Medieval Saints in Late Nineteenth Century French Culture

Eight Essays

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Odilon Redon’s *Temptation of Saint Anthony* Lithographs

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Gustave Flaubert’s hallucinatory *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* became a virtual cult object in certain progressive literary and artistic circles in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. His powerful descriptive imagery, erotic references and exploration of the dark side of the psyche reverberated with Decadents and Symbolists alike. The author’s fantastic scenes, inspired in part by the fabulous, grotesque hybrids found in Saint Anthony paintings and prints of the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, appealed to a taste for the macabre and visionary at the fin de siècle.

The artist Odilon Redon created three sets of lithographic prints between 1888 and 1896 based on the text by Flaubert. No other theme absorbed him to this extent; there are approximately forty prints in all, which follow the monstrous nightmares that plagued Flaubert’s saint. Anthony experiences a series of hallucinations in a single night that include personifications of lust, greed and gluttony, among other sins. He is taunted by believers of diverse faiths as well as pagan cults. However, no temptation proves a greater threat to Anthony’s Catholic ideals than the idea that man’s origins are in nature, not creation. Redon’s attraction to the fantastic aspects of Flaubert’s work arose at a time when evolutionary theory was gaining credibility and when contemporary theories of the mind (illuminating the existence of hidden motivations in the unconscious) and human pathologies had led to an imaginative fusion of myth and divisive behavior in literature and art. For both Flaubert and Redon the legend of Saint
Anthony provided a vehicle through which to explore modern concerns about illness, madness and man's natural past.

The writer Emile Hennequin first introduced Redon to Flaubert's novel in 1882 after seeing trial proofs for Redon's fantastic lithographic series *Origins* (1883), based on the theme of evolution. In Flaubert, Redon found a kindred spirit interested in the natural past of biological monstrosities, the primordial life of cells and the exploration of mental pathologies. Both artist and writer were also interested in the relationship between the revelations of science and spiritual life with the possibility of a reconciliation between the two. Redon would call *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* "une merveille littéraire et une mine pour moi." His first set of ten lithographs plus a frontispiece and the third set of twenty-three prints plus a frontispiece were entitled *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*; the second, done in 1889, was given the title *A Gustave Flaubert*. That Redon would specify the second series to be an homage to Flaubert, while following the text of the literary work, reflects the artist's affinity and identification with the writer and his interpretation of the Saint Anthony legend.

Saint Anthony was born in Egypt in 250 A.D. and is said to have lived for nearly a hundred years despite an eremitical existence in which he was supposedly assaulted by demons representing all the vices known to man. His story was written down as a biography by Saint Athanasius, who had known Saint Anthony well. In centuries to come, Saint Anthony would be thought of as a pure and elevated soul; he was assured a central place in the pantheon of Catholic saints by the fact that he is credited with being the founder of the monastic tradition. Anthony was identified as a "plague saint" by the medieval period, and more particularly was associated with diseases that affected the skin like ergotism (Saint Anthony's fire) and syphilis.

Anthony's ability to deliver one from the pains of the flesh (that may indeed seem like the attack of so many demons) has roots in the French national past. Whether true to historical fact or mere legend, Saint Anthony's body is said to have been removed from Egypt and reburied in France in the eleventh century in the abbey Saint-Antoine-en-Viennois, where a miracle cure involving a skin disorder supposedly took place. The abbey became a major pilgrimage site rivaling that of Santiago de Compostela. It was here that the monastic community of Antonines, which dedicated itself to the art of healing skin disorders, was founded. The Antonine order spread throughout France to Germany and the Netherlands. It is in the north that the most memorable and horrific Saint Anthony imagery was created, from fantastic works by Bosch to Jan Mandyn and Schoengauer. These artists had been influenced by the thirteenth-century *Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine, who emphasized the terrible nature of Anthony's visions.
tribulations and torments of Saint Anthony from lust to demonic attacks had an enormous appeal from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries at a time when syphilis and fears of witchcraft were on the rise.

Flaubert first began to think about a work based on the Saint Anthony legend after seeing Mandyn's *Temptation of Saint Anthony* (then attributed to Breughel) in Genoa in 1845. In the Mandyn, the devout saint turns his back on the Bosch-like hybrids that personify mortal sin. Shortly after his trip to Italy, Flaubert bought a print on the theme by the seventeenth-century French artist Jacques Callot, who specialized in works of contemporary social ills as well as monstrous horrors (Fig. 3.1). The fact that Callot's print with its staged vignettes was based on baroque theatrical sets of hell may have held particular appeal for Flaubert since his text was originally conceived as a play. While Mandyn and Callot's saint follows the traditional interpretation of Anthony as a model of virtue and steadfastness in the face of overwhelming adversity, Flaubert's saint, and that of Redon, would be vulnerable and self-doubting, a kind of contemporary everyman, prey to guilt, tricks of the mind and weakness of the flesh.

By 1849, when Flaubert was finishing the unpublished first version of *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, the theme of Saint Anthony's temptations was a popular one in art. In part, this was due to a religious revival at mid-century and a renewed interest in the lives of saints, but it also had to do with a Second Empire taste for themes of seduction and religious crises. Among the artists who depicted the erotic side of the saint's temptations were Tassaert, Morot and Delaroche. In popular culture, Saint Anthony had been a favorite subject for puppet shows for decades; here, the tales of temptation were designed to amuse and satirize hypocritical monks and the religious elite.

Revised in the 1850s, then rewritten once again during the Franco-Prussian War and its immediate aftermath, Flaubert's work was finally published in 1874. The date of its appearance was timely. The loss of the Franco-Prussian War was blamed by many on a self-indulgent, decadent Second Empire; in the early 1870s, a new moral order and a revived Catholicism attempted to compensate for the immediate past. At the same time, an anticlerical Republican faction, which would gain authority throughout the decade, promoted progressive science as the way out for a defeated France. When *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* was first published, it was unclear whether religious instruction or science would act as a future infrastructure in guiding a recovering nation. In Flaubert's text, the saint tried to hold on to dogmatic Catholic faith, but was eventually overwhelmed by nature's own truths. Only loosely based on Saint Athanasius' account of Anthony's life, Flaubert's work explored the mystery of existence and
questioned life's ultimate purpose through a modern interest in pantheism, medicine, comparative religions and the mysteries of the mind.

The appeal of La Tentation de Saint Antoine was such in the literary world that Verlaine had considered doing an opera libretto based on it as early as 1878. Jean Moreás would include it in his Symbolist Manifesto of 1886, comparing it to Shakespeare's Hamlet, the second part of Goethe's Faust and Dante's Vita Nuova. Flaubert's work is directly invoked in a scene in Huysmans' A Rebours of 1884, in which a hybrid chimera and sphinx engage in a conversation that derives from the Flaubert. A Rebours also contained numerous references to Redon's morbid charcoal drawings and the artist's close friendship with Huysmans may well have encouraged his interest in Flaubert's work. Huysmans' devotion to La Tentation de Saint Antoine led him to arrange a deluxe edition of the Flaubert in 1887, with lithographic illustrations by Redon. Although this project fell through, it prompted Redon's work on his first set of Saint Anthony lithographs.

The theme of Saint Anthony's temptations, especially the more erotic of them, interested many late nineteenth-century artists—Saint Anthony
paintings populated the French salon by the 1880s (Fig. 3.2). The saint’s story and its more satirical side also remained alive at the popular level. The first major shadow play at the Chat Noir cabaret, performed in December of 1887, was based on the legend. Like Flaubert and Redon, the set designer Henri Rivière modernized aspects of the tale, not only through references to science (in this case, industry and astronomy), but by setting many of the scenes in the here and now. In a number of them, contemporary Paris was used as a backdrop. Other scenes were more closely based on Flaubert. In this shadow play, Rivière used silhouettes placed at set distances from the screen to create varying effects of intensity and depth. Colors were used for the first time in the history of the shadow play, but the spatial effects, silhouettes and nuances of tone would have appealed to Redon, who no doubt knew this hugely popular production.

SAINT ANTHONY AND THE FEMME FATALE

While the Chat Noir shadow play was an immediate precedent in date for Redon’s own lithographic scenes, whose sequence of images faithfully
followed Flaubert's text, the artist's decision to undertake a major project based on the Saint Anthony legend may well have been encouraged by the popularity of the theme among avant-garde artists in Belgian circles, which he frequented. Khnopff (After Flaubert, 1883), Ensor (The Tribulations of St. Anthony, 1887) and Rops (The Temptation of St. Anthony, 1878) had all taken up the subject of the temptations of Saint Anthony. Indeed, it was with the assistance of his Belgian friend Verhaeren that Redon's first Temptation of Saint Anthony album was published in Brussels by Edmond Deman.9 Rops' Temptation of Saint Anthony was considered the artist's masterpiece and was owned by Edmond Picard, one of Redon's early Belgian patrons (Fig. 3.3). This work, later referred to by Freud as "a typical case of repression," envisions temptation in the body of a voluptuous female nailed to a cross. The erotic female is a sacrilegious object that is at once Christian martyr and the devil, lust and death.

Saint Anthony's erotic temptations, which are featured prominently in the Flaubert text, had become absorbed in nineteenth-century decadence as a masochistic, morbid theme. While Redon addressed many themes of temptation in Flaubert's novel, approximately one-third of all of the artist's Saint Anthony lithographs respond to the popular Romantic and Symbolist theme of the monk's lust. By the late nineteenth century, the subject of the fatal woman became tied to the growing dread associated with rising statistics of venereal disease linked with "women of pleasure." The voluptuous beauty who embodies death is one of the most pervasive of all Symbolist themes.

In his first Temptation of Saint Anthony album, Redon depicted fatal women in four out of ten of the lithographs. In Plate 1, the coquettish female with a backward glance is a prostitute and comes from a hallucination suffered by Saint Anthony at the end of Chapter 1 of Flaubert's text, in which the saint sees a sequence of visions beginning with a prostitute and followed by a corner of a temple, a soldier's face and a chariot with two rearing white horses (Fig. 3.4). The woman personifies one of the seven deadly sins referred to by this hallucination. Temptation of the flesh is revisited in Plate 3, where Redon illustrates the appearance of the queen of Sheba as an enigmatic bust-length figure with an impassive expression. Her dark, magical powers are suggested not by her appearance, but by the presence of the macabre legendary Persian Simorg-anka bird that accompanies her. In Flaubert's account, the Queen of Sheba offers Anthony worldly stature, marvelous goods and the delights of the flesh. That she hops away when rebuffed by the saint suggests she is the devil incarnate. In the Redon, it is the bird with its humanoid grimace that appears diabolical.
Fig. 3.3. F. Rops, *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, 1878. Oil on canvas. Bibliothèque Royale Albert Ier, Brussels.
Fig. 3.4. Odilon Redon, French, 1840–1916. "First a pool of water, then a prostitute, the corner of a temple, a figure of a soldier, a chariot with two rearing white horses," Plate I from The Temptation of Saint Anthony, 1888. Lithograph, 29 × 20.6 cm. Charles Stickney Collection, 1920.1632. Reproduction, The Art Institute of Chicago.
Fig. 3.5. Odilon Redon, French, 1840–1916. "It is a skull wreathed in roses. It dominates a woman's torso of pearly whiteness," Plate 6 from The Temptation of Saint Anthony, 1888. Transfer lithograph on mounted ivory China paper, 29.7 × 21.7 cm. The Stickney Collection, 1920.1639. Reproduction, The Art Institute of Chicago.

In the following plate, Redon illustrates the story of Helen, who, in Flaubert's work, represents a notable prostitute of classical times. She makes an appearance as a somnambulist, hypnotized by the magician Simon, in Chapter Four. Redon depicts her drifting in mid-air, dressed from head to
toe in classical garb, as remote and inaccessible as a Greek goddess. Plate 6, which illustrates a passage from the last chapter of the Flaubert, is the most horrific incarnation of the femme fatale: "It is a skull wreathed in roses. It dominates a woman's torso of pearly white" (Fig. 3.5). She is the death rattle itself, who makes an appearance after Saint Anthony has been accosted by lust and death, seen as a young and an old woman. Together, lust and death dance and sing a song of life and death in which one is found in the other. After this vision disappears, Anthony sees the death's head and the passage continues, "En dessous, un linceul étoilé de points d'or fait comme une queue; et tout le corps ondule, à la manière d'un ver gigantesque qui se tiendrait debout." Her skeletal appearance and leaping form link this figure to the grotesque figures of the medieval dance macabre, several of which appear in Flaubert's Callot print (see Fig. 3.1).

Fin-de-siècle imagery where death is embodied in lust has roots in fears of contamination and with syphilis. Syphilitic cures, as we have seen, were associated with Saint Anthony. At the time Flaubert first considered writing a book based on the legend of Saint Anthony, he had a skin eruption that he feared to be syphilis. In 1849, a doctor confirmed Flaubert's self-diagnosis. Redon may take the biological dimensions of this pervasive nineteenth-century condition a step further in his "And all sorts of frightening beasts arise," also from the Saint Anthony series of 1888 (Fig. 3.6).

A number of Redon's late nineteenth-century works were done in response to Pasteur's discoveries of the true origin of contagious disease, deadly microorganisms that cause death. In reference to this print, Huysmans would write in his essay "Le monstre" that the "districts des imperceptibles" in Redon's work were "plus terrifiants que les fauves exagérés des vieux maîtres." He describes the image in terms of deadly bacilli and protoplasm in a gelatinous environment.

Venereal disease and the prostitution it was associated with were major themes in literature in the last decades of the century. Disease and prostitution figure in Barbey d'Aurevilly's "Vengeance d'une femme" in Les Diaboliques, a story of self-destruction and syphilitic death. The more venal aspects of the prostitute became increasingly pronounced in literature and art as the century progressed. Huysmans had often treated the theme of the sexual temptress, including in his first book, Marthe, which dealt with state-controlled prostitution. But it was Des Esseintes of A Rebours whose nightmarish visions of lust and death matched only that of Flaubert's Saint Anthony. Des Esseintes imagines he sees a woman who is shaking with fever and whose arms become fleshless. He attempts to run, but is pursued by her again. She is the embodiment of syphilis, "la grande variole." Des
Esseintes' symptoms, including migraines, vertigo and nightsweats, are those of a syphilitic. Des Esseintes not only brings up the dread of syphilis, but also its bacteriological origins. His gloomy meditations on life would have struck a chord with his audience now so aware of the lethal potential of microorganisms, "Tout n'est que syphilis.... Et il eut la brusque vision d'une humanité sans cesse travaillée par le virus des anciens âges.... Elle avait couru, sans jamais s'épuiser à travers les siècles; aujourd'hui encore, elle séduisait, se dérobant en de sournoises souffrances." 15

In the year Redon was beginning his first Temptation of Saint Anthony album, a program of reforms focusing on regulating prostitution through the state had begun in an attempt to control the "périt vénérien." 16 At the same time, Saint Anthony's association with syphilitics came up in the medical literature of the period. In a chapter called "Les Syphilitiques dans l'art" in his 1887 Nouvelle iconographie de la Salpêtrière, the prominent pathologist Charcot attempted to identify syphilitic figures in medieval and other art. He discussed the Saint Anthony legend and illustrated a figure at lower left in Grünewald's Temptation of Saint Anthony panel from the famous Issenheim Altarpiece, created for the Antonine community at Colmar (Fig. 3.7). 17 Charcot described the syphilitic symptoms of the figure, including a partially destroyed nose and ear. Huysmans, who wrote an essay on the Issenheim altarpiece some years later, would note Charcot's diagnosis and responded to the figure in the following way:

Est-ce une larve, est-ce un homme? En tout cas, jamais peintre n'a osé, dans le rendu de la putréfaction, aller aussi loin. Il n'existe pas dans les livres de médecine de planches sur les maladies de la peau plus infâmes. Imaginez un corps boursouflé, modelé dans du savon de Marseille blanc et gras marbré de bleu, et sur lequel mamelonnent des furoncles et percent des clous. C'est l'hosanna de la gangrène, le chant triomphant des caries! 18

Huysmans may have informed Redon further about the Saint Anthony legend and its medieval connection with syphilis.

Redon continued to explore Flaubert's fascination with lust and its consequences in subsequent albums. Two of the six plates in Redon's A Gustave Flaubert also deal with the theme of lust. In the first plate, a figure of a martyred female whose body remains a locus of desire ranks with Rops

Opposite: Fig. 3.7. Matthias Grünewald, The Temptation of St. Anthony, Issenheim Altarpiece, wing on the high altar of the Anthona Church at Issenheim, 1510–1515, Musée Colmar. Giraudon/Art Resource, NY.
Fig. 3.8. Odilon Redon, French, 1840–1916. "Saint Anthony: 'Beneath her long hair, which covered her face, I thought I recognized Ammonaria,'" Plate 1 of A Gustave Flaubert, 1889, lithograph, Charles Stickney Collection, 1920.1648. Reproduction, The Art Institute of Chicago.
in its disturbing psychology. The image “Beneath her long hair ... I thought I recognized Ammonaria” conflates a scene of torture with the memory of a beloved female from Saint Anthony’s past, one of Flaubert’s inventions (Fig. 3.8). It is an image of obsessive sexual infatuation and sadomasochism, which had great appeal at the fin de siècle. Here a male with a whip ambiguously turns away from the woman and seems to be self-flagellating. The reference is to Anthony’s self-reproach over lustful thoughts. This plate is contemporaneous with the first series and was included in the Paris salon in 1888. The second reference to lust in the 1889 album is the celebrated “Death: My irony surpasses all others,” considered by Mallarmé, Gauguin and other contemporaries of Redon to be one of his best works. It is quite similar to “It is a skull” of 1888 and, in an unusual departure, does not depict the scene from which the quote derives, but rather one slightly later, that of “It’s a death’s head.” Death is the narrator in the Flaubert text, as an old woman dressed in a shroud. It is she who says “My irony surpasses all others!” Death refers to sadistic pleasure found in suffering, and the narrator continues, “Il y a des convulsions de plaisir aux funérailles des rois, à l’extermination d’un peuple—et on fait la guerre avec de la musique, des panaches, des drapeaux, des harnais d’or, un déploiement de cérémonie pour me rendre plus d’hommages.” The choice of this text to accompany an image that illustrates another passage may have to do with Redon’s self-consciousness over creating a work that is so close to a plate from his first Saint Anthony album. That the caption brings up not death, but the image of lust once again, underscores the powerful psychological orientation of the work. In the album A Gustave Flaubert, the artist may be responding not just to the text of La Tentation de Saint Antoine, but to the life of Flaubert himself. After the writer’s death in 1880, the details of his personal life fed his myth. His taste for prostitutes and failings in love were well known. He never married and lived much of his life in solitude, which raised comparisons with the eremitical monk and the erotic desires that had so consumed him from his youth to his old age.

Sexual temptation is once again a major theme in the 1896 Saint Anthony lithographs, but in some cases the references are subtle or even seem nearly effaced. The mood of this album is more restrained. For example, the Queen of Sheba makes another appearance, but this time her face is in near profile and her eyes are closed. She is a remote introverted figure despite the emotional intensity of the words repeated in Redon’s caption: “My Kisses Taste Like Fruit ready to melt into your heart! ... You Scorn Me! Farewell!” She is hardly the sensual creature who has also just said, “Ah! Comme tu vas te perdre sous mes cheveux, humer ma poitrine, t’ébahir de mes membres, et brûlé par mes prunelles, entre mes bras, dans un tour-
TWI: THE "SCLIENTIFIC" EXAMINATION
Helen is depicted, but turns aside. Although her bust, with face in profile, bears a resemblance to Redon's prostitute in plate 1 of 1888, she does not cast a glance toward the viewer; her eyes are little more than dark sockets. There is no reference to Flaubert's text in the caption, she is simply "Helen."

In a complex image of the ruined palace of Nebuchadnezzar, the dark face of a woman who seems to be veiled is disembodied and recedes into shadows between two pillars. In this plate, a snake appears as a separate undulating form that wraps itself around one column. Inexplicably, a head or tail slithers across the foreground column. In another plate, a female Christian martyr takes a sponge soaked in the blood of a lovely young male who had been martyred in a horrific fashion and covers it with kisses. Lust and death are only subtly suggested here; readers of Flaubert would know that following this melancholy scene, an orgy of sex and drink take place in a graveyard of martyred Christians. A new goddess appears in Redon's 1896 album: the Syrian fertility goddess Cybele, described by Flaubert as a mountain deity with the sun as a halo. Despite Flaubert's discussion of her sadistic nature and her masochistic appeal to her followers, Redon depicts her as a flat-chested introspective figure whose head is, once again, turned in profile. Isis, the voluptuous nature goddess whose cult was followed by many throughout the Mediterranean world during Anthony's time is represented by Redon as a more imposing Egyptian deity whose incestuous relationship with her brother Osiris has resulted in the weak failing child she holds in her arms. Although her substantial figure faces forward, her head is entirely obstructed from view by a back veil. Death as a shrouded old woman appears in 1896, with no erotic overtones. As a skeleton, death also appears dancing with the curvaceous figure of lust; as two separate figures their fusion is suggested by a sinuous arabesque (Fig. 3.9). Again, the narrator Death is included in the caption. She speaks first to Saint Anthony: "But I alone make you serious" and then to Lust, "Why don't we embrace?" The recipient of both messages is ambiguous, for the figures face the viewer. While the medieval dance macabre is reenacted once again, the references to fatal women in the majority of the 1896 images are enigmatic and remote. Subdued, introspective females that personify powerful erotic legends are part of Redon's exploration of psychology.

Opposite: Fig. 3.9. Odilon Redon, French, 1840–1916, Plate 20 of 24: "Death: It is I who make you serious; let us embrace each other." The Temptation of Saint Anthony, 1896. Lithograph in black on cream chine affixed to ivory wove paper, 30.2 x 21.2 cm. The Stickney Collection, 1920.1785. Reproduction, The Art Institute of Chicago.
SAINT ANTHONY AND MADNESS

Flaubert's text is filled with hallucinations. To prepare to write the work, he read medical texts on mental illness including Esquirol's *Des Malades mentales*, works by Pierre Cabanis, who related the intellect to the nervous system and recounted states of delusion, and Dr. Hector Landouzy's *Traité complet de l'hystérie.* Saint Anthony often seemed unsure if what he experienced was real or the result of mental debilitation. In Chapter 2, for example, he is described as cataleptic. The figures that appear to him often seem to be in trances themselves, like the Christian martyr in Chapter 4 who is "sans rien voir, comme un somnambule." Helen’s eyes "Paraissent insensibles à la lumière" and "elle tourne ses prunelles comme sortant d’un songe." Flaubert had thought to subtitle his 1874 revision, "le summum de la folie." The morbid psychology of *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* would have had great appeal in the 1880s, when psychiatry was validating the importance of dreams, hallucinations and altered states. Anatole France, whose *Thaïs* of 1890 was influenced by Flaubert, had written a year earlier that Saint Anthony awaited scientific analysis of behavior in terms of emerging psychology.

Pathologies of the mind revived interest in mesmerism (now called hypnosis), and the relationship between vision and reality were the obsession of numerous scientists and laymen under the Third Republic. Charcot wrote a book called *Les Démoniaques dans l’art* in 1887 in which he interpreted medieval imagery of suffering martyrs and the possessed in terms of hysterical conditions. His diagnosis of delusional states mainly among women, many of whom saw themselves as possessed by demons or to be themselves saints, was made largely through his work at the mental hospital the Salpêtrière. That certain of Redon’s images could be interpreted in this way is suggested by plans for the inclusion of his "Ammonaria" print in an 1889 exhibition called "Folles de la Salpêtrière." By the 1880s and the 1890s, the painful ecstasies of many saints, such as Teresa, were being reinterpreted in terms of hysteria.

There is a personal side to the aberrant states recounted by Flaubert that may well have intrigued Redon. The writer was an epileptic who, in his youth, experienced seizures that were accompanied by hallucinations. He described his attacks as a kind of hemorrhage of the nervous system, where thousands of images seem to explode all at once. Flaubert was plagued by this condition in the 1840s; it seemed to abate around 1849 when he was finishing the first version of *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, only to begin again around 1870 when he was writing the final version. Among his readings on psychology, he was familiar with medical books on nervous
diseases kept in the library of his father, a prominent medical doctor who attempted to cure him. The reason he lived much of his life in seclusion at the country estate of Croisset may have had to do with the fact that epileptics were then regularly prescribed rest in the country. Kitty Mrosovsky in her informative introduction to her English translation of The Temptation of Saint Anthony interprets the appearance of the mercurial monstrous chimera in Flaubert's last chapter as a symbol of the fluid stream of images and thoughts Flaubert experienced when ill. Redon too had been an epileptic when young and also lived a solitary life on a country estate outside of Bordeaux. Whether his episodes continued beyond childhood is unknown, for according to church records he was an example of a miracle cure in 1846. Epilepsy was stigmatized as a degenerative disorder and associated with hysteria; if Redon knew of Flaubert's condition, which was likely in the years after his death, he may have felt a special affinity for the writer and his fascination with a monk who lived apart from the world, plagued by his demons. Many of Redon's Saint Anthony figures stare, adrift as if in a dream or are entirely lost in an interior world. The example closest to "the fugue of images" Flaubert claimed to have experienced during his seizures is Plate 1 of the 1888 The Temptation of Saint Anthony lithographs (Fig. 3.4). In more general terms, Redon makes use of the contemporary interest in other states of mind in his iconography. In the first two lithographic albums one finds an allusion to Hypnos, god of sleep, in the diabolical figures that represent the devil where one wing is open, the other closed. This symbol of the dark side of the mind would have been readily recognizable in the Symbolist circles Redon frequented. It is found, for example, in the work of Khnopff.

MONSTERS AND MODERN SCIENCE

Half of Redon's Saint Anthony prints were based upon the composite monsters envisioned by Flaubert. Oriental hybrids like the sphinx and chimera come to life, along with fabulous creatures not unrelated to those of medieval bestiaries. Of all the fantastic creatures Redon represented in The Temptation of Saint Anthony albums, the chimera appears most often. It is a mercurial creature in the final chapter of the Flaubert: Its composite characteristics of bird and reptile suggest that its iconographical source is in the Callot with its fabulous flying beast (Fig. 3.1). In Redon's Saint Anthony lithographs, it is a heraldic linear symbol in the frontispiece of the 1888 album; a fabulous winged horse that leaps toward heavenly realms like Apollo's horses in the 1888 plate "the green-eyed chimera turns, barks";
Fig. 3.10. Odilon Redon, French, 1840–1916. "The Sphinx: Mon regard que rien ne peut dévier, demeure tendu à travers les choses sur un horizon inaccessible. La chimère: Moi, je suis légère et joyeuse." Plate 5 of A Gustave Flaubert, 1889, lithograph, 28.2 x 20.2 cm. Charles Stickney Collection, 1920.1654. Reproduction, The Art Institute of Chicago.
3. Redon's Temptation Lithographs—Barbara Larson

a diabolical serpent in “The Sphinx: My gaze, which nothing can deflect remains fixed across all things on an unreachable horizon. The chimera: I am full of lightness and joy” of 1889 (Fig. 3.10); a shadowy, dim presence in “I have sometimes caught sight in the sky of what seemed to be the forms of spirits,” of 1896; and a veritable seahorse in “The Beasts of the Sea,” also from the last album. Two years before the first Saint Anthony album, Redon created the lithograph, “The chimera looked at everything with terror,” for the album Night. By this time, Flaubert’s chimera as a symbolic image had become a kind of touchstone for literary symbolists. Jules Destreé expressed regret that he could not use one of Redon’s 1888 Saint Anthony prints as the frontispiece for his book of poems, Chimères.

While the chimera suggests thought and the imagination, other beasts are related to the origins of life. Monsters as evolutionary creatures led Saint Anthony to a study of the details of nature. Flaubert moved the passages on monsters from a former more obscure section of the book to the final climactic chapter in the 1874 La Tentation de Saint Antoine, demonstrating the increased importance of biological as well as spiritual origins for Flaubert. Monsters are a vehicle through which Anthony passes quickly back through the centuries as forms mutate or devolve.

Flaubert’s interest in monstrosities came from several sources. He had been fascinated by hybrid creatures he saw in medieval cathedrals and thought that they might have represented a carryover from prehistoric times. The grotesque multiforms he saw in the work of Jan Mandyn and Callot, among other representations of the Saint Anthony theme provided another source, as did his reading of Montaigne, who had written about the natural origins of monsters. Flaubert’s close friend Georges Pouchet was also interested in the natural origins of medieval monsters, having written the book Histoire des sciences naturelles au moyen âge in 1853. Yet another source had to do with the medical training of his father. Dr. Flaubert had studied under Dupuytren, famous for his studies of physical malformations such as defective fetuses and degenerative skeletal structures. These biological monstrosities were preserved at the Dupuytren Museum in Paris, which still exists today. A final source had to do with nineteenth-century theories of evolution. Both artist and writer would have been able to gather considerable information regarding the history of life at the Museum of Natural History in Paris, which they both frequented. The biological origins of the monster and its relationship to evolution through time was incorporated into nineteenth-century ideas on biological transformation. The science of teratology, or monstrosities, was established by Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, who worked at the Museum of Natural History in the 1830s. In his famous treatises Considérations générales sur les monstres and
Des Monstruosités humaines Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire asserted that embryonic deviations from the norm reveal true biological secrets and can offer insight into catalysts behind evolution.33

One of Redon’s favorites of Flaubert’s biological inventions was the Chaldean god Oannes, part man and part fish, who made his appearance in the writer’s pantheon of false gods in Chapter 5 (Fig. 3.11). In a passage that prefigures the de-evolutionary episode of natural origins that will eventually undermine the saint’s rigid beliefs at the end of the novel, Oannes claims to have “vu dans les étangs qui restent du déluge.”34 The artist’s first response to Flaubert’s book occurred in 1883 in the form of two charcoals that depict Oannes. One, called “Tadpole,” shows Redon’s interest in creatures whose bodies undergo metamorphosis in the real world. Created at the same time he published his lithographic album Origins, Redon had evolutionary theory very much in mind, and a fish-humanoid creature introduces that series. The fish may also allude to the Christian symbol and suggest interchangeable aspects of world religions, with common roots in nature mysticism. Oannes is both god and nature intertwined and only through his awakening can nature proliferate in its multiple forms. Redon’s interest in composite creatures that inhabit the boundaries between different species owes a great deal to his intellectual mentor, the botanist Armand Clavaud, who specialized in research on tiny aquatic organisms that exhibited both plant and animal characteristics. Although Redon’s depiction of Oannes may recall something of the bizarre composite creatures of Bosch, Grünewald or Schongauer, it was also informed by modern science.

While Redon was undertaking his scientific studies, his growing awareness of the philosophical potential of science applied to mankind’s past and future was also indebted to the legacy of romantic Naturalism, including the work of great luminaries such as Balzac, Michelet and Hugo, who drew from discourses in zoology in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and openly acknowledged the considerable importance of Cuvier, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Buffon in their investigations. Hugo used contemporary ideas on science in his La Légende des siècles with its meditations on the ascent of the human spirit from its origins in a prehistoric milieu. Balzac, most notably in his 1845 preface to the Comédie Humaine, credits both Buffon and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire for his analogies. Michelet sub-
Fig. 3.12. Odilon Redon, French, 1840–1916, Plate 13 of 24: "And that eyes without heads were floating like mollusks," The Temptation of Saint Anthony, 1896. Lithograph in black on light grey chine affixed to ivory wove paper; image: 31.1 x 22.6 cm, sheet: 52.6 x 34.9 cm. Elizabeth Hammond Stickney Collection, 1920. 1769. Reproduction, The Art Institute of Chicago. (Photograph by Greg Williams.)
merged Naturalism in many of his works and wrote four books on the natural sciences. Long before Redon and Flaubert began to make trips to the Museum of Natural History, Michelet and other writers of the Romantic generation had gone there to find inspiration. For Michelet, the monster was an experimental step in nature, full of tragic implications. He was most interested in middle zones, creatures that exist between the land and the sea or species that he believed belonged to two kingdoms. The whale was an example of what Michelet saw as a tragic monstrosity, a survivor of nature's shot at the sublime. For Michelet, the jellyfish was an emancipated polyp, half vegetable and half animal. The polyp, having recently been attributed to the animal kingdom, was a favorite image of his, as it would be for Redon. Michelet described it in terms of assuming all shapes and colors and even playing the part of a plant or fruit. Redon's jellyfish of Plate 21 of the 1896 Saint Anthony lithographic series illustrates Flaubert's passage, "Au loin des jets d'eau s'élèvent, lancés par des baleines; et du fond de l'horizon rondes comme des outres, plates comme des lames, dentelées comme des scies, s'avancent en se traînant sur le sable." 35

The monsters are the only vision that the saint seems not to regret; they lead him to scrutinize nature. Anthony wishes to merge with nature, to see the very stirrings of life. He is eventually overcome with amoebic bliss and lies on his belly, studying the minutiae of nature. Animals and plants merge, then the ocean transforms and seaweed becomes grass, and forests of coral give way to trees. Interested in pantheism from his earliest years, Flaubert directs Saint Anthony ultimately toward the loss of narrow Catholic faith, but this is countered by a near spiritual vision of nature. After his revision of the 1870s, Flaubert noted to a friend that Anthony had lost his narrow belief system because of the scientific cell. In Redon's image "And that eyes without heads were floating like mollusks" is a single cell with a nucleus, as if seen through a microscope on a glass slide (Fig. 3.12). Cells also drift through a number of other Saint Anthony plates including "Beasts of the Sea," "Various Populations inhabit the countries of the ocean," and "Then there appears a singular being, having the head of a man on the body of a fish" (Fig. 3.11). Jean Doin, who consulted the artist in an article on his work in 1914, noted Redon's fascination with the cell: "Mais, c'est surtout la cellule, unité élémentaire de la vie, qui séduisit alors M. Redon." 36

In Flaubert's text, Anthony watches life eventually become inanimate matter, then observes: "Des diamants brillent comme des yeux, des minéraux palpitent.... Enfin, il aperçoit de petites masses globuleuses, grosses comme des têtes d'épines et garnies de cils tout autour, une vibration les agite." 37 In the passage regarding "the birth of life," Flaubert
is referring to the still widely held belief of, among others, Georges Pouchet's famous father, Félix-Archimède Pouchet (whose work on spontaneous generation Flaubert had read), that life could originate from inorganic matter.

At the end of the novel the night with its many visions has passed and Saint Anthony looks up to see Christ's face in the sun. The last change to Flaubert's novel was made as late as 1873, when he replaced what had been the final episode of the three theological virtues with the image of the Christ-sun. The reference is to a final pantheistic reconciliation of the natural and the spiritual world and an abandonment of rigid dogma. Anthony peacefully accepts this vision, which some episodes ago may have seemed a sacrilege.

THE LITHOGRAPHIC PROGRAMS

The Temptation of Saint Anthony, 1888

From the late 1880s through the 1890s, when Redon was creating his Saint Anthony albums, there was renewed interest in religion. Many had turned back to Catholicism or had sought spiritual refuge from the Republican culture of science in the growing interest in the occult, mysticism and eastern religions. Redon himself was thought to have undergone some sort of religious crisis around 1895, perhaps prompting his last and most extensive Saint Anthony album.

Redon's lithographic program varies within the individual albums. His first may be interpreted in terms of paired images. The first two plates concern the seven deadly sins. Plate 1 is his "First a pool of water ..." (Fig. 3.4) and Plate 2 features a grotesque devil who "holds the seven deadly sins" in the form of a degenerate infant. The second two both have temptresses, the Queen of Sheba and Helen. The third pair seem to be about the birth and death of life with serpent or fish and human conffatios but have vastly different moods: One represents Oannes as an amusing creature, and the other is the horrific "It is a skull" (Figs. 3.11, 3.5). The fourth pair of plates have horrible beasts that represent the invisible dark dimensions of matter and the mind: "And all sorts of frightening beasts arise" and "The green-eyed chimera, turns, barks" (Fig. 3.6). The final pair both have round ciliated forms and suggest origins of matter and spirit and their interconnectedness: One is a disembodied eye that looks up toward heavenly realms, and the other is the sun with its face of Christ. Nature and spirit find one another.
A Gustave Flaubert, 1889

Redon's second Saint Anthony album was published on the heels of the first, and when it was advertised in the Belgian periodical L'Art moderne in June 1888 the reviewer announced an album of six plates that would "complete" the first. In this set, Redon seems to explore Flaubert's own obsessions, not only venturing as far as he ever will into libidinal territory, but by exploring a monstrous hybrid from La Tentation de Saint Antoine that had held a particular appeal for Flaubert: the snake-human Knouphis.

Knouphis was worshiped by the gnostic faction the Ophites, who practiced heretical Christian beliefs during Anthony's lifetime. The Ophites identified the serpent with the savior through the staff held up by Moses, which had been transformed from a serpent. The description of a serpent with a human head in Flaubert's novel derives from a plate in Jacques Matter's 1828 Histoire critique du Gnosticisme, which reproduces human-headed serpents, symbols of the Ophite sect. They believed that matter was evil but infused with divine sparks. In the course of salvation, the soul with its connection to divinity could be released from the material body. For both artist and writer, Knouphis could be used as a vehicle to further explore the relationship of the spiritual to the material world and matter to thought; it also represented roots of religious history in nature worship. Redon refers directly to Knouphis in Plate 2 where the serpent rests his human head on an altar (Figure 3.13). Light radiates from the creature's calm visage like the divine sparks the gnostics believed existed in all matter. Knouphis is also the subject of Redon's dark, mysterious "Flowers fall and the head of a python appears" from the 1896 album. This image suggests not light and salvation but the dark side of matter, and an atmosphere of evil prevails. Redon may have known that Flaubert had intended to write a history of Gnosticism, but regardless, as an astute reader of La Tentation de Saint Antoine, he would have noted Flaubert's personal fascination with this form of belief, which contains pagan and eastern components.

While the six plates of the 1889 album illustrate various passages of Flaubert's text, all the images include serpentine tails or imply a serpentine creature in the sinuousness of their bodies. The figure of Ammonaria is almost boneless in its curves; long hair hides much that is human in this body (Fig. 3.8). "Death: My Irony Surpasses all others" fuses snake and human as does the worm-like creature of "There must be somewhere primordial creatures where bodies are nothing but images." The chimera and the sciapode of the last two plates all have humanoid faces and snake-like tails.

The snake can be tied to dark eroticism as well as to the history of
religion, one of Flaubert's fields of study. The serpent of Eden would have reverberations as a meaningful symbol in late nineteenth-century Catholic France with its moralizing currents. Eroticism and evil in the body of the femme fatale who emerges from a coiled snake in "Death, my irony surpasses all others" of Plate 3 may suggest Eve after the fall. Flaubert explored the snake as a religious symbol from its association with nature mysticism to its affiliation with the great religions such as Hinduism. The snake has had magical connotations as uruboros or symbol of the never-ending circle of life and was ascribed healing powers during pagan times. The snake can be seen as a transmythological symbol uniting world religions and sometimes evoking concerns about dark aspects of the material realm.

While Redon seems to explore Flaubert's personal obsessions in the 1889 lithographs, the recurring symbol of the snake may refer to another aspect of the timeliness of Flaubert's text in fin-de-siècle France: the growing interest in comparative religions and the occult. That Anthony is a Catholic saint plagued by the possibility that other religious systems embody similar truths and symbols would have reverberated at a time when occult systems, incorporating common aspects of world religions, were finding popularity and challenging Catholic beliefs. After the mid-1880s there was a great deal of interest in theosophy, for example, which combined aspects of Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity, among other beliefs, with references to modern science, including Darwinism and evolutionary theory. Theosophy revived the symbol of uruboros as a self-perpetuating snake that consumes its own tail. Redon owned a copy of Schurer's *Les Grands initiés* (1889), one of the great theosophical documents of the period. It was personally dedicated to the artist with the words, "in very sympathetic homage." Redon frequented theosophical circles and began, by 1890, to sell prints through Edmond Bailly's Librairie de l'art indépendant, a gathering place for those interested in the occult and theosophy.

*The Temptation of Saint Anthony, 1896*

Fin-de-siècle interest in eastern religions and their connection with nature mysticism informs Redon's interest in the false gods that confronted Anthony. Both Isis and the Buddha made their first appearance in Redon's 1896 *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* plates. He must have been thinking seriously about illustrating Flaubert's novel once again by 1895 when he created a print of the Buddha with its pantheistic reference to the cosmos and its title taken from Flaubert, "I was taken to schools. I knew more than the scholars." Redon's 1896 Buddha from his Saint Anthony plates com-
bines the figure with a python. Unity with nature is suggested by the caption, "Understanding was mine! I became the Buddha."

The plates of 1896 draw from the works of 1888 and 1889, but the album is mellower in mood in keeping with the increased spiritualism of the decade of the 1890s. The chimera is alluded to but is no longer a specific
presence. Grimacing diabolical faces are no longer to be found in 1896; even the devil seems less deadly. In his single appearance in the twenty-four works he is a seductive figure in "Anthony: What is the meaning of all this? The devil: there is no meaning." Redon's image alludes to a passage in *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* in which the devil takes Saint Anthony on a flight through the heavens not unlike that of Faust, which Redon depicts in the frontispiece to *A Gustave Flaubert*. The space flight is prefigured in Flaubert's own *Smarr*, as in *Bivial*, by his close friend Poitrevin, and in Byron's *Cain*, but in *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* it represents the temptation of positivism, where the heavens are revealed as governed by cosmic laws rather than by the hand of god. This modern concept of the spiritually meaningless but fascinating space voyage had also been the subject of one of the scenes at the Chat Noir Saint Anthony play (Fig. 3.14). In the 1896 lithograph we see only the head of Saint Anthony and

the devil who emerges, along with a bat-wing, from Anthony’s mind as evil thought. The tiny whispering figure of the devil may allude to the power of hypnotism over the weak and the ill, an acceptable form of medical therapy in the 1890s. The life of the mind is an important aspect of the 1896 album. The many faces in profile or those with closed eyes in 1896 suggest an atmosphere of interiority or meditation upon the failings of the flesh.

Childhood memory is also explored in 1896. When he rewrote *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* in the early 1870s, Flaubert had decided to use youthful memories of Anthony’s and their later life in hallucinations as an organizing principle, including specific locales. In the 1896 album, settings with or without the presence of humans take on importance as in the empty desert, “And he made out an arid plain with nipple-like hillocks,” the tree with its enormous hole of “I have sunk into solitude. I once lived in the tree behind me,” the encrusted baroque interior of Nebuchadnezzar’s palace of “All around are columns of basalt ... light falls from the vaults,” or the haunting prison of Christian martyrs, “In the shadows, people crying and praying are surrounded by others who exhort them.” Redon used many of his own memories with imagery taken from Flaubert’s text. For example, the tree of “I have sunk into solitude ...” is based on sketches of a tree from the country estate of Peyrelebade and the hills “And he made out an arid plain ...” are similar to those he etched under the tutelage of the printmaker Bresdin when young.

Six lithographs of 1896 (Plates 4 to 9) follow passages from Chapter 4 of *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* in rapid succession as if Redon is experimenting with another way to represent the “fugue of images” experienced by Saint Anthony in his hallucination of the seven deadly sins of Plate 1 in 1888. In Plate 1 of the 1896 album, however, we begin not with a vision, but with a profile view of Saint Anthony himself (Fig. 3.15). Redon refers here to a standard medieval practice of representing Anthony after an initial series of demonic attacks at a moment when he cries out for divine intervention, the apparitions still visible. In the Grünewald *Temptation of Saint Anthony* panel, the saint holds a piece of paper with the words, “Where were you good Jesus, where were you? And why did you not come to dress my wounds?” Similarly, the Redon illustration is accompanied by the words, “Help me, O my God!” Unlike the distraught monk of the Grünewald, however, Redon’s Anthony, with his calm face radiating light, is very much a fin-de-siècle voyant. As a Rimbaudian seer the experiences that will disrupt Anthony’s senses will give him the means to understand universal principals.

By exploring the visions of a saint, Flaubert and Redon play upon periods of Catholic and medieval revival, but unlike medieval representations
TWO: THE "SCIENTIFIC" EXAMINATION
that focus on the monsters of the seven deadly sins, Redon and Flaubert venture beyond this, exploring questions about the origins of life, the mysterious depths of the mind and the relationship between spirit and matter that was part of the quest for meaning in late nineteenth-century France.

Notes


6. The first version of La Tentation de Saint Antoine was indebted to a puppet show Flaubert saw at the annual fair in Rouen when he was young. Later in life, he took George Sand to see the production. The words were printed and published in 1843, with lithographic illustrations by Daubigny. See "La Tentation de Saint-Antoine, pot-pourri par Sédain, dessins par M. Trimolet, gravures par M. Daubigny," Chants et chansons populaires de la France (Paris: H. L. Delloye).


12. Williams, 154.

13. "... the imperceptible worlds enlarged and made visible were more terrifying than the fantastic beasts of old masters." J.-K. Huysmans, "Le monstre."


15. "All is syphilis.... And he had the abrupt vision of a humanity unendingly tormented by this virus from ancient times.... She [syphilis, feminine in French] had run her course through the ages without tiring; even today, she seduced, stealing away through underhanded suffering." Huysmans, A Rebours, 141.


18. "Is this creature a larva or a man? In any case, no painter has ever gone so far in the representation of putrefaction. In no medical textbook is there a more frightening illustration of skin disease. The bloated body of the figure seems to be modeled in greasy blue-veined white soap, and full of boils and warts. It is the hosanna of gangrene, the triumphal chant of decay!" J.-K. Huysmans, Trois Primitifs, Œuvres Complètes de J.-K. Huysmans, 18 vols. (Paris: Les Editions G. Crès, 1930), 11: 291-92.

19. "There are convulsions of pleasure at kings' funerals, at the extermination of a people, and one makes war with music, plumes, flags, gold harnesses, a whole ceremonious display to give me greater homage." Flaubert, La Tentation de Saint Antoine, 185.

20. "Oh! How you will lose yourself in my hair, smelling my breasts, marveling at my limbs, and scorched by the pupils of my eyes, in my arms, in a whirlwind...." Flaubert, La Tentation, 37.


23. "Seem unresponsive to light and she rolls her eyes as if coming out of a dream," Flaubert, La Tentation, 89.


26. The image was selected by the artist Armand Gautier, who specialized in painting the insane. André Mellerio Archive, The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.

27. In the article "La foi qui guérit," Charcot diagnosed both Teresa and Francis of Assisi as hysterics able to cure others of hysterical conditions. Jean-Martin Charcot and Paul Richer, Les Démoniaques dans l'art suivi de "La foi qui guérit" (Paris: Macula, 1984): 111-23. Flaubert himself read a biography of Saint Teresa's life in preparation for the final writing of La Tentation de Saint Antoine and would later say that he had experienced during periods of illness all that Saint Teresa had. On saints and hysteria in the late nineteenth century, see Cristina Mazzoni, Saint Hysteria: Neurosis, Mysticism and Gender in European Culture (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).


31. See a letter from Destée to Redon in Lettres ... à Odilon Redon, 178.
32. Seznec, 75.

33. In a letter to George Sand as early as the 1850s, Flaubert had written, "Aesthetics awaits its Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, that great man who demonstrated the viability of monsters ...," quoted in Seznec, 80.

34. "[... seen] into ponds remaining from the flood." Flaubert, La Tentation, 129.

35. "In the distance rise jets of water, spouted by whales, and from the far reaches of the horizon, come the beasts of the sea, like round wineskins, jagged like saws and flat like blades, dragging themselves across the sand." Flaubert, La Tentation, 199.

36. "But it was especially the cell, elementary unit of life, that absorbed Redon's interest." Jean Doin, "Odilon Redon," Mercure de France 60 (July-August 1914): 10. By mid-century the cell had been found to be the fundamental unit of organic structure and thus the conceptual bond that brought together the study of plants and animals. This unified biology into one science. By the mid-1870s, the role of the nucleus, which can be seen in Redon's image, became of central importance in the study of the cell. Due to contemporaneous developments in the microscope, scattered and diverse information about the cell nucleus could be organized.

37. "Finally, he perceives small globular masses, as big as pinheads and covered by eyelashes, shaken by a vibration." Flaubert, La Tentation, 200.

38. "Petite Chronologie," L'Art moderne, June 17, 1888: 199. This album was printed by Bequet in an edition of sixty copies and sold through Laurent Dumont. Forty-five were sold within the first year; the remaining fifteen were bought by Deman and sold in Belgium.

39. Seznec discusses the origin of Flaubert's snakes with human heads and illustrates a plate.

40. Flaubert had read and taken notes on Creuzer's Les Religions de l'Antiquité, among other texts.