

# Lumière

## Lithographs by Odilon Redon

‘What have I put in my works to suggest so many subtleties? I have put in them a little door opening onto a mystery. I have made fictions. It is up to [the viewer] to go further.’

This exhibition explores the theme of light in the lithographs of the French Symbolist artist Odilon Redon (1840-1916). Redon’s innovative approach to printmaking allowed him to create ambiguous yet deeply suggestive images through the exploration of the expressive potential of light and dark.

### Redon’s Childhood and Early Career

Redon was born on 22 April 1840 in rural Bordeaux. He came from a comfortably middle class family and grew up on the family estate of Peyrelebade. Redon was very fond of the countryside of his youth and returned to Peyrelebade many times, until 1897, when the house was finally sold. He later described spending whole days laying on the grass, ‘watching the clouds pass, following with infinite pleasure the magical brightness of their fleeting variations.’ In contrast to this, he remembered himself as a ‘sad and weak’ child, who, through ill health led a solitary existence. Advised against physical or mental exertion, he ‘sought out the shadows.’ This had a huge effect on his early artistic output, with its often sombre, melancholic appearance, and it also stirred Redon’s interest in nature and imagination.

At the age of fifteen Redon began his artistic training, studying drawing under Stanislas Gorin. At seventeen Redon’s father made him begin studying architecture, which he continued in Paris until he failed entrance to the architecture stream at the École des beaux-arts in 1862. More significant was his meeting the botanist Armand Clavaud in 1857. Clavaud was more than simply an authority on science and nature; he introduced the young Redon to the writings of Charles Baudelaire, Charles Darwin, Gustave Flaubert, and Edgar Allen Poe. After failing the architecture exam, Redon spent a brief and unhappy period in Paris studying under Jean-Léon Gérôme. He described himself as ‘tortured’ by the teacher: ‘This teacher drew with authority a stone, a shaft or a column, a table, a chair ... and all of inorganic nature. The pupil saw only the expression, only the expansion of the triumphant feeling of forms.’ Back in Bordeaux, Redon found a more suitable teacher in Rodolphe Bresdin in 1865. Most importantly, Bresdin taught Redon the technique of etching, and was also the first person to

introduce him to lithography. During this period Redon started travelling to Paris and had some success entering an etching and a drawing into the Paris Salon. He also regularly exhibited work with the Société des Amis des Arts de Bordeaux. Redon’s artistic career was then suddenly interrupted by the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, for which he was drafted.



Fig. 1

### Paris and Symbolism

By 1876, Redon had moved permanently to Paris to pursue his career as an artist. He quickly became one of the most important members of the Symbolist avant-garde, emerging just at the point that Redon moved to Paris. It began as a literary movement, with its roots in the writings of Baudelaire, particularly *Les Fleurs du Mal*, an edition for which Redon later produced a frontispiece. The Symbolists were a broad group of writers and artists who rejected the naturalism of Zola and the Impressionists, in favour

of creating works which were mysterious, subjective, and evocative. The name 'Symbolism' was coined by poet Jean Moréas in his article 'Le symbolisme' of September 18, 1886, in *Le Figaro*. He began: 'An enemy of didactic pursuits, of "declamation, of false sensitivity, of objective description," symbolist poetry endeavours to clothe the Idea in a form perceptible to the senses that nevertheless does not constitute an ultimate goal in itself, but, while helping to convey the Idea, remains subordinate.' Redon's views on his art corresponded well to this literary manifesto. Indeed, Redon said the aim of his works was to 'inspire, they do not define. They determine nothing. They place us, just as music does, in the ambiguous world of the indeterminate.' Above all Symbolist art was always ambiguous, indeterminate, and subjective.

Redon found particularly good friends in Stéphane Mallarmé and Joris-Karl Huysmans. They met and corresponded regularly and shared similar ideas on art and interest in subjects like spiritualism, mysticism, and the occult. Artists and writers met at Mallarmé's house on Tuesday evenings to discuss their ideas, and this gave Redon the chance to firmly establish himself amongst the avant-garde. Huysmans especially was a great promoter of Redon's work. He won Redon a huge amount of publicity and his inclusion in *A Rebours* firmly established the artist as part of the Symbolist avant-garde. Huysmans went on to encourage friends and acquaintances to buy prints. For example, he wrote to Redon asking him to send a signed *Profil de Lumière* to the writer Robert Caze.

At the same time Symbolism was establishing itself in Paris, the movement spread to the avant-garde in Brussels. In 1886 Huysmans drew the Belgian author Jules Destrée's attention to Redon. Destrée, in turn, introduced his literary friends Edmond Picard and Emile Verhaeren to Redon. From then on Redon became the most significant artist for the Belgian Symbolists and he regularly submitted works to their Salons.

### Redon and the Lithographic Revival

Redon worked solely in black and white for many years, until the 1890s when he made the move to pastels and oils. Having begun to produce etchings under the tutelage of Rodolphe Bresdin in the 1860s, he moved quickly onto charcoal, and then lithography. His career was shaped by his successive exploration of these various media. Redon initially saw lithography simply as a means of multiplying his drawings. Lithography's status among artists had recently suffered due to its associations with commercial applications. The recent development of the photomechanical technique of *gillotage*, however, gave the traditional technique a new appeal to artists. Once he started working with the medium, Redon was intrigued by the variety of effects he could achieve, and he became a prominent figure in the revival of the Fine Art print. A major aspect of the revival of lithography as an artistic medium was the concept of the original print. This was the idea that

artists should do all their own work, rather than just pass it to the printers for reproduction. This ensured the credibility of the final prints and made them desirable works of art for buyers. Redon did, indeed, do much of the work on his own, preparing, working and re-working the image until it was ready. He left only the final stage of printing to the professional lithographers. This led to the printers being increasingly low profile and, as can be seen by the prints in the exhibition, most plates do not bear the name of the printer in the margin, as commonly seen in French lithographs. Instead, Redon signed his work, as a final reminder of the hand of the artist.

Not only did Redon revive lithography, but he used it in increasingly experimental and innovative ways, creating works that responded to the nature of the medium, and images whose meaning was inextricably linked to subtle stylistic and technical choices made by the artist. What was particular to Redon's lithographs was his deeply emotional and spiritual reaction to the interplay of light and dark, which became the focus of the expressive power of his prints. He used the strong juxtaposition of light and dark to create horrific beings, whilst retaining mystery in the subtle ambiguity of the shadows. Redon became obsessed with the qualities of the black ink. He called it 'the agent of the spirit more than the splendid colour of ... the prism' and started to produce blacks with a unique, deep and mysterious luminosity.

### The Lithographic Album

The format in which the prints were issued also bears great significance. A number of prints, such as the *Profil de Lumière* (no. 16) remained as stand-alone works. On the other hand, lithographic albums offered Redon a new way to present his work. They appealed to the literary tastes of his circle and introduced new layers of complex meaning and ambiguity.

Two of Redon's early albums, *Hommage à Goya* and *La Nuit*, dated 1885 and 1886, respectively, are represented in the exhibition. The albums were completely the invention of the artist, who used the format to produce sets of images based around a vague theme. This allowed him great scope to experiment with his imagery. He also manipulated the format of albums, using literary titles and mysterious captions, to help promote his work and produce an artistic response to the literary interests of the Symbolists.

The majority of the lithographs in the exhibition come from the second and third of the three albums that Redon based on Gustave Flaubert's highly regarded novel, *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* (The Temptation of Saint Anthony). The story tells of the hermit saint's temptation by the Devil whilst in the Egyptian desert. Saint Anthony's manifold visions of ancient gods, manifestations of the seven deadly sins, monsters and heretics, among others, were, according to Redon, a 'mine' for him. These albums, dated 1889 and 1896, were in no way the

result of collaboration, as the novel was first published in 1874 and Flaubert had died in 1880. Equally, these prints cannot be called illustrations as Redon does not pictorially recreate the narrative. Even the brief extracts from the novel that Redon printed as captions under the images were suggestive and heightened the emotiveness of the works, rather than placing them in the narrative. Instead, Redon produced a pictorial response to Flaubert's text that expanded and developed his lithographic output and refined the symbolic and emotive light of what Redon called his 'noirs'.

Redon only printed his works in small editions, which helped to promote their status as art works. In addition to being generally for sale, usually through a publisher, he entered them into the Salons of the avant-garde artists in Paris and Belgium. Many prints went to friends from the Symbolist milieu of artists and writers, as well as critics and patrons. Significantly, Redon signed his lithographs in a number of ways. The plates of the second Saint Anthony album (*À Gustave Flaubert*) had Redon's signature printed as part of the image, identifying them as autonomous art works that could be sold or exhibited individually. The third album bore signatures, often in inventive (see nos. 10 & 30) and conspicuous (see nos. 4 & 9) places. These were all added in graphite. Usually, if prints were signed by hand, the signature was added afterwards in the margin outside the picture (see no. 28). Perhaps Redon felt this gave a more personal touch, and the variance made each print undoubtedly unique.

---

## TECHNICAL TERMS

Lithography is 'a suggestive art that owes much to the stimulus that the material itself exerts on the artist.'

### Transfer Lithography

Redon used the technique of transfer lithography to produce the vast majority of his prints, after the process was suggested to him by Henri Fantin-Latour. Lithography is based on the natural repulsion of water and oil. In transfer lithography the artist draws directly onto paper which has been treated with a gelatine-based substance. This is subsequently dampened and pressed onto the stone (traditionally limestone). The stone is washed with water and printing ink is applied with a roller. This oily ink affixes to the drawn lines, but is resisted by the damp parts of the stone. The image is then printed on a sheet of paper. Because no pressure is applied at the edges of the stone, there is no 'plate mark' around the edge of the image.

There are several advantages to using transfer paper rather than drawing directly on the surface of the stone. Redon had a particularly fraught relationship with the stone. He wrote: 'The stone is harsh, unpleasant, like a person who has whims and fits ... The future of lithography lies in the resources

... of paper, which transmits so perfectly to the stone the finest and moving inflections of the spirit. The stone will become passive.' Redon did work on the stone though, and frequently altered the image after it had been transferred. He also worked reductively, often scraping away the black ink to give the effect of his images bursting out of the darkness, or of fine rays of light breaking through the shadows. Redon used a number of tools as scrapers, including razor blades and scalpels. The transfer paper was more manageable for artists than the heavy stone and also more flexible, as alterations could be made and mistakes altered. The final image is in a way more truthful to the original image as it appears the same way round, whereas if the artist draws directly on the stone the printed image is reversed.

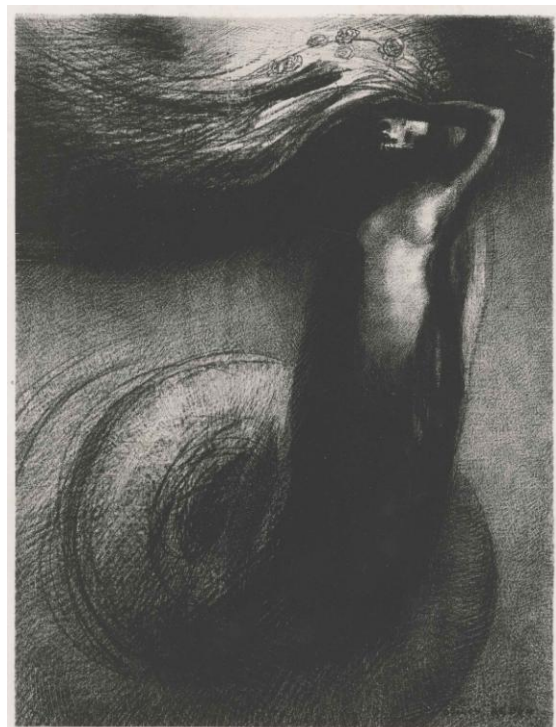


Fig. 2

### Inks

The artist uses a mixture of black pigment and grease to draw the initial image onto the transfer paper or stone. The medium exists in different forms, which produce varying effects. In its solid form, there is the lithographic pencil, crayon or chalk which produces various thicknesses of lines and allows subtle tonal gradations. The ink can also be applied in liquid form, called a tusche. This has to be painted on with a brush and produces a fine, smooth surface. For Redon, the artist's materials were 'agents that ... collaborate with him, and also have something to tell in the fiction he will accomplish. The material reveals secrets, [and] it has its genius.' Redon engaged emotionally with the lithographic medium. Whereas he endows the stone with a difficult human temperament, he bestows intelligence on the ink.

## Paper

All of the prints in the exhibition are printed on *chine collé*. This type of paper is made from a very thin oriental paper that was laid onto a heavier European paper before printing. The *chine* or China paper was made from hand-beaten bark pulp (mainly bamboo). In order to make this textured surface smooth and remove imperfections, it was usually brushed before being treated. However, Redon often left the paper in its original state to create a textured background to his prints. The fine chine paper was cut to fit the exact dimensions of the print, dampened, and then laid over the image on the stone. The European paper (Redon used thick white wove stock without watermark) was then dampened and laid over the chine paper. Finally, this was passed through the lithographic press, which transferred the image onto the chine and bound the two layers of paper together. The sizes of the printed images vary greatly, but the sheets were cut to the same sizes according to the format of the album. For this reason there are some very small images on large sheets of paper (see no. 18, for example).

Redon occasionally used expensive Japan paper for de luxe editions of prints. This is a lustrous paper made from mulberry bark, which produces images with a greater richness, depth of tone, and luminosity.

## Printers

The printing of lithographs was a collaborative process that always caused Redon certain anxieties. He called his relationship with the lithographers a 'temporary, badly matched union' and he was moved to exclaim: 'how I have suffered with the printers!' Redon did the preparatory work of drawing the image and transferring it onto the stone, but then relied on the technical skill of the lithographer to make the prints. Usually trial proofs were made and once the artist was happy and did not want to make any further alterations on the stone, he would approve it for printing. Redon's use of transfer paper and trial proofs meant he had to spend very little time at the lithographer's, the busy workshop atmosphere of which he abhorred.

The works on display here were printed by several lithographers. Fantin-Latour introduced Redon to the lithographic firm Lemer cier et C<sup>ie</sup>, and they printed all his work from 1879 to early 1887 (see no. 16). Lemer cier was the largest lithographic firm in Paris. They had 70 presses for crayon work, 20 for tinted lithography, 30 for chromolithography, and 12 for 'gravure sur pierre' (lithography in the engraved manner). Even by 1869 they employed 300 workmen. Blanchard printed all the Saint Anthony plates here, except nos. 10, 17, 33 & 35 which were printed by Clot (who had worked for Lemer cier until about 1895). Both Clot and Blanchard worked on no. 2. Other prints in the exhibition were printed by Becquet. Redon's use of numerous printers reflects his discomfort with the workshop atmosphere.

Lemer cier was probably far too big and well-known for Redon, so he went to various smaller establishments.

Amy Marquis, Curator of the *Lumière* exhibition

---

## Selected Further Reading

**Bacou, Roseline.** *Lettres de Gauguin ... [et al.] à Odilon Redon*. Paris: J. Corti. 1960.

**Dorra, Henri.** *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology*. London: University of California Press. 1995.

**Druick, Douglas. et al.** *Odilon Redon 1840-1916*. London: Art Institute of Chicago, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, Royal Academy of Arts, London in association with Thames and Hudson. 1994.

**Flaubert, Gustave.** Translated by Hearn, Lafcadio. *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*. New York: The Modern Library. 1992.

**Gamboni, Dario.** *La Plume et le Pinceau*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit. 1989.

**Gilmore, Pat, ed.** *Lasting Impression: Lithography as art*. University of Pennsylvania Press. 1988.

**Gott, Ted.** *The Enchanted Stone: The Graphic Worlds of Odilon*. Melbourne: the National Gallery of Victoria. 1990.

**Larson, Barbara.** *The Dark Side of Nature: Science, Society and the Fantastic Work of Odilon Redon*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press. 2005.

**Redon, Odilon.** *A soi-même*. Paris: Librairie José Corti. 1979.

---

## CATALOGUE

All the prints on display were bequeathed to The Fitzwilliam Museum by Campbell Dodgson in 1949.

All lithographs printed on *chine collé*.

### Explanation of catalogue information

All measurements are in millimetres, height preceding width.

Imprint refers to text printed in the margin

u.l. / u.c. / u.r. = upper left / centre / right

m.l. / m.c. / m.r. = middle left / centre / right

l.l. / l.m. / l.r. = lower left / centre / right

Mellerio (M.) refers to the catalogue numbers given in André Mellerio, *Odilon Redon*, Société Pour l'Etude de la Gravure Française, Paris, 1913

### 1 Christ

1887

330 x 270

Printed by Lemer cier et C<sup>ie</sup>

Imprint l.l. margin: à 25 exemplaires. / CHRIST; l.r. margin: Imp. A. Lemer cier, Paris

Printed signature in u.l. of image: ODILON REDON

Signed in graphite l.c. margin: *Odilon Redon*  
M.71

Museum Accession Number: P.304-1949

Redon submitted this work, along with *Profil de Lumière* (no. 16) to the official Salon of 1887 at the Musée des beaux-arts, but to his apparent disappointment they were both rejected. It was printed as a stand-alone work in an edition of 25 impressions, one of which Redon is known to have given to Huysmans.

Redon first approached this subject in charcoal and later returned to it in oil. This is the most striking and dramatic depiction. The strong chiaroscuro and use of thick crayon to produce bold features gives the head a sculptural character. A strong sense of suffering and melancholy is created by the harsh light hitting the left of the face, which is surrounded in the lower right corner by the dense black of the wreath. This contrasts with the upwards-gazing eye, an important motif in Redon's *noirs*, appearing almost to float freely on the white paper. This seems to symbolise the ascension of Christ's soul, while the mortal body is held in darkness.

**2 Antoine: Quel est le but de tout cela? Le Diable: Il n'y a pas de but!**

(Anthony: What is the point of all this? The Devil: There is no point!)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 18 of 24  
311 x 250

Printed by Clot (setting on stone) and Blanchard (final impression on paper)

Imprint l.l. margin: *Antoine: Quel est le but de tout cela? Le Diable: Il n'y a pas de but!*

Signed in graphite u.l. of image: *ODILON REDON*  
M.151

P.331-1949

This caption is from a particularly relevant passage in Flaubert's text: 'hallucinating, Saint Anthony rises further and further above the solar system, illuminated by its 'innumerable lights' and 'luminous vapours'. Beside him the devil, with his giant black wings outstretched, challenges Anthony's concept of God.

Redon's Saint Anthony appears particularly transfixed by what he observes. This sense of sadness and isolation commonly evoked in Redon's early *noirs* (see also no. 20) is often linked to his own experience as an infirm child growing up in solitude in rural Médoc.

**3 La Mort: Mon ironie dépasse toutes les autres!**

(Death: my irony surpasses all else!)

*À Gustave Flaubert*, 1889, plate 3 of 6  
260 x 197

Printed by Becquet

Imprint l.l. margin: *La Mort: Mon ironie dépasse toutes les autres!*

Signature printed l.r. of image: *ODILON REDON*

M.97

P.309-1949

This extraordinary image prompted Stéphane Mallarmé, Symbolist poet and close friend of Redon since 1883, to write in a letter to the artist: 'I am stupefied by your Death ... I do not believe any artist has ever made, or poet dreamed, an image so absolute!' The perplexing and disturbing nature of Redon's image is heightened by the spatial complexity used to create it. The coil of the serpentine tail appears almost flat until the body rises up on the right. The skull is then lit from another, unnatural, angle, and finally the hair and roses at once burst forth, and remain flat on the picture plane.

Redon creates a disturbingly fragmented image of a figure emerging from the dense ink, with the skull of Death and the female body of Lust. Instead of a crown of roses, Redon shows them forming part of what must be the flowing hair of Lust along the top of the image. Moving beyond Flaubert's text, this image of the femme-fatale has been seen as a warning of the dangers of syphilis.

**4 Je suis toujours la grande Isis! Nul n'a encore soulevé mon voile! Mon fruit est le soleil!**

(I am still the great Isis! None has yet lifted my veil! My fruit is the Sun!)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 16 of 24  
280 x 204

Printed by Blanchard

Imprint l.l. margin: *Je suis toujours la grande Isis! Nul n'a encore soulevé mon voile! Mon fruit est le soleil!*

Signed in graphite m.l. of image: *ODILON REDON*  
M.149

P.329-1949

Here light is a source of power and vitality. Isis, the Egyptian goddess of motherhood and fertility is depicted holding her son, Horus. A creature is crouching in the lower right corner. According to the text, this is Cynocephalos, the dog-headed baboon from Egyptian mythology. Flaubert uses it to symbolise death, and its black colour enhances this, together with its association with the jackal-headed god, Anubis. In Flaubert's text Isis is shrouded in a long, black veil, but in Redon's interpretation she seems to be engulfed by a mysterious black cloud or smoke, which obliterates her face and contrasts with the piercing white light on the left. Redon has signed the print in graphite in this area of light. Each of the prints displayed here from the third album is signed in graphite. Redon may have done this to give a sense of uniqueness and originality as he developed the credibility of the fine art print. This print was exhibited on its own in the Salon des Cents, organised by the avant-garde journal *La Plume* in April 1896.

**5 Il tombe dans l'abîme, la tête en bas**  
(He falls, head-first, into the abyss)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 17 of 24  
276 x 212

Printed by Blanchard

Imprint l.l. margin: *Il tombe dans l'abîme, la tête en bas*

Signed in graphite u.l. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.150

P.330-1949

This plate shows Redon developing a new motif in his imagery, the ascending chariot, which he would return to in his later work in colour (see his painting *The Chariot of Apollo*, displayed in Gallery 5). Apollo was the Roman god of the sun. According to mythology, every day he would drive his chariot across the sky to give light to the world. This scene depicts the story of Apollo's son, Phaethon, taking the chariot, losing control, and being thrown down towards the earth.

As in later representations, Redon flattens the pictorial space. The fine lines of the chariot and horses occupy a perplexing space as they are flattened between the velvety expanse of black at the front of the picture plane, broken only by Phaethon's outstretched arm, and the smooth white beyond.

**6 La Mort: C'est moi qui te rends sérieuse; enlaçons-nous**

(Death: It is I who makes you serious; let us embrace each other)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 20 of 24  
303 x 211

Printed by Blanchard

Imprint l.l. margin: *La Mort: C'est moi qui te rends sérieuse; enlaçons-nous*

Signed in graphite u.l. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.153

P.333-1949

This print is stylistically similar to no. 5. The success of *La Mort* of 1889 (no. 3) perhaps prompted Redon to return to this scene and create a new version. A swathe of light is left in the wake of the femme-fatale figure of Lust, with the luminous black ink seeming to spread endlessly into the background.

The caption is taken from the same passage in Flaubert's text that Redon depicted in no. 3, and is perhaps more fitted to that image. This shows how the images were personal responses to Flaubert's writing, rather than descriptive illustrations. In this image the figures are separate, and Death, staring straight at the viewer, seems to be holding up Lust, in what has been thought to symbolise the threat of syphilis prevalent at the time.

**7 Saint-Antoine ... à travers ses longs cheveux qui lui couvraient la figure, j'ai cru reconnaître Ammonaria**

(Saint Anthony: Beneath her long hair, which covered her face, I thought I recognised Ammonaria)

*À Gustave Flaubert*, 1889, plate 1 of 6

287 x 230

Printed by Becquet

Imprint l.l. margin: *Saint-Antoine ... à travers ses longs cheveux qui lui couvraient la figure, j'ai cru reconnaître Ammonaria*

Signature printed l.r. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.95

P.310-1949

In this scene Saint Anthony sees a woman being flogged in Alexandria. Flaubert refers to her as Ammonaria, a virgin who suffered martyrdom in Alexandria. The composition is relatively simple and relies essentially on Redon's ability to communicate through the variety of textures and effects that he could produce with lithographic ink. Most striking is the different handling of the figures. The flogger is created from a thick, brutal black line. Curiously, there seems to be a figure outlined on the wall on the left behind the flogger. In contrast, the woman is posed elegantly, her form revealed through subtle gradations of light and dark. Redon made a separate edition of ten proofs (without the letters) of this print, revealing the importance he placed on it. Furthermore, he exhibited this plate in May 1888 in the Paris Salon, in anticipation of the album.

**8 La Vieille: Que crains-tu? Un large trou noir! Il est vide peut-être?**

(The Old Woman: What are you afraid of? A wide black hole! Perhaps it is a void?)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 19 of 24  
162 x 108

Printed by Blanchard

Imprint l.l. margin: *La Vieille: Que crains-tu? Un large trou noir! Il est vide peut-être?*

Signed in graphite m.l. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.152

P.332-1949

Redon found inspiration in Flaubert's evocative description of the Old Woman:

A shroud knotted about her head, hangs down, together with her [long] white hair ... The brilliancy of her ivory-coloured teeth make her earthly skin darker still. The orbits of her eyes are full of shadow; and far back within them two flames vacillate, like the lamps of sepulchres.

The black light in her eyes is a symbol of the Devil, and her skeletal body hints at the fact that she is about to transform into the figure of Death. This theme of transformation was perhaps Redon's reason for creating a flowing, decorative background. Decorative imagery became an important aspect of Redon's colour work, but the beginnings of it are found here. The decorative space also contrasts with the Old Woman's empty black eyes.

**9 Dans l'ombre, des gens pleurent et prient entourés d'autres qui les exhortent**

(In the shadow people are weeping and praying, surrounded by others who are exhorting them)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 6 of 24  
261 x 214

Printed by Blanchard

Imprint l.l. margin: *Dans l'ombre, des gens pleurent et prient entourés d'autres qui les exhortent*

Signed in graphite u.c. in image: ODILON REDON  
M.139

P.319-1949

Redon imagined this scene as though looking through Saint Anthony's eyes observing his prison. Redon had always been drawn to the theme of imprisonment and captivity, and it corresponded to the sombre imagery of the early *noirs*. Perhaps this is why he chose a simple scene and produced a relatively straight-forward representation. The window which breaks up the oppressive darkness of the wall, is, however, used to full symbolic effect. The light at the window symbolises the freedom and joy of the outside world, as opposed to the torments suffered by the captives. This light is, however, as distant and unreachable as the sun that Redon's Fallen Angel gazes at (no. 20). When drawing on the transfer paper, Redon put grainy backing paper behind it to create the textured half-light in which the figures are barely distinguishable from the setting. Textured backing is visible in other prints, especially nos. 25 & 26. It is markedly different from the smooth, flowing black of the interior of no. 10.

**10 Et partout ce sont des Colonnes de basalte, ... la lumière tombe des voûtes**

(And on every side are columns of basalt ... the light falls from the vaulted roof)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 3 of 24  
242 x 191

Printed by Clot

Imprint l.l. margin: *Et partout ce sont des Colonnes de basalte, ... la lumière tombe des voûtes*

Signed in graphite u.r. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.136

P.316-1949

This view of the Palace in Alexandria creates a shifting space out of the fluid interplay of light and dark. Unlike the grainy, textured blacks and gradual tonal variations found elsewhere (compare no. 9), light and dark areas appear flat and strongly delineated. The ink was brushed on rather than drawn with the crayon and this is what has given the black its liquidity. Redon used the fluid appearance of the ink to create a face emerging from the shadows between the columns. The difference in style can be linked to Redon having used the accomplished and inventive lithographer, Auguste Clot to print this image. The background too is clear and untextured, so the light similarly flows in through the portal-like

window. Rather than gradual tonal gradations, the black and white is sharply juxtaposed, giving a decorative appearance to the architectural space.

**11 Et il distingue une plaine aride et mamelonneuse**

(And he discerns an arid, knoll-covered plain)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 7 of 24  
248 x 195

Printed by Blanchard

Imprint l.l. margin: *Et il distingue une plaine aride et mamelonneuse*

Signed in graphite l.r. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.140

P.320-1949

After leaving the blackness of his prison (no. 9), Saint Anthony opens his eyes and 'the darkness brightens' to reveal the landscape in full light.

This distinct and finely drawn landscape is strongly reminiscent of Redon's early etchings begun under the tutelage of the etcher, engraver and lithographer, Rodolphe Bresdin, whom he met in 1865 in his studio in rural Bordeaux. It was Bresdin who encouraged Redon to explore and master the medium of etching and revealed to him the imaginations of Dürer and Rembrandt through their engravings and etchings.

**12 Je me suis enfoncé dans la solitude. J'habitais l'arbre derrière moi**

(I plunged into solitude. I dwell in the tree behind me)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 9 of 24  
298 x 224

Printed by Blanchard

Imprint l.l. margin: *Je me suis enfoncé dans la solitude. J'habitais l'arbre derrière moi*

Signed in graphite l.r. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.142

P.322-1949

Recalling his youth, Redon commented that 'the woods with century-old trees' were places of 'supernatural tales' where witches still existed.

What is distinct about this representation is its mysterious, anthropomorphic quality, with the black hole gaping open like a mouth. Redon transformed Saint Anthony's dwelling into a sinister, mystical entity, unlike any other, creating a terrifying and consuming symbol of solitude.

**13 Des fleurs tombent, et la tête d'un python paraît**

(Flowers fall and the head of a python appears)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 5 of 24  
261 x 198

Printed by Blanchard

Imprint l.l. margin: *Des fleurs tombent, et la tête d'un python paraît*

Signed in graphite l.r. of image: ODILON REDON

M.138  
P.318-1949

A deep, velvety blackness occupies the majority of the print. The album format meant that Redon had the scope to experiment and produce unusual and obscure compositions in which the subject is only discernible with the aid of the caption quoting from the novel. The head can then be seen to rise up into the dense black from its coiled body and the flowers at the bottom. Here the caption is taken from a brief part of the story, when the Devil, in the guise of Hilarion, Saint Anthony's former pupil, leads him into a cavern with the Ophites. The ancient and mystical Ophite sect believed that Sophia animated man with a ray of light and sent the genie-serpent Ophis to give him knowledge of heavenly things.

**14 Mes baisers ont le gout d'un fruit qui se fondrait dans ton cœur! ... Tu me dédaignes! Adieu!**

(My kisses have the taste of fruit which would melt in your heart! ...You disdain me! Farewell!)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 4 of 24  
196 x 163

Printed by Blanchard

Imprint l.l. margin: *Mes baisers ont le gout d'un fruit qui se fondrait dans ton cœur! ... Tu me dédaignes! Adieu!*

Signed in graphite u.l. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.137

P.317-1949

Redon depicts the Queen of Sheba with little suggestion of the lavish exoticism described by Flaubert.

Subtle tonal gradations and fine lines create a delicate and sensual profile, in a manner influenced by Redon's study of the Old Masters in the Louvre, particularly Leonardo da Vinci. Redon wrote of Leonardo that he created 'suggestive art' through 'mysterious plays of shadows and rhythms of lines conceived mentally.'

**15 Saint-Antoine: Au secours, mon Dieu!**  
(Saint Anthony: Help me, O my God!)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 2 of 24  
215 x 130

Printed by Blanchard

Imprint l.l. margin: *Saint-Antoine: Au secours, mon Dieu!*

Signed in graphite u.l. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.135

P.315-1949

Anthony is depicted contemplating temptation and the order and unity of the universe. The source of the light before him is unclear. It may symbolise the light of the universe, as in no. 2, but it may also represent the clarity and harmony achieved through contemplation.

Redon had previously drawn the heads of figures and Sphinxes emerging from rock faces, and the profile of Saint Anthony has something of the steady gaze of the Sphinx. What distinguishes it is

the fine line of the profile, which forms the axis of the composition, as is also the case in no. 16.

**16 Profil de Lumière**  
(Profile of Light)

1886

340 x 240

Printed by Lemercier et C<sup>ie</sup>

Imprint l.l. margin: *PROFIL DE LUMIÈRE / à 50 exemplaires*; l.r. margin: *Imp. Lemercier et C<sup>ie</sup> Paris*

Signed in graphite u.c. on image: ODILON REDON  
M.61

P.300-1949

Redon took inspiration from the Italian artist Piero della Francesca's fresco cycle *The Legend of the True Cross* (c.1452), and this profile is inspired by Piero's depiction of the Queen of Sheba. Fifteenth-century Italian artists, known as the 'Italian Primitives', were held in high regard in Symbolist circles, and Redon's peers would have been aware of the pictorial source once the connection had been made. The source is not obvious just from the *Profil*, so when it was first identified by Joris-Karl Huysmans, he must have had some prior knowledge which led him to identify it.

Redon made this elegant, melancholic profile into a symbol of light, which mysteriously, perhaps spiritually, seems to emanate from the face. He revealed: 'The title is not justified unless it is vague, indeterminate, and aspiring, even confusingly equivocal.' The mystical quality is given credence by the fact Redon originally thought of calling this image 'The Fairy'. This, however, proved too concrete, and Redon changed it to a more abstract and symbolic title.

**17 Voici la Bonne-Déesse, l'Idéenne des montagnes**

(Here is the Good Goddess, the Idaean mother of the mountains)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 15 of 24  
148 x 129

Printed by Clot

Imprint l.l. margin: *Voici la Bonne-Déesse, l'Idéenne des montagnes*

Signed in graphite u.r. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.148

P.328-1949

Redon's image of Cybele, known to the Romans as the Good Goddess, draws very little from Flaubert's rich text. Cybele personified earthly abundance, and was a goddess of mountains (where she was born), nature, and animals. Cybele's strong frame is depicted against the mountains over which she presides. Her unusually angled pose reflects the angularity of the mountains and her hair-line follows their line. The forms of her body and clothes are interlocked with those of the rocks, and all focus is on the rays of light radiating from her head, seemingly symbolising the fertility of the earth.



**18 Hélène (Ennoia)**  
(Helena – Ennoia)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 10 of 24  
93 x 83

Printed by Blanchard

Imprint l.l. margin: *Hélène (Ennoia)*

Signed in graphite u.l. in margin: ODILON REDON  
M.143

P.323-1949

Another experiment in the variety of images Redon could produce, this print is a fraction of the size of the others, yet was printed in the album on the same sized paper. The image is deceptive in its apparent simplicity. Simon Magus, a sorcerer who converted to Christianity and committed various heresies, developed a doctrine in which Ennoia was the embodiment of God's first thought. She created the angels who then imprisoned her on earth. Appearing in many forms, Simon recognised her in the slave prostitute Helena of Tyre, who became his constant companion. Her pose is similar to Redon's depiction of other captive and alluring women (see no. 7).

**19 La fleur du marécage, une tête humaine et triste**

(The marsh flower, a head human and sad)

*Hommage à Goya* (Homage to Goya), 1885,  
plate 2 of 6  
275 x 205

Printed by Lemercier et C<sup>ie</sup>

Imprint u.c. margin : *Planche II* / l.l. margin: *La fleur du marécage, une tête humaine et triste*

Signed l.l. of image: ODILON REDON

M.55

P.200-1951(II)

Redon admired Goya. He would have been aware of Charles Baudelaire's words: '[Goya's] monsters are born viable, harmonious. No one has ventured further than he in the direction of the *possible* absurd. All those distortions, those bestial faces ... are impregnated with *humanity* ... The point of junction between the real and the fantastic is impossible to grasp; it is a vague frontier.' This strangely harmonious and emotive image is created from seemingly disparate elements. The influence of Redon's mentor, the botanist Armand Clavaud, is clear. He wrote that Clavaud 'searched ... for that life which lies between animal and plant, this flower or this being, this mysterious element which is animal during ... the day and only under the effects of light.' Fine rays of light emitted by the head are created by casting incisions through the black lithographic ink, as is Redon's signature.

Redon wrote his own evocative captions for this album, which together read as a poem:

In my dream I saw in the sky a face of mystery,  
The marsh flower, a head human and sad,  
A madman in a dismal landscape,  
There were also embryonic beings,  
A Strange Juggler,

Upon waking I saw the Goddess of the  
Intelligible with her severe and hard profile.

**20 L'Ange perdu ouvrit alors des ailes noires**  
(The lost angel then opened its black wings)

*La Nuit* (Night), 1886, plate 3 of 6  
258 x 215

Printed by Lemercier et C<sup>ie</sup>

Imprint u.l. margin : PL. III / l.l. margin: *L'Ange perdu ouvrit alors des ailes noires* / l.r. margin: *Imp. Lemercier & C<sup>ie</sup> Paris*

Signed in graphite u.l. on image: ODILON REDON  
M.64

P.201-1951(III)

*La Nuit* was an album of six plates produced by Redon, in an edition of fifty sets. He wrote his own lyrical captions for this and the Goya album (no. 19). The lost or fallen angel was a well-known Baudelairean motif at the time, and the subject of several early works by Redon. This lithograph is an almost exact repetition of a charcoal dating from the 1870s. In the drawing the angel is shackled and looks with hopeful eyes at the sun. Here, the light is dimmer and the black wings are fuller, darker and heavy. The angel's gently melancholic expression suggests an acceptance of his damned state as he gazes regretfully at a distant sun.

Redon's captions for *La Nuit* read as a poem when put together:

To Old Age,  
The man was alone in a night landscape,  
The lost angel then opened its black wings,  
The chimera gazed at all things with fear,  
The priestesses were waiting,  
And the searcher was engaged in an infinite search.

**21 Des Esseintes**

Frontispiece for *À Rebours* (Against Nature), 1888  
129 x 92

Printed by Becquet

Imprint u.r. margin: *DES ESSEINTES\_100 Exemp.*

Signed in graphite l.r. margin: *Odilon Redon*

M.82

P.303-1949

Joris-Karl Huysmans, a friend and avid supporter of Redon, commissioned this frontispiece for a special edition of his decadent novel *À Rebours*, first published in 1884. The book described the solitary existence and singular tastes of the aesthete Des Esseintes. Redon depicts the sickly character slumped in a chair, surrounded by his books and other possessions, which he spends the course of the novel surveying. One of Des Esseintes' pleasures was collecting Redon's noirs:

They contained the most fantastic visions ...  
Sometimes Redon's subjects actually seemed to be borrowed from the nightmares of science ...  
creating a new type of fantasy, born of sickness

and delirium ... [Des Esseintes turned] to gaze at a radiant figure, which ... stood out calm and serene: the figure of Melancholy, seated ... before a disk-like sun.

**22 Elle se montre à lui, dramatique et grandiose avec sa chevelure de prêtresse druidique**

(Dramatic and grandiose, she shows herself to him, with hair like a druid princess)

*Le Juré* (The Juror), 1887, plate 2 of 7

192 x 143

Printed by Becquet

Signed in graphite l.r. margin: *ODILON REDON*

M.80

P.302-1949

*Le Juré* was the first album that Redon produced specifically based on a literary text. Redon first drew these images in charcoal and Picard displayed them in the Brussels Salon of 1887 while he gave a reading of the text. The seven lithographs were first printed with the text of Edmond Picard's monodrama *Le Juré* in an edition of 100 copies, and then in twenty separate sets (with the plates reordered) in the familiar album format in Paris the following year. Writer and critic Picard was one of the most important members of the Belgian avant-garde and a co-founder of the journal *l'Art Moderne*. In *Le Juré*, he attacked the Belgian judicial system. A juror wrongly convicts a man and is haunted by darkly morbid visions until he finally commits suicide.

**23 Les Ténèbres**

(Darkness)

Frontispiece for *Les Ténèbres* (Darkness), 1892

198 x 123

Printed by Becquet

Proof before the letters

Signed in graphite l.l. margin: *Odilon Redon*

M.121

P.301-1949

*Les Ténèbres* was a volume of poetry by the Belgian, Iwan Gilkin. The poet was more than happy with Redon's interpretation and wrote to the artist: 'This marvellous female demon, who bears with such gentle melancholy, at the fall of night, the baleful cauldron in which bubble the poisons of darkness. I could not imagine a more splendid illustration of the dark dreams which I strove to capture in my verse.'

This frontispiece appeared in an edition of 140 copies of the book printed on china paper (as it is here) and in a de luxe edition of ten printed on Japan paper (at twice the price: 30 francs). Redon rose to great popularity amongst the Belgian Symbolists and began exhibiting at their Salons in 1886. For this frontispiece he took inspiration from the poem, Thought, which begins:

The black angel handed me the cup of dark onyx  
Where a cerebral liquid bubbled sinisterly  
I drank down into the tomb of my mouth

O, the charm of terror, the splendour of despair!

**24 À Gustave Flaubert**

*À Gustave Flaubert*, 1889, Frontispiece

258 x 203

Printed by Becquet

Imprint: *A GUSTAVE FLAUBERT six dessins pour la TENTATION DE ST. ANTOINE par ODILON REDON*

Unsigned

M.94

P.307-1949

This album of six lithographs was Redon's second series based on Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*. It was printed in an edition of 60 sets, which allowed Redon to sell a modest number; distribute others amongst friends, patrons and critics; and retain a few for individual exhibition. Despite the title, Flaubert never lived to see Redon's *Tentation* albums, having died in 1880. Flaubert's name is printed noticeably large in comparison to Redon, hinting at the tremendous popularity of the writer, with whom Redon gladly associated himself. This dramatic image is the only one in the album that features the Saint. The scene depicts the moment (just before that in no. 2) towards the end of the novel, when the Devil whisks Anthony up above the earth.

**25 Une longue chrysalide couleur de sang**

(A long chrysalis, the colour of blood)

*À Gustave Flaubert*, 1889, plate 2 of 6

220 x 185

Printed by Becquet

Imprint l.l. margin: *Une longue chrysalide couleur de sang*

Unsigned

M.96

P.311-1949

Saint Anthony is led up a staircase in 'complete darkness' until he enters a room and sees the chrysalis, 'with a human head surrounded by rays.' As in no. 17, Redon disregarded the detailed description in the text and focused on the head and the light emanating from it. The chrysalis is Knouphus, one of the manifestations of the supreme deity and creator in the mystical doctrine of Gnosticism. The term Gnostic is taken from the Greek, meaning knowledge, and refers to an early mystical belief system that combined Christianity with Greek and Oriental beliefs. The light symbolises mystical spiritual contemplation, which increasingly fascinated Redon. The head resting on the plinth, which Mallarmé aptly described as having been 'put to sleep on the block' is reminiscent of Redon's early depictions of the head of John the Baptist on a plate.

**26 Les Sciapodes: La tête le plus bas possible, c'est le secret du bonheur!**

(The Sciapods: The head as low as possible, that is the secret of happiness!)

*À Gustave Flaubert*, 1889, plate 6 of 6  
277 x 210  
Printed by Becquet  
Imprint l.l. margin: Les Sciapodes: *La tête le plus bas possible, c'est le secret du bonheur!*  
Signature printed l.r. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.100  
P.314-1949

Several of the prints from the 1889 album have creatures entering the picture from different angles (see nos. 27 & 32) and their cropped forms heighten the sense of mystery. Flaubert introduced the Sciapods as part of a sequence of monsters. Redon's sciapod, however, bears little resemblance to Flaubert's mythical dwarf-like creature with one large foot coming from the middle of its body. It has more in common with the primordial beings introduced by Flaubert a few pages earlier (see no. 27), except for the horrifically fragmented face.

**27 Saint-Antoine: Il doit y avoir quelque part des figures primordiales dont les corps ne sont que les images**  
(Saint Anthony: Somewhere there must be primordial shapes whose bodies are only images)

*À Gustave Flaubert*, 1889, plate 4 of 6  
170 x 124  
Printed by Becquet  
Imprint l.l. margin: *Saint-Antoine: Il doit y avoir quelque part des figures primordiales dont les corps ne sont que les images*  
Signature printed l.r. on image: ODILON REDON  
M.98  
P.313-1949

Flaubert's text continues: 'could I but see them, I would know the link between matter and thought.' This plate is stylistically very different from the other images in the album. It is also the most experimental. In response to Saint Anthony's consideration of the division of Substance and the desire to discover primordial shapes, Redon produced this startling and indeterminate image. This subject relates to the then popular philosophy of Schopenhauer. According to Schopenhauer, aesthetic experiences allowed the beholder to achieve pure mental enjoyment and temporary freedom from the Will, or thing in itself.

**28 Araignée**  
(Spider)  
1887  
260 x 215  
Proof before letters  
Signed in graphite l.r. margin: *Odilon Redon*  
M.72  
P.305-1949

The Symbolist poet and novelist, Camille Mauclair wrote that 'the domain of fantasy is now wide open to artists' and this new freedom of imagination is certainly evident in Redon's unprecedented image.

This bizarre image of a smiling spider was originally intended to be part of an album called 'Modern Pieces', along with *Christ* (no. 1). However, Redon decided against the album format for these disparate images and instead released them individually. Many were sent as gifts. For example, Redon sent impressions of the *Spider* and *Christ* to the writer Joris-Karl Huysmans in 1887.

A paler, earlier state of this print exists. For this final state, Redon extensively reworked the image with lithographic tusche, and darkened the upper half of the spider's face and body with pen-and-ink lines. He also used solid pen-and-ink lines to strengthen the spider's legs, giving greater weight and tangibility to this bizarre creature.

**29 Et que des yeux sans tête flottaient comme des mollusques**  
(And the eyes without heads were floating like molluscs)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 13 of 24  
308 x 224  
Printed by Blanchard  
Imprint l.l. margin: *Et que des yeux sans tête flottaient comme des mollusques*  
Signed in graphite u.l. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.146  
P.326-1949

Inspiration is drawn from a passage in Flaubert's novel that describes the 'beginnings' of life, fragmented in a 'formless world.' Here Redon used science as his source. Redon was among many artists who visited the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, which held human embryos, fetuses, and defective newborns. The writings of embryologist Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and evolutionary theorist Ernst Haeckel greatly influenced Redon. They developed a theory of recapitulation, essentially believing that embryos went through a fish or animal stage. Here Redon's monsters appear with the assured clarity of plausible beings.

**30 Des peuples divers habitent les pays de l'Océan**  
(Different peoples inhabit the countries of the Ocean)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 23 of 24  
310 x 230  
Printed by Blanchard  
Imprint l.l. margin: *Des peuples divers habitent les pays de l'Océan*  
Signed in graphite l.l. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.156  
P.336-1949

In contrast to the bright clarity of the ocean in no. 29, the water now appears endlessly and absolutely black. The luminosity of Redon's black creates a complex surface that is at once totally flat and infinitely deep. Most of the visible forms were created by scratching through the black ink. This

ocean is full of intangible, mysterious forms both revealed and masked by Redon's use of light and dark. Redon asked: 'What have I put in my works to suggest so many subtleties? I have put in them a little door opening onto a mystery. I have made fictions. It is up to [the viewer] to go further.'

**31 Les bêtes de la mer rondes comme des outres**

(The beasts of the sea, round like leather bottles)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 22 of 24  
222 x 190

Printed by Blanchard

Imprint l.l. margin: *Les bêtes de la mer rondes comme des outres*

Signed in graphite l.r. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.155

P.335-1949

Redon said that as a result of his artistic training, he 'could more easily bring together the probable with the improbable,' and 'give a visual logic to imaginary elements.' For this image Redon was almost totally free to create the imaginary sea creatures. He responded to Flaubert's description that the beasts were 'flat as blades' with leathery texture and set them in a flowing composition with unwinding arabesques of light and dark. According to Redon, the arabesque line was more than merely decorative or descriptive because it could arouse in the mind of the beholder 'any number of fantasies' limited only by the sensitivity of their imagination.

**32 Le 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**

(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)

*À Gustave Flaubert*, 1889, plate 5 of 6  
277 x 210

Printed by Becquet

Imprint l.l. margin: *Le 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*

Signature printed l.c. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.99

P.312-1949

The Sphinx and the Chimera appear totally separate, unlike Redon's later version (no. 33). A Chimera is a fantastic monster made from the parts of various animals. In Greek mythology it has the head of a lion, the body of a goat and a serpent's tail. Redon has not followed this exactly, and his image is more accordance with the scientific identification of a Chimera simply as an amalgamation of multiple creatures. This absurd, confused monster is barely distinguishable through the dense black and its face

emerges only partially, as with the other threatening beings from the second album (see no. 23 and particularly no. 3). This half-scientific, half-mythological creature intrigued Redon and Flaubert. Baudelaire, too, had written a poem called *Chacun sa chimère* (To every Man his Chimera).

**33 J'ai quelquefois aperçu dans le ciel comme des formes d'esprits**

(I have sometimes seen in the sky what seemed like forms of spirits)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 21 of 24  
261 x 182

Printed by Clot

Imprint l.l. margin: *J'ai quelquefois aperçu dans le ciel comme des formes d'esprits*

Signed in graphite l.l. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.154

P.334-1949

Redon turned to Saint Anthony's encounter with the Sphinx and the Chimera once more. It is markedly different from the version from the second series (no. 32), in which the Sphinx and the Chimera's defined forms oppose each other. Here Redon shows them appearing in the sky above the Nile. The dense blackness of the sky takes precedence and the forms can only be glimpsed. The strange beings catching the light in the foreground increase the sense of mystery, suggesting that other forms may be lurking in the shadows. Redon wrote: 'Black should be respected ... It is the agent of the spirit.'

**34 Oannès: Moi, la première conscience du chaos, j'ai surgi de l'abîme pour durcir la matière, pour régler les formes**

(Oannès: I, the first consciousness of chaos, arose from the abyss that I might harden matter, and give law unto forms)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 14 of 24  
279 x 217

Printed by Blanchard

Imprint l.l. margin: *Oannès: Moi, la première conscience du chaos, j'ai surgi de l'abîme pour durcir la matière, pour régler les formes*

Signed in graphite u.r. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.147

P.327-1949

Oannès was a creature from Mesopotamian mythology, with the head of a man and the body of a fish, who taught knowledge of the arts and sciences to the first humans.

His contemplative, downcast eyes and the light he radiates may symbolise knowledge borne out of the darkness. A sinister, disconcerting impression is created by the dense black and Oannès' only half-lit form.

- 35 Elle tire de sa poitrine une éponge toute noir, la couvre de baisers**  
(She draws from her bosom a sponge, perfectly black, and covers it with kisses)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 8 of 24  
193 x 153

Printed by Blanchard

Imprint l.l. margin: *Elle tire de sa poitrine une éponge toute noir, la couvre de baisers*

Signed in graphite u.l. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.141

P.321-1949

This is the figure of a patrician woman ('patrician' was an honorific title in ancient Rome bestowed on the elite for distinguished service) who has come with other women to mourn at the graves of the Martyrs. They appear to Anthony on the plain depicted in no. 11. Redon's sensitive representation reflects the calm elegance described by Flaubert: 'there are white figures, vaguer than clouds, bending over the graves. Others approach softly, silently.' There is nothing sinister about these women, instead their sorrowful hearts and intangible lightness is what captivated Saint Anthony and Redon.

- 36 Immédiatement surgissent trois déesses**  
(Immediately three goddesses arise)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 11 of 24  
170 x 133

Printed by Blanchard

Imprint l.l. margin: *Immédiatement surgissent trois déesses*

Signed in graphite u.l. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.144

P.324-1949

Redon depicts the Hindu goddess Saraswati, Lakshmi, and Durga. Saraswati is the goddess of learning and knowledge She appears on the left, holding a pot. Next is Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, prosperity and light. On the right, holding a bow aloft, is Durga, the Divine Mother and destroyer of evil. Redon has created a print which looks like an elegant pen-and-ink drawing and was perhaps influenced by Flaubert's description of the scene as developing 'like a lofty frieze.' The broken outlines of the bodies reflect the transitory state of the goddesses, which, in Flaubert's text, immediately join with the three gods of the Hindu Trinity (their companions Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma), transform, and multiply.

- 37 P'Intelligence fut à moi! Je devins le Buddha**  
(Intelligence became mine! I became the Buddha!)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 12 of 24

320 x 220

Printed by Blanchard

Imprint l.l. margin: *P'Intelligence fut à moi! Je devins le Buddha*

Signed in graphite u.l. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.145

P.325-1949

The Buddha appeals to Anthony, telling him of his similar solitary existence and temptation by the Devil. The choice of this image allowed Redon to develop a theme: spiritual enlightenment through knowledge. The subject seemed increasingly to interest him and signalled a new direction in his late *noirs* (see also nos. 36 & 38, which relate to this theme). It also brought a new light to Redon's prints. The entire image is illuminated by the large sun above the Buddha. Sweeping arabesque lines unwind to complete the image of the Buddha.

- 38 Le jour enfin paraît ... et dans le disque même du soleil, rayonne la face de Jésus-Christ**

(Day appears at last ... and in the very disk of the sun shines face of Jesus Christ)

*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, 1896, plate 24 of 24

Printed by Blanchard

Imprint l.l. margin: *Le jour enfin paraît ... et dans le disque même du soleil, rayonne la face de Jésus-Christ*

Signed in graphite u.l. of image: ODILON REDON  
M.157

P.337-1949

Most of the sheet remains completely white. With a minimum of black ink Redon created a detailed representation of the head of Christ. There is a level of clarity and serenity suggested by Christ's closed eyes and his visage floating amidst the rays of the sun, which leave no threatening ambiguities.

The representation of Christ is not overtly Christian; Redon's image is comparable to his version of the Buddha (no. 37) and reveals his personal, more spiritual approach to religion.

Produced to accompany an exhibition at The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, 22 September to 10 January 2010

**Image on front page: Odilon Redon, *La Fleur du marécage*, (P.200-1951(II)), page 3 Odilon Redon, *La Mort*, (P.309-1949).**

© Text and photographs copyright The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, 2009

