

ALL SOULS STUDIES

JOHN
MARTIN en
FRANCE

Jean Seznec

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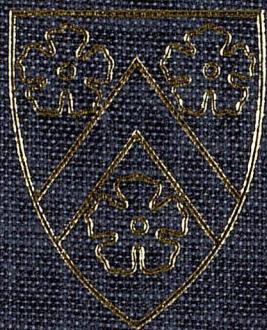


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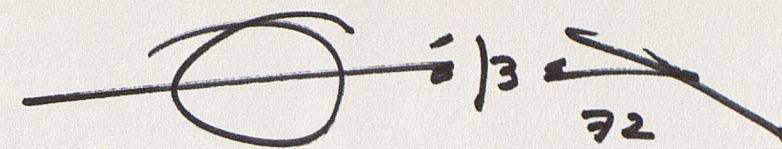
Fellow of the British Academy,
Marshal Foch Professor of French
Literature in the University of Oxford,
Fellow of All Souls College

This essay traces the astonishing fortunes of John Martin in nineteenth-century France; his popularity on the Continent—largely unsuspected today—was such that references to his grandiose and catastrophic compositions are to be found in almost every major writer of the Romantic period, when the adjective *martinien* was coined. Poet, novelist, historian and critic alike is affected; even Berlioz has 'Martinian' nightmares.

While the general causes of that epidemic—the fascination of the East and the taste for ruins—are easy to diagnose, it should be related to a specifically English tradition, combining the logical and the fantastic; this particular blend appealed to the French imagination at a time when it was craving for new, colossal perspectives, and fed on primitive, epic, and biblical terror. Martin's visions, furthermore, became real for those Frenchmen who discovered the gigantic London of John Nash, and marvelled at the megalomaniac architecture of an overpopulated city.

It is significant, however, that the vogue of Martin in France remained strictly literary; he was too deficient as a craftsman to deceive the art critics or to exert any serious pictorial influence. A comparison with a Rembrandt, a Delacroix dealing with the same subjects reduces John Martin to what he really was: a master of phantasmagoric tricks.

All Souls Studies

A handwritten mark consisting of a circle with a horizontal line through it, followed by a vertical line and the number 3, and then a diagonal line with the number 72 below it.

With the Compliments
of
CHRISTOPHER MENDEZ

36 GREAT PULTENEY STREET, LONDON, W.1.



1. Martin. *Le Déluge*. Gravure. British Museum.

JOHN MARTIN EN FRANCE

par

JEAN SEZNEC

*Fellow of the British Academy
Marshal Foch Professor of French Literature
in the University of Oxford
Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford*

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