



GEBALLE PRIZE ESSAY
“OF THE DEVIL’S PARTY”? THOMAS STOTHARD
AND THE NASCENT ROMANTIC SATAN

MILES OSGOOD

TAKE A MOMENT AND FOCUS ON THE FIGURE AT THE CENTER OF THE PAINTING (FIG. 1). SEPARATE HIM OUT FROM THE BODIES BEHIND HIM AND FROM THE WORK’S TITLE. WHAT IS LEFT? ACHILLES, MAYBE, OR MARK ANTONY. IF YOU TAKE THE BLUE STREAKS BEHIND HIM TO BE WINGS, THEN YOU MIGHT PROPOSE GABRIEL OR MICHAEL. BUT SATAN? NOTHING ABOUT THE CENTRAL CHARACTER—NOT HIS QUALITIES, NOT HIS DEMEANOR, NOT HIS STATURE—SUGGESTS THAT THIS IS SATAN SUMMONING HIS LEGIONS. NOR DOES THE COMPOSITION PARTICULARLY SUGGEST THAT THE PAINTER IS THE BRITON THOMAS STOTHARD (1755–1834).¹ THE OUTLINES SEEM TOO ROUGH, THE DEMONS TOO EMOTIONALLY CHARGED, AND SATAN TOO MORALLY AMBIGUOUS FOR THIS TO BE AN OIL STUDY BY THE MILD-MANNERED, STYLISTICALLY CONVENTIONAL BOOK ILLUSTRATOR. YET IN AN ERA WHEN NEOCLASSICISM STILL DOMINATED BOTH THE COMMERCIAL AND THE ACADEMIC SPHERES AND WHEN JOHN MILTON’S DEVIL, IN ART AND IN CRITICISM, WAS STILL A FIEND, STOTHARD CREATED, IN THIS PAINTING, ONE OF THE FIRST ROMANTIC SATANS.

How did Stothard, who made a career of mass-produced, classically themed and classically wrought drawings, arrive at the realization of a nineteenth-century hero in 1792? To take such an uncharacteristic risk, he would have needed a compelling reason; to announce such a leap in Milton interpretation, he would need unique resources. Only historical context can tell us whether he had both. This essay tracks the history of Stothard’s relationship with history painting and the Royal Academy of Arts in London, the genealogy of critical and artistic interpretations of *Paradise Lost* that preceded him, and

his immediate personal influences during the years he was creating illustrations of Milton’s epic, all to determine whether Stothard’s *Satan* was a mere cog or a dynamic piston in the development of one of the romantic period’s most important heroes.

When Stothard painted *Satan Summoning His Legions*, about 1792, he needed it to impress. Seven years after he graduated from the school of the Royal Academy and fourteen after he first exhibited at the academy,² the painter had yet to be elected academician. Getting by on illustrations for English plays and poetry collections,³ Stothard was no doubt

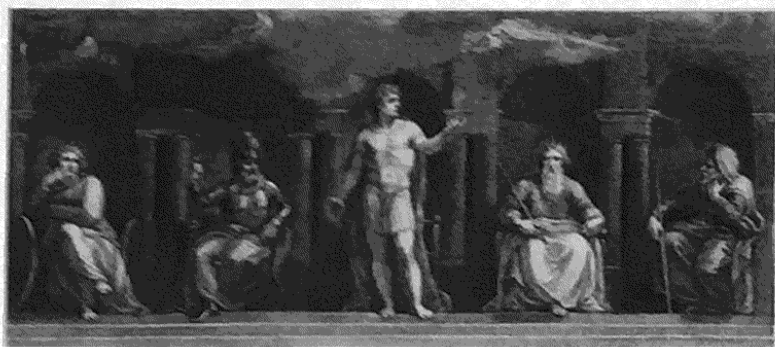
FIG. 1. (OPPOSITE) THOMAS STOTHARD. *SATAN SUMMONING HIS LEGIONS*, C. 1792. OIL ON CANVAS, 33 × 26.7. MORTIMER C. LEVENTRITT FUND, 1978.148

thrilled to be commissioned by John Jeffryes to make drawings for the publisher's *Graphic Illustrations of Milton's Paradise Lost*, drawings that would be engraved for reproduction by Francesco Bartolozzi (fig. 2).⁴ Stothard must have seen this commission as a chance to make a necessary splash. Given the title of Jeffryes's project, Stothard's contributions would be more than drawings complementing text (as his work had often been before); they were to be stand-alone works of art. The edition marked an opportunity for Stothard to rely on his experience as an illustrator at the same time that he had the freedom to create interpretative art. Though his drawings may never have been exhibited, the bound book, published in 1792–93,⁵ would likely reach as large or larger an audience, owing to the popularity of Milton illustrations.⁶ In short, the stakes were high. After the years Stothard had spent making neoclassical drawings had failed to gain him entrance into the academy, he would try a new style. But what style does *Satan* embody?

The question might be readily answered if Stothard had followed a clear artistic genre throughout his career, but his oeuvre is unclassifiable, since the painter-illustrator flitted among many sources of inspiration over his lifetime. Critics have labeled

portions of his work neoclassical, preromantic, and rococo; on the basis of individual works, he has been designated "The English Raphael" and a Pre-Raphaelite.⁷ Overall, Stothard's work seems to divide into three phases—clear neoclassical and rococo periods at either end of a brief, hybridized, and experimental period just around 1800. These interstitial decades, opening with the years of *Satan Summoning His Legions*, mark Stothard's brief interest in romanticism while he was still tied to classical stories and motifs. The works from the 1790s can be fully understood only through their relation to the styles that bracketed them.

In his early illustrations, Stothard was constrained by the need to create drawings crisp enough to be engraved. The neatness, detail, and canonical subject matter of neoclassicism suited his budding and lucrative craft as a book illustrator, so Stothard adopted the style for the bulk of the work he did in the eighteenth century.⁸ This choice is reflected in Stothard's earliest drawings, such as his *Illustration to Fenton* in John Bell's *Poets of Great Britain*, of 1779. Although the illustration introduces Elijah Fenton, Stothard draws Orpheus in place of the early-eighteenth-century poet. The neoclassical influence in form is already apparent: the



PARADISE LOST.

FIG. 2. THOMAS STOTHARD, *THE COUNCIL IN PANDEMONIUM*, ENGRAVED BY FRANCESCO BARTOLOZZI IN JOHN MILTON, *THE FIRST BOOK OF PARADISE LOST* (LONDON: JOHN JEFFRYES & CO., 1792–95), 35. PHOTO: COURTESY BODLEIAN LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD (SHELFMARK: JOHNSON A.83)



FIG. 3. SIR DAVID WILKIE (SCOTTISH, 1785–1841). *BLIND-MAN'S BUFF*, 1812. OIL ON CANVAS, 63.2 x 91.8. THE ROYAL COLLECTION © 2010 HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

delineations of light and shadow are stark, the figure appears static and deliberately posed, and the scene is emotionally subdued. Stothard's illustrations continue in this vein; each figure has the contrived stance, limited emotional expression, and careful tunic folds of ancient Greco-Roman sculpture or contemporary French history painting. Stothard's 1784 illustration for Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel *Clarissa Harlowe, Lovelace's Dream* shows how these features shaped his drawings of more recent literary characters as well as classical ones. Though motion is more important in this later work, the relative focus on pose over individuality and emotion reveals an attempt at a more classical style than the competing courtly style of the rococo. A neoclassical bent works its way even into Stothard's 1792 *Paradise Lost*: in *The Council in Pandemonium*, Satan stands in statuesque contrapposto before a panel of Olympian and pagan gods (see *Paradise Lost*, book 1, argument and ll. 392–496). Bereft of any typical demonic attributes, Satan looks every bit like a Roman orator; without

the work's title, he and his tribunal would be unrecognizable. Even the scene's architecture is overtly classical, and Stothard's organization of characters, each between two columns, evokes the structure of neoclassical painting's famous standard, Jacques-Louis David's *Oath of the Horatii* (Paris, Musée du Louvre). Stothard's taste for adapting antique art to English subjects, then, lasts into the years of his more novel experimentation and (as in *Satan*) vies for its place in those new romantic efforts.

Stothard left the neoclassical behind only in his third phase, his

personal revival of rococo, which, manifesting itself as it did in 1817, cannot have influenced the intermediate period of *Satan* but stands generally as a testament to the influence of the Royal Academy on the painter's efforts in high art. A year before this change, Stothard had suffered his first major career setback, the failure of his 1816 academy exhibition. Joseph Farington, a romantic landscape painter and diarist who exhibited at the academy at the time, wrote: "[John Constable]...spoke of Stothard as being much mortified and disappointed. He sent eight pictures [to the exhibition] some of which He was advised to withdraw."⁹ At the time, Stothard did not have any work for book publishers. To be rejected by the academy of which he was a member was a crushing blow.¹⁰ To understand the transformation in taste that turned Stothard from fashionable to passé, one must reconsider the academy exhibition of 1813, when Stothard wrote that: "[David] Wilkie's picture of Blindman buff [fig. 3] has ever a crowd round it closely packed; and some of those

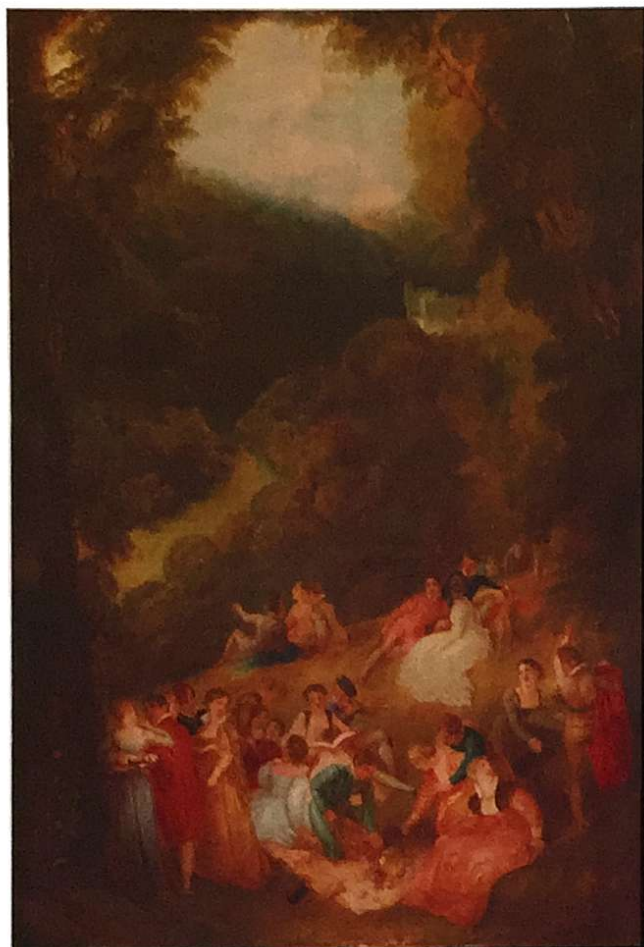


FIG. 4. THOMAS STOTHARD, *SANS SOUCI*, 1817. OIL ON PANEL, 80 × 52. LONDON, TATE BRITAIN, BEQUEATHED BY HENRY VAUGHAN. PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY TATE BRITAIN

in the rear, in vain struggling for a view, console themselves for the disappointment by looking at my Shakespeare subject."¹¹ Popular culture demanded a change from historical gravity to countryside levity, from the Bard's plays to playing games. The new English audience had lost interest in its past literary greats; it wanted simple, gay life. It is no wonder, then, that Stothard's contribution to the 1816 exhibition, with paintings such as *Diana and Her Nymphs Bathing* (London, Tate)—another example of a mythological subject treated in stark and dated

classicism—was doomed to be another failure, in the critical and popular eye alike.¹²

Stothard's reaction to this decline in popularity is a crucial case study for examining the work he submitted to the academy in the 1790s, since the two periods follow the artist's two main attempts to re-create his style in the face of hostility toward neoclassicism. The later example differs from the earlier in one important respect: to dig his way out, Stothard found a role model. Visiting the Musée du Louvre in Paris in 1815,¹³ Stothard saw paintings by Jean-Antoine Watteau, the French father of rococo who had similarly rebelled against the more classical painting standards of Louis XIV's Versailles to celebrate contemporary life and liveliness. The paintings that Stothard submitted to the 1817 exhibition follow a similar turn, betraying a distinct homage to the Frenchman. *Sans Souci* (fig. 4), one of his first works after the 1816 disaster, shows all the aristocratic, countryside flirtation of the *fête galante*. When Stothard's rococo hit London, newspapers lauded its freshness: "[Stothard's pencil] looks at and delights in the sunshine of morals...and feasts our eyes and our hearts with happy realities and ideal delights."¹⁴ The popularity of his imported style was such that it even changed Stothard's interests in simple illustration, as seen in *The Swing*, at once an illustration for Samuel Rogers's *Poems* and a direct (if desexualized) evocation of Watteau's most famous arabesque.¹⁵ This abrupt shift in Stothard's chosen style proves, for the art historian, his flexibility in the face of critical opinion. One can infer that, faced with similar difficulty about 1792, he might have been spurred to do the same: to try an untested style rather than produce painted transcriptions of his familiar neoclassical drawings.

Because of the conventions of Royal Academy exhibitions about 1790, the style of simple transcrip-

tion was all too alluring a trap. Before the avant-garde movements of the mid-nineteenth century, academic art meant painting figures from the classical tradition, European literature, or European history.⁸ Since European literary characters and historical personages were often glorified in art by being presented in classical dress and posture, the standards of the Royal Academy exhibitions seemed to require subject matter that used the classical style. At the same time, however, the academy's selections of artists show that even accomplished neoclassicists were not necessarily guaranteed membership. Stothard's close friend John Flaxman had been denied as early as 1771, after four years of exhibiting sculptures and pictures such as *Neptune, Odysseus and Antigenia*, *Ulysses*, and *Figure of the Grecian Comedians*.⁹ And even though Stothard had been exhibiting classical and biblical illustrations in the academy since 1777,¹⁰ he was not elected an associate academician until 1792. The manner of Stothard's eventual election confirms that some degree of nonclassical risk could find reward. After a decade

and a half on the outskirts, Stothard shot up from student contributor to associate academician to full academician in two years. Why the sudden ascent? Most likely, it is not because the academy changed its standards but because Stothard changed his style.

If so, Stothard's submissions to the 1791 exhibition, the one presentation between his elections to associate and then to full academician, should represent that experimentation. And they do. In his paintings of that year, Stothard presented a new variety in genre within conventional scenes. Both of his subjects, *Telemachus and the Cyclops*, are classical, but he does not portray them in a classical manner. His *Six Scenes of Telemachus*, studies for François de Salignac de La Mothe-Fénelon's *Adventures of Telemachus*,¹¹ reveal a stamp of figural and formal innovation. Stothard takes on an antique figure with a romantic brush. Compare the artist's *Illustration of the Shipwreck Scene* (fig. 6) with Edward Burney's (fig. 7)—both appeared in engraved form in 1795. While Burney's scene obeys the classical laws of dress

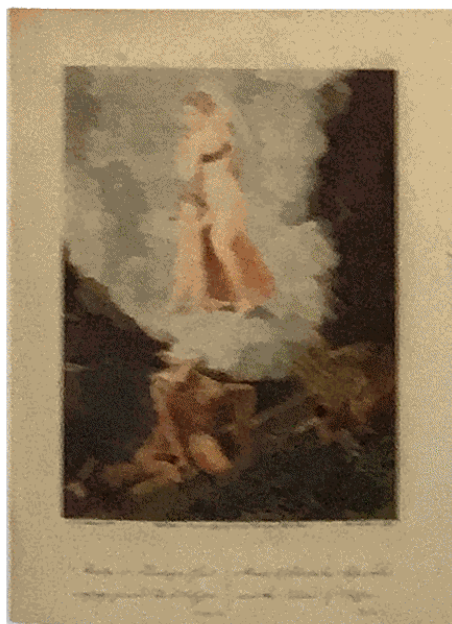


FIG. 6 (LEFT) THOMAS STOTHARD, *Illustration of the Shipwreck Scene* (1795). ENGRAVED BY W. SKELTON IN FRANÇOIS DE SALIGNAC DE LA MOTHE-FÉNELON, *The Adventures of Telemachus*, THE SON OF ULYSSES, TRANSLATED BY HANNAH WORTH (LONDON, 1797), BOOK 8, OPP. 102. THIS IMAGE IS REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THE MONTICELLO LIBRARY, SAN MARINO, CALIFORNIA.

FIG. 7 (RIGHT) EDWARD FRANCIS BURNEY (BRITISH, 1767-1848), *Illustration of the Shipwreck Scene* FOR CHARLES'S EDITION OF FRANÇOIS DE SALIGNAC DE LA MOTHE-FÉNELON, *The Adventures of Telemachus*, 1795. PEN AND WASH, 18 x 11.6. THE JAMES MARSHALL AND MARIE LOUISE OSBORN COLLECTION, BIRNCKE RARE BOOK AND MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY, MUIZUNBERG, AUSTRIA. COURTESY, BIRNCKE LIBRARY.

and posture in Telemachus's more contrived, battle-ready pose, Stothard's depicts sailors' naked muscles strained on a fallen mast. The more sinewy, foreshortened, and contorted torso of the central figure recalls the bodies of Satan's legions: in the 1790s Stothard began to work with romantic form as much as romantic content. But content is an important part of the Telemachus scene as well: the palpable struggle in Stothard's rendition—Telemachus's determination and his mate's desperation—and the sea's roughness accord this illustration a new emotional tenor. Venus and Cupid, floating above, may be classical, but the action itself—a personal fight against overwhelming odds—represents the romantic ideal that would become so popular decades later with Percy Bysshe Shelley and George Gordon Byron.²⁰ Stothard's other exhibited work, *The Dryads Finding Narcissus*, likewise displays a figural roughness quite distinct from his early drawings (and only the rightmost dryad is classically dressed and posed). Nature is no longer a sketchy background but contributes to the mood of the scene. Narcissus, the center of attention, may not be a typical romantic hero, but, again, the self-absorbed lover certainly bears similarities to the typical romantic poet. Stothard, likewise, is no Goya or Delacroix, but his work foreshadows their movement. Romantic qualities, both formal and conceptual, compete with (and occasionally defeat) neoclassical precedent in his 1790s exhibition works.

Satan Summoning His Legions, although it appears relatively early in the decade, is a marked example of this stylistic oscillation. Completed on the verge of Stothard's election to the academy, the painting is caught between its artist's neoclassical and protoromantic periods—after the simpler drawings of the previous decades but before the bold steps that were seen in the 1793 exhibition. The demons behind the

central character point to aspects of romanticism through their rough contortions as figures and their rebellious struggle as characters, but Satan stands in a separate style. Formally, at least, his armor, stable anatomy, and frozen posture suggest a restrained classicism. If Stothard planned on a consistent depiction of Satan in Jeffryes's *Milton*, then this figure was likely meant to look like the hyperclassical orator of *The Council in Pandemonium*, which appeared next in the series.²¹

However, although Stothard may have limited his artistic romanticism to the background behind Satan, his central figure could still represent romanticism ideologically. Before the 1790s the artistic romantic movement and the literary Satan-protagonist thesis were still in their nascent stages, so Stothard would have little reason to conflate the two—it is remarkable enough that he places them both within the same frame. The formal rendering of his legions may have already been stylistically romantic, yet the heroic concept of the artist's Satan was to become a romantic position in a different sense.

Although the Satan-protagonist reading of *Paradise Lost* is widely acknowledged by literary critics today, this interpretation was far from common in the decades following the poem's publication. According to M.H. Abrams, the twentieth-century American literary critic,

*For more than a century after his great epic was published, no one doubted that Milton's whole-souled purpose had been, as he had represented it, "to justify the ways of God to men," or that his sympathies were anything but undeservingly on the side of Omnipotence in His suppression of the Satanic rebellion.*²²

Although criticisms such as John Dryden's in 1697 and Lord Chesterfield's in 1749 recognized Satan as

the hero on the basis of his victory, "it apparently occurred to no one to correlate this reading of Milton's character with his unintended elevation of Satan to the position of formal protagonist in *Paradise Lost*."²³ Before the arrival of Stothard's *Satan*, only Robert Burns in 1787 implied that the reader might side with the devil, but he gives no textual argument: the reader would have to side with hell in general in the war against heaven, he writes.²⁴ Two creative works proposed a similar thesis, but they seem to have received little attention: the anonymous *Head of a Modern Poet, Being the Substance of a Dream, Occasioned by Reading the Sixth Book of Virgil*, of 1750,²⁵ and William Combe's *The Diaboliad* in 1777.²⁶ Stothard probably did not know about these early sources, and in any event, most interpretations still considered Satan a villain.

Nor does it seem that Stothard drew on earlier artistic representations of the devil: to the contrary, Stothard is the first in a century-long line of illustrators to eliminate all the features and icons of Milton's villainous Satan. From 1688, when Jacob Tonson first published an illustrated *Paradise Lost*, artists had humanized Satan significantly in comparison to their medieval predecessors,²⁷ but only Stothard renders him indistinguishable from a heroic, classical commander. J. B. Medina, Tonson's chief artist, began the tradition of picturing Satan as a satyr,²⁸ with pointed ears, horns, wings, and occasionally a tail and hooves. Medina did away with the medieval devil's beak and talons, but his Satan remains a deformed, dark, sinister creature. The first depiction of Satan summoning his legions belongs to Sir James Thornhill, in 1720. While the round shields, tall, plumed helmets, and long spears make Satan's army look like a band of hoplites, this Satan retains the horns and webbed wings that represent his unangelic character. At best, only his right side, outside the



FIG. 7. FRANCIS HAYMAN (BRITISH, 1708–1776), SATAN CALLING HIS LEGIONS, 1749–50, ENGRAVED BY S. F. RAVENET, IN JOHN MILTON, *PARADISE LOST*. A POEM IN TWELVE BOOKS, 2 VOLS. (LONDON, 1750), 1:104. THIS ITEM IS REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THE HUNTINGTON LIBRARY, SAN MARINO, CALIFORNIA

disquieting shadow, is appealing. Francis Hayman's version of the scene of about 1750 (fig. 7) eliminates the horns and softens the wings but continues to portray an infernal devil. While outward symbols are scarce, Satan's dark, spiked hair and facial contortions underscore an unequivocal evil.

Although these earlier versions grant Satan varying degrees of humanity, they all share one crucial element that Stothard abandons: their Satans

are identifiable. Stothard is the first illustrator to humanize Satan to the extent that he is unrecognizable as the “Arch-fiend” (*Paradise Lost*, book 1, l. 209). The classical armor from previous versions is kept, but bodily ornaments, contortions, and darkness are gone. The black, serpentine locks are replaced by blond curls. In *The Council in Pandemonium*, even Satan’s wings are gone, so that the figure becomes little more than a Roman senator. In *Satan Summoning His Legions*, whether without distinct wings as in the painting’s vague blue brushstrokes or with feathered wings as in the engraving (fig. 2), Stothard’s devil is either a general or an angel. His surrounding legions certainly contribute to the line of interpretation that casts the figure as protagonist: earlier illustrators of Milton depicted devils that climb out of fiery pits or stand at military command, but Stothard depicts devils that can still fly. As a result, many of the figures look as much like fallen angels as outright demons (the legionnaire floating under Satan’s right arm might even quote

Michelangelo’s God from the Sistine Chapel). These are not variations on previous artists’ devils: these are new insights. Stothard’s *Satan Summoning His Legions*, then, is not only a rung on the ladder progressing to a romantic Satan; it marks a definite shift, the beginning of a new wave of representation.

Stothard may not, however, have come up with this interpretation on his own. If we take his other illustrations as a benchmark, Stothard was not one to take controversial gambles in portraying literary figures: if anything, he tended to subdue visible emotion so that the character’s psychological state remained ambiguous.²⁹ Throughout his career, Stothard was a literary illustrator, not a literary essayist or critic. Where, then, did the conceit of this painting come from? One remaining domain of influence solves the puzzle: any argument concerning the stylistic and interpretative innovation of *Satan Summoning His Legions* is inseparable from the influences of the artist’s closest friends, John Flaxman and William Blake.³⁰



FIG. 8. JOHN FLAXMAN (BRITISH, 1755–1826), WINGED SATAN, C. 1790. PEN AND GRAY INK, WITH GRAY WASH OVER GRAPHITE, 23 × 24.6. LONDON, BRITISH MUSEUM, BEQUEST OF HENRY VAUGHAN, 1900.0824.177. PHOTO © THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM; COURTESY BRITISH MUSEUM



FIG. 9. JOHN FLAXMAN (BRITISH, 1755–1826), SATAN ROUSING HIS LEGIONS, C. 1790. PEN AND GRAY INK, WITH GRAY WASH OVER GRAPHITE, 20.5 × 25.9. LONDON, BRITISH MUSEUM, BEQUEST OF HENRY VAUGHAN, 1900.0824.176. PHOTO © THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM; COURTESY BRITISH MUSEUM

In spite of the unpleasant surprise of his early exclusion from the Royal Academy, Flaxman remained more strictly neoclassical in tenor throughout his career than any other illustrator of Milton.³¹ His illustrations for *Paradise Lost*, also drawn sometime in the early 1790s,³² were never finished or published, but his two versions of *Satan Rousing His Legions* (figs. 8, 9) bear striking structural similarities to Stothard's—as if Stothard had combined the Satan of the first with the legions of the second. However, the similarities are likely only as deep as the design: Flaxman would never intentionally glorify Satan.

The biographical aid that colors this difference lies in the artists' respective stances toward Christianity. According to biographer Shelley Bennett, Stothard was probably a Voltaire-inspired deist, a pious man who never went to church and showed no signs after his youth of any particular religious affiliation.³³ Flaxman, by contrast, was "a literary man with strong religious convictions and particularly concerned with man's constant battle against sin."³⁴ If Flaxman's depictions of Satan appear sympathetic, it may be because he never detailed the character's threatening shadows and features. At any rate, Flaxman got the chance to vilify Satan later on in his career with his only finished work on the character, *St. Michael Overcoming Satan* (University College London, library), a statue that speaks volumes about how Flaxman conceived Satan. The work is biblical rather than Miltonic, as the title and the construction suggest (during the battle in book 6 of *Paradise Lost*, Michael is not a saint and Satan is not half snake; those traditions belong, respectively, to the Catholic Church and Revelation 12:7–9). As such, and as is clear from the devil's curled position, Flaxman eliminates any possibility of a heroicized Satan in his statue, and one wonders, then, whether

his sketches for *Paradise Lost* could have treated Satan any differently.

Even though Flaxman's views on religion and on Milton differed from Stothard's, their friendship is not insignificant. That Stothard was not able to divorce his Milton illustrations fully from his neoclassical background may well be because of the interplay between his art and Flaxman's. Although Stothard's message is more provocative than Flaxman's, a comparison of their Satan illustrations reveals that Stothard's style relies heavily on his friend's influence. How does Stothard use the same figures and produce a different feel? First, Stothard uses only the figures in Flaxman's drawings that have the most motional and emotional complexity: the encircling demons from one of the drawings and the pointing Satan from the other. Second, Stothard creates a greater light-dark contrast between Satan and his legions, a technique that differentiates the hero from his more disturbing armies and turns Satan into Lucifer, the "Light-bringer." These differences are subtle, but each contributes to a clearer sense that, of the two artists, only Stothard deliberately paints a hero.

The most important piece of evidence of the entire case for a romanticized Stothard and Satan, however, has to come from a different friendship: that with painter and poet William Blake. Stothard and Blake met in 1779 and were close until a dispute distanced them in 1806.³⁵ In the meantime, their friendship brought out some of Stothard's most politically and artistically progressive sentiments. The pair joined similar radical political groups in the 1780s and 1790s and admired the same innovative painters, James Barry and John Hamilton Mortimer—both of whom were considered at the time "eccentric, rebellious, and highly romantic."³⁶ Their friendship flourished in the sphere of business as well. "Blake's

own artistic sentiments were so closely in tune with Stothard's that when he opened his own print shop in...1784, the only prints to be issued were after Stothard's designs of *Zephyrus & Flora* and *Callisto*.³⁷ Blake continued to help Stothard find employment in tough years. In 1779 Flaxman invited the two artists to join the Mathews' circle, an association that makes apparent the intellectual cross-pollination occurring within the band of friends. "This gathering of intellectuals shared a taste for Gothic and Italianate literature, music, and art. A literate woman, Mrs. Mathew read the works of Homer to Flaxman in Greek and encouraged an interest in Shakespeare and the pre-Romantic poets."³⁸ Since Blake published his first volume of verse under the patronage of Mrs. Mathew and her husband, the group and its discussions are a likely source for his literary romanticism. One can only assume that, even if a smaller dose of the new movement rubbed off on Stothard, the painter was at least well exposed to its ideas and, in particular, to Blake's. If nothing else, it is from this alliance that the form of Stothard's painting changed: "Together," Bennett writes, "these three close friends developed a reduced linear style to amplify the emotional resonance of their art."³⁹

But the intellectual nature of this friendship weighs heavily on the interpretation of the conceptual content of Stothard's art as well, since Blake was the first important champion in writing of the romantic Satan. From 1790 to 1793, in the same years that Stothard was approaching the Royal Academy and painting his *Satan*, Blake penned *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. This is the first thorough and enduring treatise on the proposal that Satan was the hero of *Paradise Lost*—the culmination of pro-Satan criticism and the birth, for all intents and purposes, of the romantic Satan.⁴⁰ For all its intricacy, Blake's interpretation

was summarized and popularized in a one-sentence, passing remark: in the section titled "The Voice of the Devil," Blake writes, "Note: The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet, and of the Devil's party without knowing it."⁴¹ This line, the most famous in Milton scholarship, was pivotal for the development of the rebellious romantic hero.⁴² Moreover, the idea was not necessarily new for Blake; in a poem he wrote to Flaxman in 1800, he claims, "Milton lov'd me in childhood and shew'd me his face."⁴³ If the author can be taken at his word, it seems that Blake saw Satan as the protagonist in *Paradise Lost* from his first reading. Blake's friendship with Stothard at the end of the eighteenth century was such that Stothard, having already dabbled in Milton illustrations before the Jeffryes edition,⁴⁴ must have discussed and had some knowledge of Blake's early interpretation, or at least of that in his forthcoming book. It can be no coincidence that such a close-knit pair produced in the span of two to three years the first written treatise on Milton's sympathy with Satan and the first work of art that unequivocally depicts Satan as a martial hero. Stothard may not have been an innovative literary interpreter on his own, but it cannot have hurt him to have one at his right hand.

While Stothard's *Satan Summoning His Legions* may appear farther from Blake's (fig. 10) than from Flaxman's, the details that Blake keeps speak to their common interpretation. Blake's own illustrations for *Paradise Lost* appeared in 1807, shortly after his estrangement from his old friend. The gap of fifteen years of ideological and, now, personal differences certainly shows between Stothard's *Satan Summoning His Legions* and Blake's, but the works remain connected. Stothard began the convention of the wingless, blond, curly-haired Satan that Blake adapts.

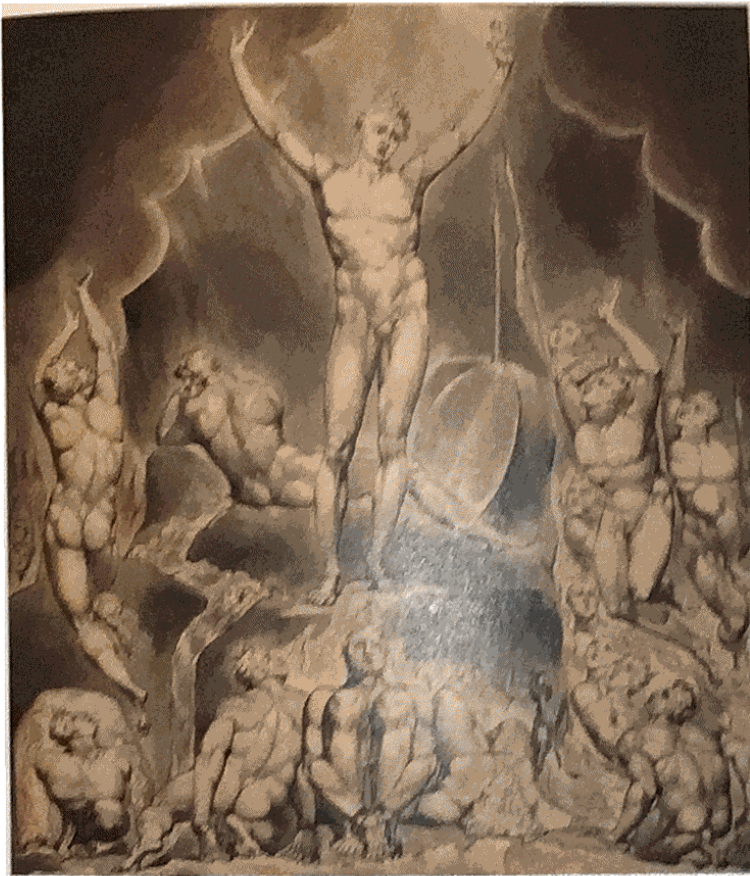


FIG. 10. WILLIAM BLAKE (BRITISH, 1757–1827), SATAN CALLING UP HIS LEGIONS, 1807. PEN AND WATERCOLOR, 25 × 21 1/2. THIS ITEM IS REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF HUNTINGTON LIBRARY, ART COLLECTIONS, AND BOTANICAL GARDENS, SAN MARINO, CALIFORNIA.

The confused mass of naked, muscular, emotive bodies filling the frame is an innovation of Stothard's as well. Blake's only significant departures come from his stance as a romantic poet: he attempts to present at once a more literal illustration from Milton and a more erotic one. Unlike Stothard, Blake keeps the chains (*Paradise Lost*, book 1, l. 210) and "the ponderous shield" (l. 284) of the original text, and his figures are contorted, not in action or in pain, but in muscular voluptuousness. In these formal qualities, Satan and his legions are the same as almost any other figure in Blake's illustrations—as Adam, Eve, the angels, or even Jesus. Whereas in Flaxman's drawings, the similar composition between the disturbing legions and their leader conveys Satan's evil, in Blake's case, the

likeness between the hell dwellers and heaven dwellers undermines such aspersions. Blake attacks the entire Christian spiritual hierarchy, continuing his thesis in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in an interpretation that goes far beyond Stothard's. However, Blake's more extreme interpretations (as in his *Satan*) should not be taken for romanticism's norm: his radical positions and depictions do not necessarily push Stothard off the spectrum of romanticism altogether.

But does that leave Stothard's *Satan* where we left it at the beginning, uncommitted to either Flaxman's extreme neoclassicism or Blake's extreme romanticism? Maybe so, but its stance on a middle ground does not diminish its importance, nor does it show any indecisiveness on Stothard's part. In poetry and

in art, romanticism and the romantic Satan did not become fully realized until the nineteenth century;⁴⁵ back in 1792, the Royal Academy would have expected Stothard to paint in a neoclassical style. Stothard's *Satan* defies that expectation. Though not fully romantic on its own, Stothard's painting is still stylistically and interpretatively prescient. It emphatically rejects the blatantly negative demons of the previous century by creating legions whose cause appears, rather than fierce, pitiable and urgent. It takes a tradition of dark and twisted Satans and leaves instead a blond, soft, bright hero. Even in its more classical, engraved form (Bartolozzi's), the illustration allows for a Blakean, Satan-sympathetic reading by transforming the entire army of martial devils into fallen angels, winged or flying. Stothard's style may be riven with social and personal influences, but, ultimately,

he chooses a artistic innovation over engraving-ready precision and the Blakean hero over Flaxman's fiend. When *Satan Summoning His Legions* appeared in 1792, it was not just another illustration to the first book of *Paradise Lost*: its startling novelty in form and interpretation ushered in the era of the romantic artist and the romantic hero.

MILES OSGOOD (CLASS OF 2011) RECEIVED THE CANTOR ARTS CENTER'S 2009 GEBALLE PRIZE FOR WRITING, AN AWARD ACKNOWLEDGING THE BEST PROSE WORK BY A STANFORD FRESHMAN OR SOPHOMORE "THAT RELATES IN SOME WAY TO THE COLLECTIONS, EXHIBITIONS OR PROGRAMS" OF THE CENTER. IT WAS WRITTEN FOR HISTORY 132A, THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE ARTS, A COURSE TAUGHT BY CAROLYN LOUGEE CHAPPELL, FRANCES AND CHARLES FIELD PROFESSOR IN HISTORY, IN THE AUTUMN OF 2008.

NOTES

- 1 A. C. Coxhead, *Stothard's second biographer*, writes of the Milton illustrations: "There is little of Stothard's peculiar genius to be seen in these designs, many of which, did they not bear his name, would be readily ascribed to one or other of his contemporaries"; Coxhead, *Thomas Stothard, R.A.: An Illustrated Monograph* (London, 1906), 103.
- 2 S. M. Bennett, *Thomas Stothard: The Mechanisms of Art Patronage in England circa 1800* (Columbia, MO, 1988), 11; and Coxhead (as in n. 1), 6.
- 3 Bennett (as in n. 2), 4, 7–10.
- 4 Coxhead (as in n. 1), 103.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *Ibid.*, 56; and "Thomas Stothard," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2008, at *Encyclopædia Britannica Online* (accessed 18 November 2008).
- 8 M. R. Pointon, *Milton and English Art* (Manchester, 1979), 174.
- 9 Bennett (as in n. 2), 52.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*, 52–53.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 53.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 54.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 27.
- 16 J. Rosenfeld, "The Salon and the Royal Academy," *Hebrew Timeline of Art History*, at https://www.nectmusem.org/TOAH/hd/sara/hd_sara.htm.
- 17 On Flaxman's early career and rebuff by the academy, see W. G. Constable, *John Flaxman: 1755–1826* (London, 2006), 6–7.
- 18 Coxhead (as in n. 1), 6.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 8.
- 20 "The Romantic Period: Introduction," in *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. S. Greenblatt and M. H. Abrams (New York, 2006), 1362–70.
- 21 Coxhead (as in n. 1), 104.
- 22 M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Traditions* (Oxford, 1971), 250.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 251.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 J. T. Shawcross, "An Early View of Satan as Hero of *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (1998): 104–05.
- 26 S. Achinstein, "'Of the Devil's Party': Heroism Redefined," in *Citizen Milton*, exh. cat. Oxford, Bodleian Library, December 2007–April 2008, at http://www.cems.ox.ac.uk/citizenmilton/viii_heroism.shtml.
- 27 Pointon (as in n. 8), 4–5.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 29 An example of this prudence shows up in Stothard's illustration for *Othello*, act 2, scene 1. Iago, the villain, is recognizable, but unreadable. See *The Meeting of Othello and Desdemona*, c. 1799, at http://english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare_Illustrated/Stothard.Othello.html (accessed 14 June 2010).
- 30 Bennett (as in n. 2), 11–12.
- 31 Pointon (as in n. 8), 77–78.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 79.
- 33 Bennett (as in n. 2), 5.
- 34 Pointon (as in n. 8), 79.
- 35 Bennett (as in n. 2), 11.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 12.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 13.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 *Ibid.*, vii.
- 40 Abrams (as in n. 22), 251–52.
- 41 W. Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," in *Norton Anthology* (as in n. 19), 1433.
- 42 L. Newlyn, *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader* (Oxford, 1993), 39.
- 43 W. Blake, "To My Dearest Friend, John Flaxman, These Lines" (1800), in *The Selected Poems of William Blake*, ed. B. Woodcock (Ware, 2000), 143.
- 44 Bennett (as in n. 2), 10.
- 45 Byron and Shelley, who were only just born at the time of Stothard's *Satan*, began England's "Satanic School," according to nineteenth-century critics. See "The Romantic Period" (as in n. 20), 1368.