



The Temptation of St. Anthony

By Gustave Flaubert

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The Temptation of St. Anthony By Gustave Flaubert

Flaubert's story is based on the legends surrounding the monastic hermit St. Anthony (who lived during the second half of the third century AD) and the various temptations that he faced. The story is written in a prose-play form the reader has the "scenes" described at length, before the prose dialogue hits like a thunderclap. In the opening scene there is a very detailed picture of the desolate desert and in Saint Anthony's opening "monologue" some of the disaffection that will serve as the conduit by which the various temptations sent by Satan shall reach him during the course of the night to follow. Later in the story, Anthony goes into his hut and reads passages of how the Most High exalted his believers upon even the most puissant of monarchs. Stories of how the faithful overcame great obstacles and temptations, from avarice to lust to hubris to each of the other Seven Capital Sins. As Saint Anthony falls asleep, Satan himself materializes out of the desert air and his devils begin a bit of mischief that leads to Anthony awakening and being confronted first by the lust-filled "Queen of Sheba," whom he can barely resist. Next, Satan assumes the form of a fellow hermit, Saint Hilarion, in order to tempt Anthony to committing the grave sin of heresy. And so it continues, each temptation building upon each other, Saint Anthony assailed more and more with each sharp thrust. The scenes continue to be highly charged and imaginative in how these temptations are portrayed in both symbolic and literal forms. By the end of the book, Saint Anthony is brought to the cusp of collapsing into concupiscence, only to be granted a last minute reprieve...perhaps.

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