewritten in 1856, it was not published until 1874, in its third and final rewritten state. A few sections of the 1856 state, including the feast of Nebuchadnezzar, the arrival of the Queen of Sheba and the account of Apollonius of Tyana were published in serial form in the periodical, \textit{L'Artiste}.\textsuperscript{30} Flaubert took the basic facts of Anthony's life and amplified and embellished them into a story about a hermit whom the Devil tormented, first by tempting him with seductive women and, when that did not work, by using terror in the form of monsters and demons. Thus, there are two major themes in the story of St. Anthony -- seduction and terror -- which have been illustrated in the visual arts throughout the centuries in the form of beautiful women and monstrous demons.\textsuperscript{31} However, Redon diverged from this legacy to create images that emphasized the dreamlike, suggestive, psychologically subtle, and mysterious aspects of the story.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{29} Jean Seznec, "The Temptation of St. Anthony in Art," \textit{Magazine of Art}, 40 (March 1947), pp. 91-92.


\textsuperscript{31} Jean Seznec, "The Temptation of St. Antony in Art," \textit{Magazine of Art}, 40 (March 1947), p. 88. Seznec's article was written to counteract criticism of paintings produced on the St. Anthony Temptation theme. These paintings were in competition to be named as a focus of interest for a new motion picture. Then, as in the nineteenth century, many were critical because the paintings seemed to reflect the more salacious side of the legend.

\textsuperscript{32} Theodore Reff, "Cézanne, Flaubert, St. Anthony, and the Queen of Sheba," \textit{Art Bulletin}, 44 (June 1962), 116.
Redon, as is well know, was not interested in illustration. He believed that the anecdote or narrative should remain ancillary to any visual artistic image. If the image is so precise as to picture every description and nuance from the narrative, then the literary work would not be necessary. What Redon preferred and successfully achieved in his interpretation of Flaubert's work, was ambiguity. He did this via the technique of suggesting an impression — forcing the reader/viewer to ponder on the many rather than the few possible meanings. Redon said:

I have never used the misleading word 'illustration.' You will not find it in my catalogues. The right words remain to be found. Words like transmission or interpretation might be used, but even these do not exactly describe the process by which something I have read passes into my black and white drawings and prints.

In her search for meaning in the Temptation albums, the viewer may feel a need to refer back to Flaubert's novel and then forward to Redon's combination of text and image. In some lithographs, Barthes's premise that the text burdens the image with new signifieds is apparent; in other lithographs it seems that the image burdens the text as in the lithograph captioned, "...Une longue chrysalide couleur

---

33 Redon's feelings about illustration happily paralleled those of Flaubert. Flaubert said: "The most beautiful description is destroyed by the poorest drawing...Why should I use so much trouble and skill to leave everything vague, if a fool comes and ruins my dream with his inept precision?" Jean Seznec, "Flaubert and the Graphic Arts," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, Vol VIII, 1945, p. 184.


de sang" (fig. 13) from the second album. It contains some visual components that are mentioned in the novel, certainly not all, and the text selected to accompany the image is a dearth of narrative detail. What seems apparent is a reductive succession from book, to image, to selected text, that increasingly leaves out detail. Flaubert's text describes the chrysalis with a man's head; mentions the name Knouphis, written all around in Greek; polished iron medallions representing animals' heads; clay lamps hanging beneath these images; a hole in the wall exhibiting the moon; and waiting men, women and children. Redon's image omits all of these items only depicting the chrysalis with a human head resting on a column, and a half delineated massive architectural arch in the background with a head adorned with headdress attached to one side of the arch. By contrast, the selected, accompanying text is only a brief description of the chrysalis that omits one very important detail — the fact that it has the head of a man, calmly in repose. Clearly, here is an example of Redon not using the image to denote or re-create the text. He obviously did not feel constrained to create an illustration of Flaubert's book — an image that would merely denote the words. Rather, we have an instance where the image burdens the text with additional meanings, content, or signifieds not readily apparent because it conveys more information than is stated in the caption. The combination of text and image create an unsettling signified. The image contains the chilling depiction of a human head for the chrysalis, although the caption does not mention this fact. Expectations of the reader are overwhelmed by what the
Figure 13
"...Une longue chrysalide couleur de sang"
A Gustave Flebert (second album), 1889
Lithograph, 22 x 18.5 cm
viewer sees. In other words, by not mentioning the chrysalis as having a human head but depicting it that way in the image, Redon creates a menacing atmosphere - one looks for and expects normality but instead finds a shocking scene.

In his discussion of this lithograph, Eisenman points out that, "Practiced habits of looking and reading are called into question by Redon's series, and, "The liberties taken with perspective, scale, contour, and Flaubert's text lead the receptive viewer to an exasperating search for denotative stability: an unrelenting shuttle between image and text." Subsequent to looking at the lithograph with text, one quickly realizes that the image is much more than an illustration of the accompanying text, a text which is merely a truncated part of a larger narrative in the novel. Much descriptive detail is omitted by Redon's selection of these particular words, and by the same token, much of Flaubert's text is omitted from the image as well.

In this instance, the text and image combination is a reversal from traditional book illustration, as discussed by Barthes. The image does not denote the selected text, as in a traditional sense, indeed does not even denote the text as it appears in the book. This lithograph and text combination are a reversal or shift from customary book illustration, because the image is supplying much more information than the text. The viewer, especially a contemporary viewer, is asked to shift

---

36 Eisenman, p. 218.

37 Eisenman, p. 218.
traditional modes of viewing and interpretation that are applicable to word and image combinations. As mentioned before, new ways of viewing and new avenues of apprehension are helpful in deciphering meaning in Redon’s work. Often there is a disruption of any obvious single meaning, in part because each sign system, visual and verbal, works independently of the other in conveying knowledge. “Yet it is impossible for the words to ‘duplicate’ the image; for in the shift from one structure to the other, secondary signifieds are inevitably elaborated.”

Redon used the same technique in another lithograph discussed in another context. “C’est le diable, portant sous ses deux ailes les sept péchés capitaux...” (fig. 2) from the first album presents a situation where the image burdens the text by creating a signified not present in the caption. Expectations are that the signified of the devil suckling its young, which is generated by the image, would be contained in the text, but it is not. The image burdens the text with the signified “suckling young” that is not specifically mentioned. However, such words are in the text of Flaubert’s novel, “This is the Devil, propped against the roof of the cabin, and folding under his wings — not unlike a gigantic bat suckling its young—the Seven Deadly Sins, whose grimacing heads can be dimly discerned.” As stated earlier, expectations of the reader are overwhelmed by what the viewer sees.

38 Barthes, p. 15.

39 Mrosovsky, p. 73.
The reader/viewer is challenged to grapple with heterogeneous sign systems in order to grasp any meaning. In Redon’s lithographs, the words and images occupy a different, although contiguous space; by contrast a rebus, which has both words and pictures, is interpreted in the same sequence of time along a single axis. 40 Words are interpreted in time and images are interpreted in space. In a line of text one word is read after another in sequence and full cognizance is not realized until all words are read. Meaning unfolds in a timely manner. On the other hand, there is no definite or predetermined sequence for the interpretation or reception of images. The images are a “piece of space” exhibited to the viewer at one time and the viewer’s eye is free to wander about the image in a personal and subjective progression. 41 Not only will the eye find its own personal route, but different episodes of viewing by the same person could well produce different routes each time and presumably routes of apprehension would differ from person to person.

The scanning of images and the linear reading of text are different in other ways as well. 42 Words associated with images, either within the image as often seen in Renaissance art, or attached just below the image as in Redon’s works, call

40 Roland Barthes was analyzing press photographs and their related captions when he spoke of their heterogeneous characteristics, contrasting them with a rebus. The same thought is applicable to Redon’s combination of images and text. Barthes, p. 4.


42 Gandelman, pp. 142-143.
upon the viewer to work with two sign systems. The language sign system is symbolic; the visual sign system is iconic. Unlike the ideograms in an oriental alphabet that picture the thing or idea itself, the western world uses language that is symbolic of a thing or idea. While reading text, the reader must take symbols or signs and determine the concepts, objects and ideas for which these words stand. On the other hand, with the perception of iconic images, the viewer is presented with the signified, a more immediate representation of the concept, object, or idea. Usually, with images one sees the signified offered immediately for viewing on the surface. Gandleman refers to these two processes as construction and deconstruction. Construction is used to mean the process by which a reader assembles meaning from words that are symbols for the signified and deconstruction is used to mean the process a viewer goes through to find the many meanings possible in a picture that only become apparent by uncovering one from another.

"Des fleurs tombent, et la tête d’un python paraît" from the third album (fig. 14), shows a string of signifiers or words that symbolize signifieds that are simple and straightforward; flowers fell and the head of a python appeared. The words are symbolic, but when one acquires the use of language, the meaning of the symbols or words is quite easy to discern. Essentially, there are two nouns and two verbs that denote a meaning easily understood. Placed with these words is an image that at first glance seems to denote the text. It appears that the image contains iconic
Figure 14.
"Des fleurs tombent, et la tête d'un python paraît"
Tentation de Saint-Antoine (third album), 1896
Lithograph, 26 x 19.8 cm
signifieds that are straightforward as well – flowers and a python's head. Usually, iconic symbols are easy to discern because they resemble what they signify. However, a more meticulous deconstruction of this lithograph reveals an image that is mysterious rather than denotive.

Because "reading" verbal and visual sign systems is done in different ways, the road to cognition is quite bumpy for this particular image/text combination. One sign system is easily understood, the other is not, and there is a constant movement between the two in an endeavor to make sense of each. Cognition is achieved by the end of the sentence, but in the image, one is very uncertain about what one sees. Organic, oval forms appear around the bottom of the picture and are draped over what could be part of the python's body. A snake-shaped head appears to rise up and two small eyes are discernible. However, the head seems to rise, not from the rest of the body, but from a conglomeration of indeterminate forms. The head and body are not connected but appear severed and rest side by side in a more or less vertical position. To the left of the body is a circular form that could be read as convex or concave. The viewer's eyes move about the image searching for meaning and the mind races back to the text for some verification that does not exist. This example clearly shows Redon's command of the ambiguous. Taken by itself, the image is an indeterminate mass of forms; adding text exacerbates the situation because expectations are not realized. The anticipation is that text will illuminate the image but in this case, it merely bewilders because it does not.
Part Two

In Part One of this paper, I focused on the interaction of Flaubert’s text and Redon’s images, examining the production of meaning with a semiotic analysis of each sign system. In Part Two, I will examine the semiotic capacity of Redon’s medium of lithography. To bolster my thesis that Redon recognized in Flaubert a shared desire to fracture any unitary meaning in his work, I will draw an analogy between Redon’s use of texture in his lithographs to Flaubert’s unique writing devices in *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*. Indeed, all three — Mallarmé, Flaubert and Redon — used their medium at hand to create works containing ambiguous signifieds. Mallarmé’s idiosyncratic use of words and spaces, Flaubert’s destabilized narrative and abstracted descriptions, and Redon’s use of text and texture are all examples of the drive to ambiguity that was characteristic of the literary and visual arts of the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Victor Brombert, in speaking of Flaubert’s *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, states, “The very techniques exploited by Flaubert in this text become tools of disjunction.” He claims that Flaubert was purposefully creating a, “permanent climate of dis severance” when he used techniques of profusion, incorporating words and creatures in superabundance or instigated movements in breakneck speed.

---

between different states of consciousness and modes of existence with no transition or invented forms of enormous incompatibility to express a basic discrepancy in all of nature.\footnote{Brombert, p. 204-207.} Most troubling of all is the impression that the bulk of the novel contains no temptations at all. During the Sheba episode at the beginning of the book, Anthony is charmed with typical temptations such as women, wine, food, wealth, and knowledge. But a great deal of the book concerns gods, heresies, and monsters leaving one to wonder if St. Anthony is being tempted and if so by what. "To say, by way of solution, that Flaubert shows resisting and yielding to temptation to be, in the final analysis, indistinguishable is to negate the structural device of the plot which focused attention on this point and forced this particular solution."\footnote{Jonathan Culler, \textit{Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 136-137.} In other words, the reader finds no clear, concise narrative that makes sense. From the title, expectations are that one will read about temptations and St. Anthony's struggle to resist. Instead, the reader is bombarded with a phantasmagoria of exotic places and bizarre beings.

Comparing Flaubert's story telling technique with that of St. Athanasius illustrates, to some degree, what was dramatically disruptive about Flaubert's writing style in \textit{La Tentation de Saint Antoine}. The first, most striking difference is that Flaubert tells the story in the first person making the reader feel that she is part of
the action as it occurs. St. Athanasius uses the third person to recount, in a
traditional manner, the events of St. Anthony's life. He uses an ancient literary form
of biography known as an encomium in tandem with a Christian element in order
to portray the ideal, saintly life. Flaubert, on the other hand, embellishes the basic
biography by adding additional bizarre venues, events and creatures not mentioned
in the original story. His style of writing incorporates disruptive techniques such as
different sized type, (fig. 3), rapid shifts from dialogue to descriptive passages,
unrealistic time, and shifting scenes that have the action progress by way of
creatures or objects miraculously altering their appearance.

Mallarmé's use of the medium of the word and the page to suppress any
obvious meaning is similarly disruptive. In his poem, "Un Coup de Dés" (fig. 15)
words are useful for their visual quality as well as for their relay of objective and
subjective information. The reader's attention is first drawn to the physical
placement of words on the page before any attempt is made to read and decipher
meaning as conveyed by language in the expected manner. Usually, the reader
very rarely takes notice of the words and spaces as a physical presence, but, in the
case of Mallarmé's poem, the poet's emphasis on the visuality of words and the
space around the words, contributes, in new ways, to the total meaning of the poem.

46 An encomium is a classical Greek literary type that relates basic facts of an important public
figure such as nationality, parentage, education, youth and as well as their good qualities. St.
Athanasius: The Life of Saint Antony, trans. and annotated Robert T. Meyer (Westminster,
SOIT
que
l'Abîme
blanchi
étale
furieux
sous une inclinaison
plisse désespérément
d'aile
la sienne
par

Figure 15
page from Un Coup de Dés by Stéphane Mallarmé
Space provides the structure for the poem, clustering words and phrases in such unusual and unexpected ways that apprehension of meaning in the conventional way is impossible. As Virginia La Charite states, "...as space affirms the design, it denies reader expectations, destroys referents, distorts language, betrays relationships, and confirms loss of contact with the printed words, which space alone validates, makes legible, and organizes into disciplined patterns of meaning." The reader/viewer now begins to see the poem in terms of its medium not in terms of its intellectual content. Mallarmé fulfills the function of the literary symbol by uniting a signifier with several signifieds which seem to hover just out of reach of concrete meaning, thereby promoting the interplay and multiplication of signifieds beneath the signifying surface of the text.

In his article on the pictorial sign, Veltrusky states that the emphasis on the materiality of the pictorial sign was especially evident in Post-Impressionist work, "...which chiefly endeavored to bring out and develop the semiotic potential of the individual material, or technical components – the picture surface and field, its texture, size, form, inner articulation, and so on, the line, color, shape, and composition – and to attenuate for this purpose the thematic elements." The

---


pictorial sign is characterized by the materiality of its signifier, either stone for sculpture, canvas and oils for painting or paper and texture for lithography. For example, the sign of sculpture is affected by its hardness, fragility, surface texture and so forth. The materiality of sculpture is responsible for the added qualities that contribute to the meaning of the sign. The medium used contributes to content, affecting, in a specific way, the meaning. The same is true for painting or lithography. As seen in Redon's lithograph, "La mort: Mon ironie dépasse toutes les autres" (fig. 8), the very material of the lithograph, especially the texture, affects meaning in ways that are independent of the image. In many ways it is similar to music where the material of music, the tone, can arouse synesthesia or different emotional responses.  

Even language, whose basic significant unit is the articulated sound, is at times affected by the "materiality" of its sign. Certain sensory qualities of language, as in onomatopoeia, can affect meaning. But in the pictorial sign, the material properties of the sign will produce "psychophysical effects" which will affect the conveyance of meaning through the sign.  

As Maurice Denis, who was instrumental in defining Symbolism of the 1890's, wrote, "Believe that in order to perpetuate your emotions it is not necessary to dissimulate the material used and to

---

50 Veltrusky, p. 246.

51 Veltrusky, p. 247.
pervert it into appearances of trompe l'oeil; believe that the material of art has the ability to emit suggestions as powerful as the appearance of nature itself."  

Artists of Redon's time wished to express a type of emotional experience that could not be represented by mimetic or illusionistic allegorical methods. In his neoplatonic writings, Aurier's espoused belief that painting should be a sign for the idea rather than illusionist representation of reality, enhanced the realization that line, color and form were important tools for conveying the desired meaning. However, this notion further evolved into the realization that the very material of the work of art was instrumental in generating meaning or signification. "The mode of perception was of greater consequence to the impressionist or symbolist artist than the view seen or the image presented."  

The technique of accentuating the surface structure in an effort to draw the viewer's attention away from the illusion of the subject matter as reality depicted is one way the medium can participate in the generation of meaning. Examples of this include Gauguin's painting, Garden at Arles, where the artist built up the surface of the canvas to approximate a frescoed wall and Munch's Hands painted on cardboard with large areas of the support not covered with paint. The idea was to

55 Heller, pp. 148-151.
make the surface of the painting, including the support and the oil paint, noticeable, thereby drawing attention to the medium as well as to the subject matter depicted. In this way, the artist called upon the viewer to look for additional levels of meaning. Content would not only rely on the created image, but on the technical components of the painting or lithograph as well. Redon himself believed that the artist was first and foremost at the mercy of the demands of the medium in which he chose to work and that in many ways it is the medium itself that gives meaning to the work. "La matière a son génie."\(^{56}\)

In his study of Symbolism, Goldwater amplifies the importance of the materiality of any symbolist work:

One of the chief characteristics of symbolist painting (and its graphic derivatives) is the stress it puts upon the pictorial surface and its organization. In the words of Maurice Denis' famous definition of 1890: "Remember that a picture - before being a war horse, a nude woman or some anecdote - is essentially a plane and surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order."\(^{57}\)

The picture was free to be its own entity rather than a mimetic rendition of the world. Released from the constraint of having to depict the world as seen through the "Renaissance window," an artist could arrange the image and the technical components of the painting into any arrangement he wished. In so doing, the emphasis shifted from a naturalistic depiction of the world to a situation where the


elements of artistic expression could facilitate "...the artist's desire to evoke emotion
and suggest ideas and so could become a symbol of the affective life of the mind." 58

Goldwater continues by comparing the difference in the use of line in a
symbolist work of art and art nouveau. In both, line is used to accentuate the
surface of the work; the difference being that in art nouveau line is used to unify the
surface of the picture and only in a two-dimensional sense; in symbolism, line is
used to integrate and unify the surface as well, but a sense of depth is usually also
created, thus a disjunction will exist between the surface of the picture plane and the
depth that the artist creates using the usual methods, i.e. modeling, overlapping,
horizon line, etc. By causing this disjuncture, symbolism puts the emphasis on the
picture plane and the materiality of the work of art.

Redon's lithograph, "La mort: Mon ironie depasse toutes les autres" (fig. 8),
is an example of the sensuous line used in so many symbolist works and reflects the
linearity of Redon's later works. The figure of Death rises out of a coil or worm-like
body. A line is formed by the flowing hair, continues down the body and curves
around the coil. In Flaubert's words, "- the whole body undulates, as might a
gigantic worm lifting upright." 59 It is a death's head on the body of a woman, with
flowing hair crowned with flowers. The modeled body with the coil wrapped behind it
hovers in ambiguous space suggesting the vastness of the universe where Death

---

58 Goldwater, p. 18.

59 Mrosovsky, p. 220
resides. Death’s body, in this case the body of a woman, is modeled in luscious soft black; the shroud, from which she has broken, frames the body creating an enveloping shadow. Redon created an image that seems to vibrate from the page. From the head with its hard angles and stark whiteness to the shroud that envelopes the body, a variety of textures and tonal gradations are employed.\(^{60}\) However, it is the rich, velvety texture of the shroud that most calls attention to the pictorial plane. The impulse is to touch the lithograph, to feel the vibrating velvet of the shroud and the body and blackness that is behind the flowing hair. Redon, with his expertise in lithography, accented the picture plane just as other symbolist artists had done with the support and oil paint. Lithographs from Redon’s later work illustrate his expertise in transferring his skill at “textural qualities,” learned early in his career with charcoal, to the medium of lithography.\(^{61}\)

Critical to this discussion is an emphasis on Redon’s highly acclaimed and proficient use of chiaroscuro. Redon believed that black was a better agent of the spirit and that it did not give pleasure to the eyes in the sense that color did.\(^{62}\) By using black, either in charcoal or in lithography, Redon was able to direct the

---


\(^{61}\) Hobbs, p. 28.

\(^{62}\) "Il est agent de l’esprit bien plus que la belle couleur de la palette ou du prisme." Redon, p. 125.
spectator to different states of mind rather than just focusing on the physical, objective world. Chiaroscuro, line and the exploitation of texture in charcoal (later conveyed to lithography), were an integral part of Redon's style. Redon said:

Mai je vous le dis aujourd'hui, en toute maturité consciente, et j'y insiste, tout mon art est limité aux seules ressources du clair-obscur et il doit aussi beaucoup aux effets de la ligne abstraite, cet agent de source profonde, agissant directement sur l'esprit. L'art suggestif ne peut rien fournir sans recourir uniquement aux jeux mystérieux des ombres et du rythme des lignes mentalement conçues. Ah! eurent-ils jamais plus haut résultat que dans l'oeuvre du Vinci! Il leur doit son mystère et la fertilité des fascinations qu'il exerce sur notre esprit.

Redon consciously chose to work in black and white. After an aborted attempt to study in the studio of the well established painter, Jean-Léon Gérôme, Redon began his work with Rodolphe Bresdin, a graphic artist. By this decision, Redon chose an art form that did not enjoy the same status as painting. However, because of a resurgence of interest in etching as a vehicle for personal expression, the graphic arts were raised to a new level of prestige. As an additional distinction, the patron saint of the Etching Revival was Rembrandt who had so eloquently expressed emotion in black and white.

Redon's command of chiaroscuro is well exemplified in the Death lithograph discussed above. His versatility is affirmed by a comparison with another lithograph

---

64 Redon, p. 25.
captioned, "Et partout ce sont des colonnes de basalte..., La lumière tombe des voutes" (fig. 16) from the third Temptation album. Redon depicts a scene from Flaubert's novel where Anthony finds himself in the midst of a palace, lost in a suite of rooms: "Displayed along the mosaic walls are generals, offering conquered towns to the Emperor on the flat of their hands. All around are columns of basalt, grilles of silver filigree, ivory chairs and pearl-embroidered tapestries. Light falls from the vaults, Antony walks on." The contrast is stunning in the sense that Redon's subtle play of lights and darks in the Death lithograph convey soft, organic surfaces such as flesh, hair, and cloth while the lithograph depicting columns of basalt is noted by the hardness, angledness, and coldness of the lifeless substances depicted. The columns of basalt are in an arena of ill-defined space, so typical of Redon's technique. The lines demarcating what appears to be a tile floor, offer no sense of space as lines such as these usually do. The floor tiles are drawn, not as a devise to create logical space, but rather are depicted in reality, that is to say, as objects with four equal sides. Dark and light abut throughout the image in such a way that one would expect the very paper that the lithograph is printed on to have a hard surface. Both lithographs cause the viewer to focus on the surface of the image even though each chiaroscuro technique is commiserate with the thing depicted. The real carrier of meaning is the continuum of lights and darks.

66 Flaubert, p. 79.
Figure 16
"Et partout ce sont des colonnes de basalte..., La lumière tombe des voûtes"
Tentation de Saint-Antoine (third album), 1896
Lithograph, 24.3 x 90 cm
We know that Redon was aware that it is often not the anecdote that conveys meaning but rather the vehicle (or medium) itself. While in Antwerp in 1879, Redon wrote that Rembrandt painted drama and that Rubens had a genius for staging. By this I take him to mean that Rembrandt could paint the idea or emotion of a scene while Rubens painted only the narrative. Redon had a deep appreciation for Rembrandt’s ability to use chiaroscuro to add an emotional dimension to common place objects and events. In his book, A Soi-Même, Redon speaks specifically about Rembrandt’s The Angel Gabriel. Redon was struck by the supernatural light emanating within the painting stating that it is really the light and dark that convey impressions and ideas rather than the narrative that is told through the actions of the people depicted. Douglas Druick and Peter Zegers suggest that Redon’s interest in and awareness of “carriers of meaning” indicate an “...analytic orientation informed by current scientific method.” Redon believed that, “The material reveals secrets, it has its genius.” When in Holland in January 1913 during an exhibition of his works he said:

Outre les dispositions reçues sous l’influence du monde et du lieu qui l’entourent, l’artiste cède aussi, dans une certaine mesure, aux exigéants pouvoirs de la matière qu’il emploie: crayon, charbon, pastel, pâte huileuse, noirs d’estampe, marbre, bronze, terre ou bois, tous ces produits sont des agents qui l’accompagnent, collaborent avec lui, et disent aussi quelque chose dans la fiction que’il va fournir.

---

67 Redon, p. 79.

68 Redon, p. 82.

La matière révèle des secrets, elle a son génie; c'est par elle que l'oracle parlera. Quand le peintre donne de son rêve, n’oubliez pas l’action de ces linéaments secrets qui le lient et le tiennent au sol, avec l'esprit lucide et bien éveillé, tout au contraire.  

In summary, it seems that Redon must have been aware, at least at some level, of how meaning was generated in his noirs. He was purposeful in his use of the medium of lithography to depict emotional states of mind or at least to provide the viewer the opportunity to explore their own interior life using his pictures as a catalyst. And, as I have attempted to show, he also used words attached to his lithographs to propel the reader/viewer into a state of contemplation, reverie, or ambiguity thereby disrupting any easy access to a single meaning. He found Flaubert’s *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* an inspiration and a useful vehicle for his imaginary art. Both Redon and Flaubert, like other visual artists and poets of the last several decades of the nineteenth century, grappled, “...with problems of form in response to a need to re-invent linguistic and visual modes capable of expressing and shaping social and individual experience.”  

Artists and writers of late nineteenth century France had either experienced or bore the cultural legacy of the corruption of the Second Empire, the indignity of the Crimean War, the agony of the Franco-Prussian War, and the shame of the Paris Commune. A natural outcome to the totality of these experiences would be a departure from the realism of visual art.

---

70 Redon, p. 129.

and the naturalism of literature to an artistic expression of suggestion rather than description.
Part Three

The notion that Redon had a certain attraction or empathy for St. Anthony is not dealt with in art historical literature, although much is made of the similarities between Redon and Flaubert – their love of the macabre and interest in Eastern thought, their similar views about illustration, and their bourgeois beginnings to name a few. Many Flaubert scholars believe that Flaubert identified with St. Anthony. Kitty Mrosovsky, in the introduction to her English translation of The Temptation of Saint Antony, selects the following quote from Flaubert that illustrates this point:

There comes a time when one needs to make oneself suffer, to hate one's flesh, to throw mud in its face, so hideous does it seem. If it weren't for my love of form, I might perhaps have been a great mystic.72

And Laurence M. Porter flatly states that,

The saint was an alter ego of the author. Both men withdrew from society in response to an overwhelming vocation; both struggled to control an exuberant fantasy life with austere self-discipline.73

Perhaps scholars have simply chosen to believe that any similarities and affinities between St. Anthony and Redon must be taken as those between Flaubert and Redon because it was, after all, Flaubert who wrote the story, taking only the basic facts of St. Anthony's life and embellishing them into a phantasmagoria of

---


incredible venues and events. However, several points will be made to support the thesis that Redon was drawn to Flaubert's novel because of similarities he shared with St. Anthony. Reasons for proposing this thesis fall into two categories: Redon's idiosyncratic choice of subject matter from the novel for lithographic interpretation and a fascination shared by both Redon and Anthony for a certain ideology or philosophy.

The Anthony that Redon found fascinating was not the Anthony of the traditional story as told by St. Athanasias but rather the Anthony of Flaubert's novel. Although Flaubert based his book on the historical Anthony, the two have different personality characteristics. The historical St. Anthony in the biography written by St. Athanasias was a very pious, gentle person, much loved by the ascetics who admired him and followed his teachings. A person of enormous moral strength, he seemed never to waiver from a straight and virtuous path, even when tempted again and again by demons. His vision of who he was and his relationship with God were very clear to him. Flaubert's Anthony on the other hand is at times pessimistic, dismayed that his disciples have left him, regretful that he did not go into another line of work such as soldiering or toll-gathering, bored, hypocritical, lonely, a whiner and complainer, doubter of the holy scriptures, self reproachful and proud. He was also in awe and wonderment of the universe, profoundly introspective, and keenly aware of the life around him. Despite the fact that Flaubert's style of writing is fantastic, his Anthony is more human and believable than that of St. Athanasius.
Both men displayed an obvious passion for the bizarre creature; it exists as part of the interior life of both Redon and Saint Anthony as reflected in the hallucinations of Anthony and the images of Redon. About half of the 42 lithographs from the three Temptation albums are based on Chapter VII of Flaubert’s book which is filled with encounters with Lust, Death, Beasts of the Sea, the Chimera, the Sphinx, and the Sciapodes. While viewing the Beasts of the Sea, Flaubert describes the conflated beings that Anthony sees:

The Dedaims of Babylon, which are trees, have human heads for their fruit; there are Mandrakes singing, the Baaras root runs in the grass.

Vegetable and animal can now no longer be distinguished. Polyparies looking like sycamores have arms on their boughs. Antony thinks he sees a caterpillar between two leaves; but a butterfly takes off. He is about to step on a pebble; a grey grasshopper leaps up. Insects resembling rose-petals adorn a bush; the remains of may-flies form a snowy layer on the ground.

And then the plants become confused with rocks.74

This confused, fused type of being had been in Redon’s repertoire before as seen in Les Origins (1883), with, “Quand s’éveillait la vie au fond de la matière obscure” (fig. 17). Even before Les Origins, however, Redon had drawn composite creatures. In 1882 some of Redon’s charcoal drawings and lithographs were shown in the offices of the Parisian newspaper, Le Gaulois. As events unfolded, this turned out to be an all important exhibit for Redon because J. K. Huysmans wrote

---

74 Mrosovsky, p. 231.
Figure 17
"Quand s'éveillait la vie au fond de la matière obscure"
Les Origines, 1883
Lithograph, 27.5 x 20.3 cm
about Redon and the exhibit in his 1883 book, *L'art Moderne*. Émile Hennequin, another critic, reacted to the *Le Gaulois* show and his interview with Redon, with two "glowing reviews."

75 Contained in this exhibit were two charcoal drawings that very much exemplified his passion for conflated beings: "The Crying Spider" 1881 (fig. 18) and "Strange Flower" 1880 (fig. 19). Later, in the Temptation albums, this tendency is seen in the two lithographs, "Ensuite paraît un être singulier, ayant une tête d'homme sur un corps de poisson" (fig. 20) from the first album and, "Les Sciapodes: La tête le plus bas possible, c'est le secret du bonheur!" (fig. 21), from the second album.

Such a strong fascination with the grotesque or conflated beings is believed to have been fostered, in part, by Redon's early association with Armand Clavaud, his botanist friend who was Director of Bordeaux's Jardines Plantes. Redon remembers him as always being at his herbarium, looking through his microscope in search of an intermediary between the animal and plant world. 76 He provided Redon with a scientific understanding of nature, but most importantly encouraged his imaginative methods of creation. 77 Also, Redon's admiration for Corot shaped the way he created his images — placing a certainty against an uncertainty as Corot

75 Gott, p. 92.

76 Clavaud was also the friend who introduced Redon to the first writings of Flaubert, Baudelaire and Poe. Redon, p. 18.

Figure 18
The Crying Spider, 1881
Charcoal, 49.5 x 37.5 cm
Private collection, The Netherlands
Figure 19
Strange Flower, 1890
Charcoal, 40.4 x 33.2 cm
The Art Institute of Chicago
Figure 20
"Ensuite parait un être singulier, ayant une tète d'homme sur un corps de poisson"
*Tentation de Saint-Antoine* (first album), 1889
Lithograph, 27.5 x 17 cm
Figure 21

"Les Scapodes: La tête le plus bas possible, c'est le secret du bonheur!"

A Gustave Flaubert (second album), 1889
Lithograph, 27.7 x 21 cm
had advised him. Each creature’s inception was at least grounded in nature, making it credible. Redon’s technique was to copy nature in the smallest detail and then give in to the urge to create something imaginary.

Redon’s lithographic interpretations of Flaubert’s Temptation are almost unprecedented in iconographical depictions of the subject. Out of 42 lithographs devoted to the myth, only three portray Saint Anthony. Almost every other artist, Cézanne being a notable exception, included the hermit in their pictures. By this inclusion, most artistic depictions were of an objective bent, meaning the viewer takes on the role of a mere observer. By casting the viewer as observer of both Saint Anthony and his tribulations, most artists created an outward looking, objective view of the Temptation. Redon, on the other hand, created graphic works that placed the viewer as the watcher or experiencer of events— an experience that would require an inward and subjective interpretation. Redon’s work allows the viewer, simultaneous to Anthony, to experience the same trials, tribulations, and

78 "A côté d’une incertitude, mettez une certitude," Redon, p. 36.

79 Redon, pp. 28-29.


81 Cézanne’s interpretation of the story of St. Antony emphasizes the seductive theme. Between 1870 and 1875, Cezanne did three paintings and four drawings that dealt with the temptation of St. Antony. Most of these pictures were based on the attempted seduction of St. Antony by the Queen of Sheba as described in Flaubert’s novel. Voluptuous nudes are posed in lascivious poses, catering to Cézanne’s dark fears and distrust of women. His romantically inspired depictions of violence and passion were based not on Classical themes but rather on his own “obsessing fantasies or fears.” Reff, p. 113.
temptations of the saint. By not including the hermit in his pictures, Redon (and whomever else views the lithographs) could have taken on the role of Anthony, experiencing in a subjective way, the scenes from his life as interpreted by Redon.

As part of the French symbolist milieu of the last part of the nineteenth century, emphasis on the viewer would have been important to Redon. Symbolism and its subjective nature echoed the ideas of Plotinus, a student of Plato, whose teachings were important in forging the symbolist ideology. "Plotinus has many new things to say about an area that is little discussed in ancient philosophy, the area of human subjectivity. He reminds us that in philosophical inquiry there is not only the object being investigated, but also the someone who is investigating." Arranging his pictures as if he were experiencing the event would have been a customary technique for Redon to use. John Rewald takes this idea and melds it with the thought expressed above by Redon that his pictures are grounded in reality but enhanced by his imagination, that his, "...haunting visions he translated into black and white, belonged to a world that was never absolutely detached from reality." His visions were not inventions but things he actually saw in his mind's eye.

Therefore, Rewald reasons that Redon,

...did not have to search for the plastic equivalents of his emotions because his work was not a translation of ideas from one medium into another. Redon lived in a world of beautiful and disquieting dreams that were indistinguishable from reality. Since to him they were real,

---


he hardly bothered to investigate their meaning; all he desired was to express them with the most voluptuous colors, the most powerful or subtle oppositions of black and white.\textsuperscript{84}

In other words, Redon transferred to art what he saw and experienced in his mind. An example of a direct transfer between the mind of Redon and the image expressed is the Tree lithograph (fig. 10), where the image and caption suggest that someone is gazing. Jean Seznec believes that the gazer is Redon; the optical effect would be the same for both Anthony and Redon.\textsuperscript{85} This would mean that Redon created most of the 42 lithographs as if he were St. Anthony -- as if he were experiencing his trials and temptations.

This brings up the question of whether Redon, of his own volition, made the decision to do the first album or if it was commissioned. Two thoughts prevail among scholars. The first proposes that Redon was merely asking the Belgian publisher Edmond Deman to underwrite the publication costs and the second claims that Deman was actually the one who commissioned the works.\textsuperscript{86} On this issue, Eisenman believes that the first two albums were commissioned because both Flaubert and Redon were so popular among the Belgian artists, critics, and authors associated with Les XX.\textsuperscript{87} In his letter of July 21, 1896 to Mellerio, Redon strongly

\begin{footnotes}
\item[84] Rewald, p. 154.
\item[87] Eisenman, p. 178.
\end{footnotes}
stated that the first series of lithographs done based on Flaubert's novel were at the request of Deman. However, it is generally thought that this strong stance, written years after the fact, is merely an effort to avoid the "epithet 'literary.'" The attention given to him early on by the literary critics Joris Karl Huysman and Emile Hennequin was invaluable to his career, although the term "literary artist" was always for Redon a pejorative term.

It would seem that because the book had such appeal for Redon that he would have made the decision to begin the first album himself. And, in fact, there are two letters that distinctly imply that it was Redon who initiated the idea as Fred Leeman indicates in his article on image and text in Redon's oeuvre. In a letter to Redon dated November 17, 1887, Edmond Picard, a leader of the Belgian Les XX, tells Redon how happy he is that he has begun the Temptation of Saint Anthony. On November 23 of the same year, Redon wrote to Emile Verhaeren, another Belgian who was an important Symbolist poet. In this letter it is quite clear that Redon has already started the Temptation lithographs and he asks Verhaeren to help him get Deman to publish them.

---


89 Hobbs, p. 66.


Notre ami Maus me dit que vous avez bien voulu me recommander à Monsieur Deman et me donne l'espoir que votre éditeur traiterait peut-être avec moi pour des travaux.

Si vous avez l'occasion de le revoir, vous m'obligeriez vraiment en lui proposant la *Tentation de St. Antoine* de Flaubert, un album de huit à dix planches que je prépare en ce moment.92

As stated before, it was rare for Redon to depict St. Anthony in any of the 42 lithographs devoted to the subject. However, three lithographs do contain an image of Anthony. Two represent St. Anthony with the Devil; one image, actually the frontispiece to the second album, has Anthony touring the universe atop and between the Devil’s horns (fig. 22), and the other shows both Anthony and the Devil in a thoughtful dialogue (fig. 12). The third lithograph is a bust depiction of Anthony in profile and the caption is a plaintive cry, “Saint-Antoine: Au secours mon dieu!” (fig. 23) Although the face shape is not as round as Redon’s, this image does exhibit a similarity to Redon. Compared to portraits by others, such as *Homage to Cézanne*, 1900 by Maurice Denis (fig. 24) and *Portrait of Odilon Redon*, cover from *Les Hommes d’aujourd’hui*, 1890 by Claude Emile Schuffenecker, (fig. 25) and his self-portrait (fig. 26), one is struck by the similar, characteristic receding forehead and beard. Anthony is shown in profile, a very common motif for Redon to use in portraying people. It was a device that added mystery and ambiguity by limiting direct involvement with the image. However, in this particular instance, I take it to be a device that covers a physical flaw. Accounts from those who had personal

---

Figure 22
Frontispiece
A Gustave Flaubert (second album), 1889
Lithograph, 25.8 x 20.3 cm
Figure 23
"Saint-Antoine: Au secours mon dieu!"
_Tentation de Saint-Antoine_ (third album), 1896
Lithograph, 21.5 x 13 cm
Figure 24
Maurice Denis
Homage to Cézanne, 1900
Oil on canvas
Musée d’Orsay, Paris
Figure 25
Claude Emile Schuffenecker
Portrait of Odilon Redon, cover from *Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui*, 1890
Figure 26
Self-Portrait
Louvre, Paris
interviews with Redon report that he had an "œil flottant," a slightly wandering eye.\textsuperscript{93} This would account for the profile view and also for casting the right eye in shadow in his self portrait. Redon depicted Anthony in profile for his usual reasons, however, I would add to that another reason — that he put Anthony in profile because he was drawing Anthony as if it were himself and therefore it would have been natural for him to portray him in profile to disguise the wandering eye.

Contained throughout the three Temptation albums are images that can be interpreted as personal references. Flaubert's book is populated with enormous numbers of creatures, gods, monsters — living beings of all sorts; therefore it is significant to take notice of what Redon choose to depict in only 42 lithographs. I believe his identification or affinity with Anthony dictated to some degree what aspects of the story he chose to depict. Flaubert describes the Thebaid, a forlorn place, in the opening lines of his novel. Anthony is high on a mountain on a platform shut in with large boulders. The rocks cut off the view of a desert with undulations stretching to the Libyan range, the color of chalk. The surroundings and isolated predicament of Anthony are not unlike the surroundings and circumstances of Redon's childhood. According to his son Ari, Redon was raised in a "desert" far from his home and any love from his family.\textsuperscript{94} His


\textsuperscript{94} Druick, p. 17.
childhood spent away from his parents and siblings has become a well-known major theme of his life. Shortly after he was born in 1840, he was taken to the family estate known as Peyrelebade. There, away from his parents and siblings, he spent his childhood in the care of an older uncle amidst environs known for desolate landscapes. Recent research indicates that Redon was epileptic, a condition that was cause for shame in the nineteenth century and thus his family's reason for isolating him at their country home away from the city of Bordeaux where his parents and siblings lived. An early etching, *La Peur* 1866 (fig. 27), which shows a horseman in a desolate landscape sharply punctuated with rocky boulders and cliffs recalls this isolation. Redon did many landscapes of this type, especially when he was studying under the highly creative Rodolphe Bresdin. The drawing *Hagar* 1866 (fig. 28), along with *La Peur* emphasize feelings of solitude and isolation and show imposing landscapes swallowing up and overpowering lonely individuals. Of the 42 lithographs from the three Temptation albums, only one depicts a landscape and it is unique in its representation of a scene that has no dialogue or depiction of something organic. Unusual for its inclusion, is the lithograph titled, "...et il distingue une plaine aride et mamelonneuse" (fig. 29), from the third album. In a book teaming with a superabundance of creatures, both believable and fantastic,

---

Figure 27
*La Peur*, 1866
Etching, 11.2 x 20
The Art Institute of Chicago
Figure 28

Hagar, 1866
Graphite, 24.6 x 20.6 cm
Private Collection, Chicago
Figure 29
"...et il distingue une plaine aride et mamelonneuse"

_Tentation de Saint-Antoine_ (third album), 1896
Lithograph, 24.8 x 19.5 cm
it is interesting that Redon would devote one of only 42 lithographs to a cold, dead landscape. Eisenman believes that Peyrelebade, his childhood home in the wild and deserted Llistrac in the Médoc, was for Redon a place of both physical confinement and imaginative liberation and that he would depict these two oppositions in his mature graphic works as, "...horsemen, angels, and gods as well as windows, prison bars, and shackles."\(^{96}\) If this is true, then one can find several personal references in the lithographs throughout the three Temptation albums such as "Dans l'ombre des gens pleurent et prient entourés d'autres qui les exhortent..." (fig. 30), from the third album, as well as "Qannes" (fig. 9) and "D'abord une flauche d'eau, ensuite une prostituée..." (fig. 1).

Coupled with the oddity of omitting St. Anthony from most of his interpretive lithographs, is the significance of depicting St. Anthony and the Devil twice. Why would this one scene from the book have such an attraction for Redon that he would devote two lithographs displaying the interaction between Anthony and the Devil? Flaubert, as author, creates a dialogue between the two that is strongly influenced by the philosophy of Baruch (or Benedict) Spinoza. Flaubert's admiration for Spinoza was "long-lasting"\(^{97}\) and we know that Redon

\(^{96}\) Eisenman, p. 10.

\(^{97}\) "Flaubert's own admiration for Spinoza was long-lasting. He had read the *Ethics* before first writing *Saint Antony*, and he reread them and discovered the *Tractatus Theologico-politicus* before completing the last version. What Flaubert saw in Spinoza was both confirmation of his own unitarian pantheism, his notion of an endless diffusion of forms through a radiant infinity of space, ..." Mroovsky. p. 11-12.
Figure 30

"Dans l'ombre des gens pleurent et prient entourés d'autres qui les exhortent..."

Tentation de Saint-Antoine (third album), 1896

Lithograph, 26.5 x 21.6 cm
was familiar with the seventeenth century philosopher because of his association with Clavaud. In his book *A Soi-Même*, Redon relates Clavaud’s admiration for Spinoza saying, “Il professait pour Spinoza une admiration quasi religieuse. Il avait une manière de prononcer ce nom avec une sensibilité et une douceur dans la voix qu’on ne pouvait entendre sans émotion.”

Further confirmation of Redon’s deference to the philosopher is seen in his work; Fred Leeman points out that the combined influence of Eastern literature and Spinoza is embodied in the charcoal drawing *The Little Abbot Reading the Ramayana* 1883 (fig. 31). The abbot is dressed as Spinoza might have dressed in the seventeenth century, reading a book of Eastern origin.

Because Clavaud had such a profound influence on Redon during his impressionable youth and into his later years, he is considered one of Redon’s most important mentors. Years after his death Redon was known to say of Clavaud, “Il était, quand je revenais à Bordeaux, mon refuge. Lorsqu’il mourut il y a quelques années, je sentis, soudain, qu’un appui me manquait. Sa mort me laissa un malaise.” Besides introducing Redon to the writings of Flaubert, Baudelaire, Poe, and Eastern religion and thought, he also introduced him to the art of Delacroix, thereby inspiring his enthusiasm for the Romantics and their

---

98 Redon, p. 18.


100 Redon, p. 19.
Figure 31
The Little Abbot Reading the Ramayana, 1883
Charcoal, 50.5 x 37 cm
The Art Institute of Chicago
love of nature. These introductions built on his love for nature as he experienced it in his youth living on his family's country estate. This early guidance to an appreciation of nature, Spinoza, and the Romantic tradition help explain, in part, Redon's enormous attraction for Flaubert's *Temptation*.

The all important dialogue between St. Anthony and the Devil in Chapter VI is replete with references to Spinoza's ideology and we can only believe that the philosophical repartee between Anthony and the Devil attracted Redon, in a personal way, inspiring him to produce the two lithographs. In all likelihood the Devil's remarks are a reflection of Anthony's (and Redon's) philosophy as well, because in the beginning of the dialogue, Anthony's thoughts, as he listens to the voice of the Devil, are described for the reader: "Antony is not surprised by this voice. It strikes him as an echo of his thoughts -- his memory's answer."¹⁰¹ Spinoza regarded mind and body as merely different aspects of a single substance, which he called God or Nature, believing that everything that existed was God. It was his elevation of Nature as one and the same as God that attracted the veneration of the Romantics.

When Anthony asks the Devil what is the purpose of all this (fig. 12), the Devil replies that there is no purpose, because if God had a purpose it would be to admit to several acts of will which would destroy his unity; God's will is inseparable from his essence. When Anthony says he is frightened he will fall

¹⁰¹ Mrosovsky, p. 205.
into empty space, the Devil is quick to point out that, "There is no emptiness! There is no void! There are everywhere bodies moving in the immutable depths of Extension -- and since, if it were bounded by anything, it would no longer be space but a body, it has no limits!" and, "God is not a portion of space of such-and-such a size, but immensity!" These statements cause Anthony to wonder, slowly, "Might matter...then...be part of God?" Later, Anthony will wonder why forms are so various if there is only one substance: "Saint-Antoine: Il doit y avoir quelque part des figures primordiales dont les corps ne sont que les images" (fig 32) from the second album. At the very end of the book, the reader finds Anthony literally reveling in the rejuvenative powers of nature and expressing his desire to be matter. While I am not suggesting that Redon wanted to become matter, I do believe he found in these words a similar perspective as his own: "I love life, nature above all." 

Symbolism's credo had been to banish any direct association between nature and its variant art forms. As an alternative to realism and Positivism, the goal of symbolist art was to express the Idea in as obscure a fashion as possible. Thus, we find Redon knowingly placing titles or captions with his images to make his art vague and confusingly equivocal in order to place the

---

102 Mrosovsky, pp. 208-209.

103 Leeman, p. 217 quoted from an interview in April, 1893. Redon deliberately chose not to exhibit in the second Symbolist exhibition of the Salon de la Rose+Croix, because he felt their art was based on the cult of the artificial and his art favored life, especially nature.
Figure 32
"Saint-Antonine: il doit y avoir quelque part des figures primordiales dont les corps ne sont que les images"
A Gustave Flaubert, (second album), 1889
Lithograph, 17 x 12.4 cm
viewer in the world of the indeterminate. However, Redon never lost touch with
the source for his art. As he explained:

Mais d’autre part, mon régime le plus fécond, le plus nécessaire à
mon expansion a été, je l’ai dit souvent, de copier directement le
réel en reproduisant attentivement des objets de la nature
extérieure en ce qu’elle a de plus menu, de plus particulier et
accidentel. Après un effort pour copier minutieusement un caillou,
un brin d’herbe, une main, un profil ou toute autre chose de la vie
vivante ou inorganique, je sens une ébullition mentale venir; j’ai
alors besoin de créer, de me laisser aller à la représentation de
l’imaginaire. La nature, ainsi, dosée et infusée, devient ma
source, ma levure, mon ferment.¹⁰⁴

For Redon the balance between external nature and the world of the soul
or Idea was never a problem. Anthony’s questions and the Devil’s responses
about good and evil, illusion and reality, spirit and matter must reflect Redon’s
interior life because of what we see in his art — the natural world in both its
physical and emotional states.

¹⁰⁴ Redon, pp. 28-29.
Bibliography


__________. Oeuvres Posthumes, Paris: Mercure de France, 1853.


