



Ain Shams University

Faculty of Al-Asun (Languages)

Department of English

M.A. Thesis

“The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

from Samuel Taylor Coleridge

to Paul Gustave Doré:

A Study of the Para-text

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
1. Chapter One:	
The Literary Text and the Visual Para-Text.....	19
1.1. Poetics of “The Rime”.....	20
1.1.1. Archaism	20
1.1.1.1. First Version.....	21
1.1.1.2. Second Version	22
1.1.1.3. Third Version	22
1.1.1.4. The Gloss	22
1.1.1.5. Thematic Archaism.....	24
1.1.2. Medievalism, Gothicism, Catholicism, and Romanticism.	25
1.1.3. The Lyrical Ballads	26
1.2. Criticism of “The Rime”	28
1.2.1. Negative Criticism.....	28
1.2.2. Positive Criticism	29
1.3. The Artistic Medium.....	30
1.3.1. Historic Background	30
1.3.2. Woodcut Engraving for Illustration	31
1.3.3. Woodcut Engraving and Archaism	31
1.4. Reception Theory	32
1.4.1. The Talented Reception	33
1.4.2. The Power of Semiotic Clue.....	34
1.4.3. What Coleridge and Doré Share in Common.....	37
1.5. From Poem to Plate	40
1.5.1. What is a Para-Text	40
1.5.2. The Dramatic Aspect	41
1.5.3. The Semiotic Aspect	43
1.5.4. Thematic Allusions	44
1.5.5. Characterization.....	45

2. Chapter Two: Techniques of Presentation and Adaptation: <i>Mise en</i> <i>Scene</i>).....	53
2.1. Cover Page.....	54
2.1.1. Within the Vicious “Oroborous”	54
2.1.2. Lighting Technique	57
2.2. Para-Textual Features	58
2.2.1. Monochromic Production	58
2.3. Techniques of Adaptation	60
2.3.1. Aesthetics of the Ancient Setting	60
2.3.1.1. Gothic Style of Architecture ...	60
2.3.1.2. Gothic Medievalism	61
2.3.2. Costume and Codes of Dress	64
2.3.2.1. Gothic-Medieval Code of Dress.....	65
2.3.2.2. Medieval Dress	67
2.3.2.2.1. The Mariner	67
2.3.2.2.2. The Hermit	68
2.4. Lighting in Weather Sequences.....	69
2.4.1. The Wondrous Cold	73
2.4.2. Heat	75
2.4.3. Storm Scenes	78
2.5. Lighting in Transitional Off-Deck Scenes.....	82
2.6. Lighting in Confusion and Enlightenment Scenes.....	89
3. Chapter Three: Characters from Poetry to Plate	97
3.1. The Ancient Mariner	100
3.1.1. Attributes in Text and Para-Text	100
3.1.2. Ancient Mariner’s <i>Crucifixion</i>	104
3.1.3. The Wandering <i>Mariner</i>	109
3.1.4. Strong Power of Speech	110
3.1.5. The Ancient Mariner and the Wandering Jew	114
3.2. The Ordinary Man	115

3.3. The Supernatural Characters	117
3.3.1. Embodiment of Dancing Death Fires ...	117
3.3.2. The Spirit of Plague	119
3.3.3. Sea Snakes as a Thematic Clue	122
3.3.4. Life-In-Death and Her Mate	123
3.3.5. Angels	126
Conclusion	141
Bibliography	151
Glossary	159
Appendix A.....	160
Appendix B	163

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INTRODUCTION

Turning a poem into a visual sequence of illustrations represents a challenge. It requires carrying on several and multiple acts of reading of the literary text in order for the artist to uncover its essence. Every new reading reveals a layer of the text and unfolds some of its hidden ideas. Reading the text in its own original language contributes to a deeper understanding of the text and to a better interaction between the reader and the text. It allows better and more direct interaction with the text without the impeding limitations sometimes imposed by certain acts of translation. Accordingly, reading the text several times in its own language provides higher chances of a more profound interaction between the creative reader (the Artist) and the literary text.

Poetry and Painting

Although poetry and painting differ in their manner of expression, they are almost identical in their moral aims, ideological content and purpose (Lamozzo 21). Both the poet and the artist aim at influencing their receiver; morally as well ideologically. They also have the ability to *attract* receivers or disinterest them (Horace, *Ars Poetica* 61-2). Furthermore, both of them are marked by distinctive properties of *telling*: “Painting is *mute* poetry, and poetry is *speaking* picture.” (da Vinci 25 – italics mine). Accordingly, when the two mediums of expression meet in the situation of artistic adaptation, mutual influence and interaction between them is fruitful.

Painting and art can artistically adapt poetry’s linguistically *speaking picture* and thus turn it into a parallel para-textual mute poetry keeping the readers’ company in their journey through the literary text. In the light of this fruitful interactive reception, the thesis explores with study and analysis how the text of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is being adapted artistically. The focus is on the levels and methods of this artistic visual adaptation: thematic and semantic, symbolic and semiotic – through the employment of

specific artistic techniques distinguishing the artistic medium: woodcut engraving.

Para-Textuality

In his book, *Paratexts*, Gerard Genette introduces Para-textuality in detail. It is defined as the liminal devices that mediate the text to the reader. If it is within the book it is called “peritext” and if it is outside it is named “epitext”. A para-text is a possible artistic way of commenting on literary texts. By mediating the text to the reader, Genette means that it can contribute to a better reception of the literary text. It provides commentary on the text and thus influences the way it is received. According to Genette also in his *Paratexts*, a para-text may exist without its literary text and in some cases the text is lost and the para-text becomes the only remaining trace that holds the spirit of the literary text alive and “in shape”. He also believes that a text without a para-text “does not exist” and “never has existed” (4). The para-text in all its forms is dedicated to the service of something other than itself. It resolves problems of the text. Yet in turn, the text contains clues that can help the reader better interact with the para-text.

The Artistic Medium

The artistic medium used in the creation of Doré’s para-text, is woodcut engraving. According to *Oxford Companion to Art*, the technique is historically associated with the Art of Book (1215). The most ancient document that represents this ancient technique is the Buddhist *Diamond Sutra* discovered in China A.D. 868 (*Companion to Art* 1215). The technique reaches Europe in the early 15th century and used in the production of religious pictures distributed during religious occasions, the production of playing cards and of book illustrations. It primarily depends on creating the artistic design on a wooden plate, cutting away areas from the surface of the wooden plate and keeping other areas relief and levelled. After the engraving is finished, the surface of the engraved plate is covered with ink and is pressed against a

sheet of paper. The engraved areas appear whiter and brighter than the levelled areas. The latter form the artistic composition.

The Poet and the Artist

The writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), the English poet and critic, are marked by their profound philosophic aspect and their address to common issues of art, and writing. In “The Rime,” however, Coleridge addresses *Common Unity*. He explores common human themes, beliefs and problems with implicit references to knowledgeable ancient landmarks in the map of human knowledge (Beer 14). The poem’s thematic content and its symbolic as well as imagistic patterns reveal this *common* philosophic representation of sin, punishment, redemption and salvation. The Romantic atmosphere is still manifested in his *glorious* representation of Nature as a holy acting power.

Paul Gustave Doré (1832-1883) is a French engraver famous for his distinguished illustrations of the Biblical stories and of some of the world’s most popular classics including Dante Alighieri’s *La Commedia* and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Doré’s artistic style is remarkable for its attentive concentration on details and for its intense dramatic nature. He is a Romantic artist whose style is influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite style of art in terms of exaggeration and dramatic presentation and lighting schemes. His Romantic spirit is evident in his attention to natural beauty and details. This is evident in most of his works and in his illustrations of “The Rime.”

Both the poet and the artist appear to share common ground with respect to their *Romantic* presentation, their creation of dramatic atmospheres, and their *common* symbolic representation of human issues. The styles, philosophic orientations and moral aims are united by the dominant ideological, moral and philosophic borders of the poem’s

dominant atmosphere. Those shared aspects play a crucial role within the context of Reception Theory.

Reception Theory and *Talented Reception*

The developers of the Reception theory have varying views regarding the properties of the reception process. Hans Robert Jauss (1921-1997) in his book *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982), and Robert Charles Holub (1949) in his book *Reception Theory* (1984) dwell upon literature from the receiver's perspective. Holub shifts the focus from the author to the reader focusing on the reader's response to the text as a new reintroduction (Holub xii). Jauss believes that literature plays a dialectical function of *production and reception*. He thus views the reading process as an act of *interaction* between the literary work and mankind (Jauss 15).

In other words, how the text through its structural formation, thematic content, language and imagery affect the reader and evoke specific acts of response is how the acts of reading and *reception* are viewed within the context of the reception theory. According to the Italian semiotician and essayist Umberto Eco in his book *The Role of the Reader* (1979), linguistic signs control the reading process (Eco 2) and they highlight the connotation of specific elements in a given culture (4). The way readers receive the semantic connotation of certain linguistic signs can lead to various results. Accordingly, he states that texts are open to multiple interpretations that can add to the text (35-6).

Within the same context of production and reception, the American academic Stuart Sillars in his book *Painting Shakespeare: The Artist as a Critic* (2006) explains how visual adaptations of the Shakespearian literary texts are created. He highlights that multiple acts of attentive reading uncover the text's hidden ideas and details (5-11). This can help the *talented* reader, the artist, to have a clearer account of his own view of the text that he is supposed to present through his artwork. He adds that the artist's representation is not

necessarily expected to be totally identical with the text. The artist according to him is a *critic*. Subsequently, he is free to focus on specific details or add extra visual details that do not exist in the text yet can represent his own perception of the text.

Through his article entitled “Two Clever Collaborators”, Harlow Hyde states that the artist sees more clearly through his imaginative and artistic abilities. He adds that the artist is more likely to be positively affected by the literary text. He agrees with Sillars about the positive influence of multiple reading. He suggests too, like Jauss, Holub and Eco, that linguistic details and signs contribute to the formation of the artist’s total and final view of the text (31). As he states: “It is the privilege of the artist to transmit to others the record of his keener sight and full enjoyment through his pictures or illustrations” (30) In the light of this theoretical background, it is possible to trace how Doré received “The Rime” and reintroduced it. Yet it is important at this point to refer to the properties of the literary text. It would give a clearer interpretation for some of Doré’s artistic representation.

History of “The Rime”

“The Rime” first appeared in the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). It was the longest poem in the volume written in mock-medieval spelling. It is written in old-fashioned spelling, containing archaic verbal endings and grammatical forms. Examples like “grey-beard loon” (I. 2), “wherefore stopp’st thou me” (I. 4), and “this body dropt not down” (I. 231) prove this. To *modernize* the poem to readers of his time, Coleridge removed some of the archaic words and expressions, he de-archaised the spelling of “ancient” and “Mariner” throughout the poem, and changed other archaic endings (Sonmez 32, Watson 89). This version is known as the 1800 edition. The third and last version of the poem appeared in *Sibylline Leaves* in 1817. It included very few formal changes. According to George Watson in his chapter about the

poem in his book *Coleridge the Poet*, Coleridge left the poem essentially unchanged except for the addition of the eight-hundred word gloss (89).

“The Rime” and *The Wandering Jew*

“The Rime” shares a lot in terms of moral content and thematic nature¹ with the medieval legend of *The Wandering Jew*. Both of the major characters in the two stories commit sins, both are cursed, and doomed to wandering. Yet the only difference is that the Mariner is forgiven and saved whereas the Jew is not. This thematic allusion is visually interpreted. The ancient Mariner and the wandering Jew have almost the same appearance except for the length of their beards. Both are dressed in ancient worn out clothes. Both are old, lacking physical power and using sticks to support them. Both have grey fearful beards. They both end up wandering; however, the gazes on their faces reveal the end results of experience to both of them. The Jew is lost and inexperienced, while the Mariner is saved and experience leaves him a wiser *ancient* man.

Criticism of “The Rime”

“The Rime” is inspired from a dream by one of Coleridge’s friends. It is Mr John Cruikshank’s dream about a person suffering from a dire curse for the commission of some crime (Bowra 45). This explains why most of its major incidences are not logical enough to be realistic. This also justifies the poem’s atmosphere of confusion. This was the reason behind most of the negative criticism addressed against the poem on the one hand. The Romantic English poet Robert Southey (1774-1843) wrote that the poetic text of “The Rime” was well written, yet it lacked logic and coherence. He wrote: “Many of the stanzas are laboriously beautiful; but in connection they are absurd and unintelligible...” (Southey 117-200). Furthermore, the English critic Charles Lamb (1775-1834) dislikes “all the miraculous parts” in the poem (55). The English critic William Hazlitt (1778-1830) described it in his book *Lectures on the English Poets*, as “a drunken dream,

reckless, careless, and heedless, of past, present and to come.” (54)

On the other hand, the poem was positively received by critics like the English critic C. M. Bowra and the Egyptian critic Abdelwahab El-Messiri. In the third chapter of his book *The Romantic Imagination*, Bowra states that “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” contains a criticism of life in an exciting context. He states that “The Rime” is original in its supernatural presentation. He finds it unique in terms of its narrative style (55). Professor Abdelwahab El-Messiri who translated the poem into Arabic and published it with a critical study in 2007² finds the poem highly philosophic, and timelessly cross-cultural (91).

Doré’s Reception of “The Rime”

Receiving a literary text like “The Rime” with all these profound stylistic features, thematic concerns and complicated supernatural imagery, Doré is positively influenced by the text on various aspects. In his creation of the para-text, Doré is influenced by the poem’s verbal archaism, dramatic structure, Gothic atmosphere, Christian symbolism and thematic content. Each of those elements is artistically presented in the para-text. The archaic nature of the poem’s diction and theme are reflected in Doré’s creation of the setting and exploitation of the artistic medium. Lighting and scenic composition are his means to communicating the poem’s dramatic as well as Gothic aspects. He expresses Christian symbolism through the employment of certain visual signs and gestures like the cross and the crucifixion position. The thematic content of the poem is coherently presented with respect to the thematic allusion of “The Rime” with other historic texts.

Literature Review

The relation of poetical presentation and visual representation between the poem and the Doré illustrations was not tackled before. However, studies that are related to the topic of tracing similar relations between literary texts and

their illustrations were pursued by many researchers tackling famous and unknown illustrated texts and illustrators as well. The research is consequently making use of the significant studies in the field. The first one is by Harlow Hyde, a writer in *Brush and Pencil* in which the study was first published (Vol. 9) in 1901 entitled “Two Clever Collaborators in Illustration”. It is mainly concerned with the way a literary text is handled before making the illustrations (i.e. the necessary steps), and hence revealing all the stages of the process of building illustrations to literary texts. The second one is an analytical study entitled “Mother Goose Illustrated: From Perrault to Doré” by Ségolène Le Men published in *Poetics Today* (Vol. 13) in **1992**. The study traces how illustrations can replace literary text for little children and restore oral culture for adults. The third study is by Dan Mallan who published a book entitled *Gustave Doré- A Drift on Dreams of Splendor* in **1995**. The book presents biographical details and analytical explanations to most of Doré’s plates.

The Egyptian Researcher Heba A. Mohaymen Awad finished and published a study about *The Graphic Works of P. J. Doré* in **2002**. The study gives a panoramic view of the engravings of Doré . In **2006** a study entitled *Painting Shakespeare: the Artist as a Critic* by the American scholar Stuart Sillars was published in New York by Cambridge University Press. The study reveals how an illustrator can turn into a critic of the literary text, and also how an artist can add to the text, and explain its deepest layers through his artistic tools and thus make them clearer and more visible. In **2007**, Dr Abd El-Wahab El-Messiri’s translated version of the poem was published with a commentary by him and illustrations by the Egyptian painter Rabab Nemr. The poem in its original text and the Doré illustrations appeared in three editions. The first in 1877, the second in 1952 and the third in 1970 and they continue to be published until the present time.