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READER-RESPONSE THROUGH ILLUSTRATIONS AT AL IMAM MOHAMMAD IBN SAUD ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY— CASE STUDY: MISS GHADA

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For reader-response critics, the reader is the most important component, not the text. Their theories, although diverse, share one common interest—the reader. Although their sole interest is on the reader, still, all the reader-oriented theorists focus on the verbal or the written response of the reader. Not one theory examines other responses to texts readers may have, namely, illustrations. This study acknowledges the existence of responses to literature other than the norm. An undergraduate student at Al Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University prompted this study. In a poetry course designed specifically for advanced students majoring in English literature, the student had responded to literary pieces solely through illustrations. This had been the only means by which the student was able to communicate her understanding of English literature in general, poetry in particular. The study makes the distinguished student a case study in the hope of expanding the scope of reader-response criticism as well as reviving interest in an approach which appears to have been subdued by more up-to-date approaches namely, post-colonialism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, new historicism, cultural materialism, gender criticism, queer theory, and the latest—ecocriticism. In addition, the study proves that the two mediums of artistic expression: painting and poetry are more intimately connected than had previously been thought.

Keywords: Interdisciplinary approach, Poetry, Illustrations, Disciplines, Reader-response.

Introduction

In a recent study entitled "Hostile Reader-Response at Al Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University to Selected Seventeenth Century Poems with a *Carpe Diem* Theme," it was noted that Saudi female undergraduate students responded with hostility to *carpe diem* poems of seduction, particularly lyric poems which trivialize virtue. Islamic teachings as well as cultural norms and values have conditioned students to respond with animosity towards anything related to sex and sexuality (Alshiban 2, 4). Interestingly, this hostile attitude towards literary pieces which urge a virgin to change her state extended to postgraduate students belonging to the same university. Students' responses in general proved in accordance with the German literary historian and theorist Hans Robert Jauss who stresses that: "the quality and rank of a literary work result neither from the biographical or historical conditions of its origin, nor from its place in the sequence of the development of a genre alone, but rather from the criteria of influence, reception, and posthumous fame" (5). Jauss' "horizon of expectations" theory in general, contends that a work of art is never universal. It does not have the same appeal to readers of all eras since

tastes change as do conventions, convictions, and moral and religious attitudes. Students at Al Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University proved living testimony to Jauss' assertion.

The study had been fruitful for a number of reasons. First, in terms of acknowledging readers' responses in the classroom as opposed to, disregarding them in the past. Second, in raising awareness to the challenges faced by the professor of English Literature at an all-female Islamic university; adhering to certain moral and religious codes. Third, in suggesting solutions that aid in subduing hostile readers' responses when they arise with regards to literary pieces which prove offensive. Fourth, and most importantly, in recognizing the fact that Saudi female students at an Islamic university respond uniformly to literary pieces in general.

Overall, the results of the research had been satisfactory, that is, until one student in the "Poetry 313" course, did not fit the criteria of the religious reader shaped by Islamic beliefs and social conventions. Miss Ghada, as she will be referred to from now on for the sake of anonymity (at her request), displayed a rather unusual reader-response that not only did not correspond with the responses of her fellow classmates *per se*, but also did not qualify any of the theories associated with this particular approach to literature. The student showed no interest either in the written or in the spoken word. Her sole interest had been in illustrations. Ghada's responses had been visual renditions of almost all the literary pieces read in class. This had been her sole means of communicating her understanding of poetry. As a result, Ghada became one of the most enigmatic and intriguing students in the history of my teaching career. Hence this research which pays homage to a truly distinguished reader/student.

Ghada did not fit the image of the courteous, impeccably dressed student who showed tremendous respect for traditional values. She was tormented, reclusive, disheveled—thus fitting the image of the archetypal artist. She insisted on the personal integrity of the artist, on the self-sufficiency of the work of art, and on the right to draw in class. She ignored hoary academic teachings and rules and worked spontaneously, impulsively, bringing a highly individual and fresh vision to almost everything she read. And she fused literature and art.

On the surface there was nothing particularly unusual about Ghada; her appearance typified the young and rebellious. She was energetic, vivacious, and had slightly disheveled dark hair, piercing black eyes, and a straight nose. She caught my attention from the very beginning since as I was introducing myself to the class, Ghada was busy drawing my portrait. She had found me fascinating; a person whom evoked in her a desire to draw and I had loved the attention—finally someone found me worthy of a portrait!

This study makes Miss Ghada a case study in the hope of demonstrating that reader-response theories should not be confined solely to the written or spoken word. Other responses to literary pieces do exist, and thus, should be acknowledged. The study questions the notable absence of a theory which centers on responses to literature through mediums other than the norm. Furthermore, it proves that the two mediums of artistic expression: painting and poetry are more intimately connected than what had been thought.

Reader-Response Theory

All reader-response theorists focus on the reader's reception of a text since the theory itself is concerned with the relationship between text and reader and reader and text, "with the emphasis on the different ways in which a reader participates in the course of reading a text and the different perspectives which arise in the relationship (Cuddon 770). However, some, namely the German critics, Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, focus not on the response of one reader, but on the general reading public over the course of time. The American reader-response critic, Stanley Fish also believes in the power of what he terms "interpretive communities." Like Jauss and Iser, Fish believes that many readers from similar backgrounds share the same interpretive strategies (Padley 189). Others, most notably, David Bleich and Norman Holland, believe in the subjective response of an individual reader. "For these psychological or subjective critics, the reader's thoughts, beliefs, and experiences play a greater part than the actual text in

shaping a work's meaning" (Bressler 67). Still, even Bleich's subjective criticism appears communal. The reader must objectify his subjective feelings in order to make his response to a literary piece "socially respectable in his interpretative community" (Bressler 69).

Although the aforementioned names are the principle theorists of reader-response criticism, I. A. Richards, Louise Rosenblatt, Walker Gibson, and others, have also introduced some groundbreaking theories with regards to this particular approach to literature. Still, the present study is not a survey of all the reader-response theories advanced over the years. The study refers to certain theories particularly those by the principle theorists in an attempt to demonstrate the obvious lack of a theory which centers on a response to literature through a medium other than the written or spoken word. Bleich, for example, uses "the written, essay-length response statement" in order to formulate judgments with regards to his readers/students (147). Bleich explains his purpose: "A response statement aims to record the perception of a reading experience and its natural, spontaneous consequences. . . . At the same time, it is not necessary to interrupt the reading to record the response" (147). Holland's five readers, on the other hand, were taken from a group of undergraduate literature majors who volunteered as paid subjects to respond verbally, during taped interviews, to selected short stories.

Interestingly, Bleich firmly believes that the American way of observing readers in the classroom is superior to that of Ingarden, Jauss, Iser, Groeben, and others since, "these European writers aim mainly at presenting models of the reader without studying specific responses of specific readers" (101). Regardless of which approach is better, nowhere in the history of reader-response criticism is reference made to a reader's response through illustrations.

"Poetry 313"

The "Poetry 313" course at Al Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University is quite an intensive course designed specifically for Level 5 (advanced) students specializing in English literature. The course covers a pivotal period in the history of English literature—The Romantic. However, due to the enormity of subject matter as well as the vast material to be covered in a span of less than four months, students were informed in the introductory lecture that "Nature" would be the theme of choice since landscapes, sea views, and sunsets have had quite an impact on literary figures throughout history. Steve Padley supports this view. In *Key Concepts in Contemporary Literature*, he writes: "The representation of nature in literature has historically been one of the most prevalent themes in the Western tradition" (113). As a result, the way in which nature had been revealed in the development of intellectual and critical thoughts of the day became central to the "Poetry 313" course. In truth, there had been another, more important, reason for selecting nature as theme—there is no sexual element in nature. Thus, guaranteeing a smooth-running course devoid of opposition.

In the introductory lecture students were informed that a preoccupation with the beauty of untamed nature and its picturesque qualities became central to the Romantics. Nature stimulated the imagination and allowed it to envision and to escape the confines of everyday life. The artist was allowed free expression of the imagination in order to create. Nature became goddess, healer, protector—the ideal.

The second session began with the students being formally introduced to the Romantics. They were informed that the Romantic period ran roughly between 1785 and 1832 and that the period marked a noticeable departure away from form, order, decorum, and objectivity, to feelings, particularly in relation to the natural order. Literary figures showed a tremendous interest in the reality of nature, and in the natural, crude, primitive, and uncivilized way of life. They gave their attention mainly to the landscape and essentially to the aspect of nature where the atmosphere was of supreme importance, as it conditioned reality to its ambient mood. This was best expressed in the poetry of the period, a point confirmed by David Perkins, who, in *English Romantic Writers* asserts that: "The supreme achievement of the age was in poetry" (9). Students were then informed that the main figures associated with the movement had been Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, George Gordon, Lord Byron, and William Blake. Although literary historians have grouped the poets together and constructed a

unified Romanticism on the basis of their works, nonetheless, the figures had different philosophical views with regards to the imagination, mind, the emotions, and most importantly, to nature. For example, "Byron despised both Coleridge's metaphysics and Wordsworth's theory and practice of poetry; Shelley and Keats were at opposite poles from each other stylistically and philosophically; Blake was not at all like any of the other five" (Abrams *Norton Anthology* 1).

Despite their varying views, all the poets were inspired one way or another by nature and the natural landscape. Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp" (1795), for example, shows the poet communing with transcendent reality through listening to a musical instrument associated with "music played by nature" (Colville 6). In "Dejection: an Ode" (1802), the blowing wind inspires the poet. Shelley's "Ozymandias" (1817), concludes that immortality is to be sought not through art, but rather through nature, since nature is infinite: "The lone and level sands stretch far away" (14). In "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" (1816), the poet presents Intellectual Beauty "as communion with supernatural unity reaching down through nature" (Colville 36). "Mont Blanc" (1816) explores the relationship between the mind and nature through meditation. The central figure in Shelley's "Arethusa" (1820) is a nymph associated with nature. In "Julian and Maddalo" (1818), the natural landscape evokes the speaker's imagination: "Oh, / How beautiful is sunset, when the glow / Of Heaven descends upon a land like thee, / Thou Paradise of exiles, Italy!" (54-57). Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1850) is all about the poet's spiritual growth and relationship with nature. Keats' poems, too, show a preoccupation with nature. In fact, he was quoted as saying; "if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves on a tree it had better not come at all," thus confirming the association between the poetic mind and the natural landscape (qtd. in Perkins 13). Cantos III and IV of Byron's *Child Harold's Pilgrimage* (1809-17) reveal "the silent contemplation of nature leading to perception of unity and the deity" (Colville 33). Even Blake, who is oftentimes viewed separately from his fellow Romantics shows his passion for nature when in his *Poetical Sketches* (1783), he includes four poems in the form of invocations to one of the four seasons.

Ten out of the thirteen lectures had been devoted solely to in-class readings and commentary on excerpts from the aforementioned poems. I remained objective all the while, allowing no personal feelings or biases to interfere. Students were not swayed either in favor or against a certain poet/poem. They were to respond freely. Norbert Elliot supports such teaching methodology. In "A Midrash for Louise Rosenblatt," he stresses that: "Tolerance of other points of view" is extremely important for the teacher (295). Rosenblatt herself had also argued against any interference on the part of the teacher. In *Literature as Exploration* she stresses the "necessity not to impose a set of preconceived notions about the proper way to react to any work." "The student must be free to grapple with his own reaction," advises Rosenblatt (63).

On the thirteenth lecture, students were requested to prepare a presentation on a Romantic poet of choice in terms of his handling of nature. They were informed that marks would be involved in an effort to guarantee satisfactory presentations. However, the outcome of this assignment proved disappointing. The presentations had been devoid of emotions. Romantic poets appeared to have little or no effect upon the readers. Moreover, Romantic poems did not titillate the students as poems detailing human relationships had done in previous courses. Their responses had been flat, detached, aloof, and passive.

In truth, this came as no surprise as students showed little interest in the course as a whole. They sat in class motionless as one Romantic poem was read after another. The emphasis on nature and the natural landscape resulted in a nonchalant, passive reader-response. Students brought no personal experiences or private emotions to bear in their textual analysis. They failed to bring to the poems any ideas accumulated through life's experiences. "Romantic jargon about nature," to use the students' words, did not appeal to them in the least.

In *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, Rosenblatt introduces two types of reading: “efferent” or "nonaesthetic" and “aesthetic” (23). She distinguishes between the two by explaining that in "nonaesthetic reading," the reader's attention is focused primarily on "the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out" (23). The reader is interested only in information, not in the actual words themselves. By contrast:

> In aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text . . . [The reader] must decipher the images or concepts or assertions that the words point to, he also pays attention to the associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas that these words and their referents arouse within him. (24-25)

From the respondents' reaction to poems and poets from the Romantic period, it became evident that no "aesthetic reading," to use Rosenblatt's term, had been employed. All the readers rendered similar judgments with similar justifications. The compendium of attitudes and responses shared by the readers was held, despite natural variations in personality, with remarkable unanimity. The students did not identify with the characters in the poems, the speakers, or the poets. There was no emotional involvement in the characters' situations. No associations. No "Sensing, feeling, imagining, thinking, synthesizing the states of mind" (Rosenblatt *The Reader* 26). Interestingly, Colville does not find this reaction/response unusual. In *Victorian Poetry and the Romantic Religion*, he writes:

> A sense of puzzlement is a central reaction—conscious or otherwise—of most modern readers of Romantic poetry. Scholars are constantly having to explain that the wholeness of belief the poems express, however naïve it may now appear, was not only possible when they were composed, but did actually exist. This suggests not only how far our own age has retrogressed from Romantic certitude, but also that Romantic certitude has had a remarkably swift decay. (4)

Romantic poetry did not appeal to Western students due to its seeming naivety. Yet, female students at Al Imam University had an altogether different reason for rejecting Romantic poetry—they found the poems monotonous. It is my speculation, however, that poems about nature and the natural landscape did not appeal to Saudi students residing in Riyadh, a big city, simply because they could not fathom the meaning of the word nature. Nature had been remote.

Since students could not relate to nature presumably due to its absence from their everyday lives, their readings of Romantic texts had been "efferent" or "nonaesthetic" (Rosenblatt *The Reader* 24).They did not read the texts as poems, but rather as fact-accumulating pieces. Ghada, on the other hand, displayed an "aesthetic reading" throughout the course. She identified with the characters and became emotionally involved in their situation. Her subjective responses to Romantic poems resulted in a desire to illustrate them. For example, in Shelley's "Julian and Maddalo," Ghada's response had been a beautiful painting of the poet's natural landscape which he almost paints, himself, with his vivid description:

> Looking upon the evening and the flood
> Which lay between the city and the shore,
> Paved with the image of the sky . . . the hoar
> And aery[sic] Alps towards the North appeared
> Through mist, an heaven-sustaining bulwark reared
> Between the East and West; and half the sky
> Was roofed with clouds of rich emblazonry
> Dark purple at the zenith, which still grew
> Down the steep West into a wondrous hue
> Brighter than burning gold, even to the rent
> Where the swift sun yet paused in his descent
> Among the many folded hills: they were
> Those famous Euganean hills, which bear,
> As seen from Lido thro' the harbor piles,

The likeness of a clump of peaked isles—
And then—as if the Earth and Sea had been
Dissolved into one lake of fire, were seen
Those mountains towering as from waves of flame
Around the vaporous sun, from which there came
The inmost purple spirit of light, and made
Their very peaks transparent. (65-85)

When the aforementioned lines had been read aloud in class by one of the students, Ghada took to sketching Shelley's nature first. However, due to the time limit of the lecture, she had been unable to paint it. Not discouraged, Ghada had decided to complete the work at home, returning the following session with a masterpiece. According to Ghada, once home, she took to re-reading the lines over and over again until she was able to visualize Shelly's nature. After which, she began to transfer the poet's words on canvas. Her painting (shown below), truly captures the poet's description of the natural landscape particularly in terms of its kaleidoscopic effect on the observer. Nature's appeal is undeniable. The delicate shades of dark purple, light purple, and violet, and her deft brushwork, which with a few strokes suggests the mountain tops breaking the purple sky is truly breath-taking. The painting is a brilliant example of Ghada's aesthetic response to literature. Looking at the warm beige of the mountains, one becomes a witness to this idealized nature. Interestingly, Ghada had translated the last five lines literally. The "Earth and Sea" appear "Dissolved into one lake of fire." And the mountains do in fact tower "as from waves of flame / Around the vaporous sun, from which there came / The inmost purple spirit of light, and made / Their very peaks transparent" (80-85).

Figure 1. A Scene from "Julian and Maddalo".

This process of converting words into visual images continued with Ghada throughout the thirteen lectures. Now, as much as I had enjoyed this particular reader's response to poetic pieces, I found myself growing increasingly concerned as to the way in which she would be graded. This concern, I had decided, would have to be postponed until the final exam.

The fourteenth and fifteenth lectures had been reserved solely for student presentations. Ghada's was to be the last, as I found her too fascinating to part with early on in the lectures. Whereas, all the presentations had been repetitive, uniformed, and objective, Ghada's had been quite the reverse. She began by setting up a projector and introducing a short home-video showing her in the process of sketching selected lines from Wordsworth's "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" (1798) and "Michael" (1800), respectively. She then proceeded by explaining that for Wordsworth, "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (qtd. in Perkins 9). In her view, so was painting. The "poet of nature," as J. R.

Watson refers to him in *English Poetry of the Romantic Period*, depicted nature in a manner she could envision (166). In "Michael," for example, the poet, in the role of narrator, voices his love of both rustic life and nature when he introduces his tale:

> Of Shepherds, dwellers in the valleys, men
> Whom I already loved;—not verily
> For their own sakes, but for the fields and hills
> Where was their occupation and abode.
> And hence this Tale, while I was yet a Boy
> Careless of books, yet having felt the power
> Of Nature. (23-29)

Wordsworth's preoccupation with rustic life, with children and the English peasantry, appealed to Ghada because she, herself, was a country girl. Ghada came from a small village near Baha, a city in the southern region of Saudi Arabia. Her village, she explained, had beautiful picturesque landscapes, with houses built from different sized stones and sheep-folds occupying every hilltop. Humble shepherds dwelt the land—shepherds not dissimilar from those depicted by Wordsworth. Ghada explained that her ancestors had been landowners who, like most Wordsworthian characters, coexisted with the land.

The association between her village and Wordsworth's natural landscape had been undeniable for Ghada, as were the characters depicted by Wordsworth. Wordsworth's Goody Blake reminded Ghada of an old peasant woman who lived on a hill top in her village. The old woman, like Goody Blake, had also been: "old and poor; / Ill fed she was, and thinly clad; / And any man who passed her door / Might see how poor a hut she had" (21-24).

"Goody Blake and Harry Gill," appealed to Ghada because it showed two contrary states of being: innocence and experience. A rich property owner is hardened by materialism, and a poor old woman still retains her childlike innocence. On a cold winter's night with the full moon in view, Harry Gill, who had long suspected Goody of stealing from under his hedge, finally catches her in the act of collecting sticks, upon which he grabs her violently by the arm and threatens her sense of safety. Goody Blake, kneeling with her sticks scattered on the ground, looks up to the heavens above and prays to the Almighty that he may never be warm. Goody Blake's prayers are answered. Harry Gill is forever cold.

Ghada admitted that upon reading the poem, she had found herself unwilling to illustrate just a few lines. She wanted to illustrate the entire piece. As a result, three individual illustrations were presented to the class rather than her usual single illustration per poem. The first scene Ghada chose to illustrate came from the lines:

> Now, when the frost was past enduring,
> And made her poor old bones to ache,
> Could any thing be more alluring
> Than an old hedge to Goody Blake?
> And, now and then, it must be said,
> When her old bones were cold and chill,
> She left her fire, or left her bed,
> To seek the hedge of Harry Gill. (57-64)

Ghada chose to illustrate Goody Blake praying as her second scene:

> She prayed, her withered hand uprearing,
> While Harry held her by the arm—
> "God! who art never out of hearing,
> O may he never more be warm!"
> The cold, cold moon above her head,
> Thus on her knees did Goody pray;
> Young Harry heard what she had said:
> And icy cold he turned away. (97-104)

For the third and last scene Ghada chose to illustrate the beginning of the poem where Harry is presented to the reader as one who is cold regardless of the seasons:

> In March, December, and in July,
> 'Tis all the same with Harry Gill;
> The neighbours tell, and tell you truly,
> His teeth they chatter, chatter still.
> At night, at morning, and at noon,
> 'Tis all the same with Harry Gill;
> Beneath the sun, beneath the moon,
> His teeth they chatter, chatter still! (9-16)

Figure 2. Scene 1 from "Goody Blake and Harry Gill".

Ghada's illustrations proved not only that she had understood the poem well, but that she had also liked it. In the first scene, Goody Blake is shown in the midst of a winter's storm with sparse clothing signifying her social status. However, Goody is smiling which conveys to the observer that although cold, she still enjoys nature and the elements. The touches of black and gray truly make the figure of Goody Blake stand out from her background. The whole atmosphere of the picture is one of repose, relaxation, and leisure. The most admirable thing of all is that the observer can barely see the figure of Harry Gill lurking. His presence is truly terrifying since he becomes an embodiment of all that is evil.

Figure 3. Scene 2 from "Goody Blake and Harry Gill".

The second scene with its grayish tonality bathed in moonlight is without doubt Ghada's best illustration by far. Each detail is carefully constructed—Harry's hedge becomes an almost stage-like setting for the drama which occurs in the foreground, the trees, the sticks, the play of light, and the figures, carved, it would seem, out of the light of the moon—contributes to make this scene the best illustration. The illustration exalts light, shade, and technique with the most vivid intensity. Wordsworth's lines can easily be traced in this central scene where Goody is shown in a state of power. Although the old woman is on her knees with sticks scattered everywhere, still, her pointed finger, suggests empowerment. The enlarged full moon in the background symbolizes Goody's closeness to nature. It also alludes to a Divine presence. The look on Harry's face is one of dread as he slowly turns away. He knows that a horrible fate awaits him.

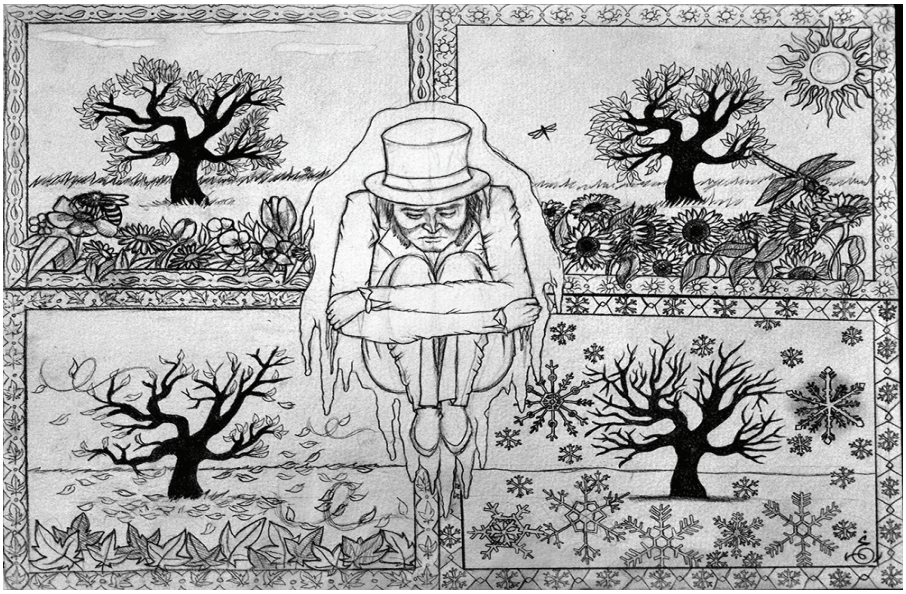

Figure 4. Scene 3 from "Goody Blake and Harry Gill".

The last scene is the ending of the story although inspired by the second stanza of the poem. Harry is depicted in an upright fetal position; his back is curved, head bowed, limbs bent and drawn up to his chest. The arms wrapped fully around his body suggest that this man has undergone extreme physical and psychological trauma. Harry's lowered chin and shut eyes are a clear indicator that he desperately wants to prevent further injury. The illustration is powerful and shows much psychological depth. The four seasons surrounding Harry are a magnificent touch since they convey to the observer that the seasons come and go, yet, Harry Gill is cursed forever—he is forever cold. Harry's lack of human compassion has at last been punished.

Wordsworth's "Michael" had also appealed to Ghada. She had found Michael's oneness with nature worthy of illustration. And, although Ghada had enjoyed reading the lengthy narrative poem, she chose to illustrate only a few lines:

> And, truly, at all times, the storm that drives
> The traveler to a shelter, summoned him
> Up to the mountains: he had been alone
> Amid the heart of many thousand mists,
> That came to him, and left him, on the heights.
> So lived he till his eightieth year was past. (56-61)

Figure 5. A Scene from "Michael".

In her illustration (shown above), a thunderous storm is in progress, yet, Michael appears unfazed. He is shown neither fleeing nature's destructive force, nor taking shelter indoors. There is no terror and impotence in the face of the blind forces of nature. Instead, he is embracing the storm. Michael appears to be sprouting out of the mountain with both arms up in the air emphasizing the drama of nature, the dynamic struggle between the elements, and the changing sky. It shows a powerfully orchestrated scene: storm clouds pile up in the distance, pierced by bolts of lightning. The human figure, is not small as one might expect, instead, Michael is glorious and occupies centre stage. Michael's implied nudity hints at his oneness with nature. The divinity of the human body is beautifully captured by Ghada in the powerful arms, and the heaving masses of bone and muscle that comprise the chest. The muscles are individually defined and separated emphasizing a life-like torso. Although Michael is a man of eighty, fully grown, he is portrayed with the powerful muscles of a youth. The illustration shows extraordinary mastery of expression and perfect command of technique.

A noteworthy point is that although Ghada had chosen to illustrate only a few lines from the poem, she nonetheless, retains the whole story. Michael, for example, is depicted in her illustration as aged, yet strong, hence his muscular physique. This portrayal of Michael comes directly from the physical characteristics attributed to him by the narrator/poet:

> An old man, stout of heart, and strong of limb.
> His bodily frame had been from youth to age
> Of an unusual strength: his mind was keen,
> Intense, and frugal, apt for all affairs,
> And in his shepherd's calling he was prompt
> And watchful more than ordinary men. (42–47)

Although I found myself exceedingly pleased with her illustration, I still wondered as to her reasons for excluding Luke, Michael's only son, since most of the poem speaks of the relationship between father and son. However, she soon provided a satisfactory answer. According to her logic, the poem details Michael's relationship with nature, not man. His relationship with Luke is used by the poet to reveal more about the man. For example, Michael is able to overlook gender roles. His closeness to nature enables him

to transcend the self and reach out to another human being hence his ability to nurture Luke as a mother would:

> Exceeding was the love he bare to him,
> His heart and his heart's joy! For oftentimes
> Old Michael, while he was a babe in arms,
> Had done him female service, not alone
> For pastime and delight, as is the use
> Of fathers, but with patient mind enforced
> To acts of tenderness; and he had rocked
> His cradle, as with a woman's gentle hand. (151-158)

Furthermore, when Luke reaches his eighteenth year and leaves for the city, Michael, although heart-broken, allows him to go. He sacrifices the son, but not the land. Luke is therefore merely a tool used by the poet to reveal more about the man—Michael. This point in particular is supported by Harold Bloom, who refers to Michael as a "Wordsworthian Man, the solitary against the sky." Bloom goes on to add that, "Wordsworth has no interest in the son, Luke (he is given no line to speak in the poem)" (183-184). Thus, Ghada's impressive illustration had translated the poet's exact vision.

Prickett raises a very interesting point when he asserts that: "it is impossible to think of Romanticism solely within the confines of literature" (10). Marcia Pointon supports Prickett. In "Romanticism in English Art," Pointon devotes her entire essay to the relationship between poetry and painting. She explains that the Romantic spirit was not confined to literature alone, but extended into the other arts: "Pictorial manifestations of a 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling' were everywhere to be seen" (79). This is because, "English literature provided a wealth of events for the English . . . painter" (86). Painters showed a deep awareness of the change of attitudes to nature from previous centuries. The landscape painter, John Constable (1776-1837), a Romantic artist, is quoted by Pointon as saying: "In Art as in Literature . . . there are two modes by which men endeavor to attain the same end, and seek distinction" (104). Constable had been correct. There is indeed an undeniable connection between poetry and painting, a point further recognized by poet/painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who was quoted as saying: "if a man has any poetry in him he should paint, for it has all been said and written, and they have hardly begun to paint it" (qtd. in Hilton 162). Therefore, when a student such as Ghada shows a response to literature that is primarily illustrative, she is merely following in the age old tradition of poetry and painting being "sister arts" (Hilton 50).

Painting and Poetry

Figure 6. Hughes' The Lady of Shalott.

The above illustration is entitled *The Lady of Shalott*, painted by the English artist, Arthur Hughes (1832-1915), in 1858. The painting is worthy of mention at this point not because of the abundant detail, the models' faces and poses, the artist's realistic depiction of the water, the richness of color, the pose of the Lady of Shalott, or the fluidity of the brushwork, but rather for its subject matter. For, the subject comes directly from Tennyson's poem "The Lady of Shalott" (1832). Hughes' painting exemplifies an illustrative reader-response to a literary piece. Hughes read Tennyson's poem and reproduced it through a medium other than the written or spoken word. The artist, not only drew inspiration for the picture from the poem *per se*, but also gave his painting the title of Tennyson's poem. This had been his response to literature. It is important to note, however, that Hughes did not choose to illustrate the entire poem. As in Ghada's case, he had selected only certain lines. For example, the observers who stand on the bank of the river bear reference to the following lines from Tennyson's poem:

> There the river eddy whirls,
> And there the surly village-churls,
> And the red-cloaks of market girls
> Pass onward from Shalott (51-54).

Furthermore, the positioning of the Lady of Shalott is taken not from the beginning of the poem, but from the end. Hughes appears to have been moved by the ending of the poem where the Lady dies singing her song. The Lady's pose comes directly from the lines:

> Lying robed in snowy white
> That loosely flew to left and right—
> The leaves upon her falling light—
> Thro' the noises of the night
> She floated down to Camelot;
> . . . . . .
> Till her blood was frozen slowly,
> And her eyes were darkened wholly,
> Turned to towering Camelot.
> . . . . . .
> Singing in her song she died,
> The Lady of Shalott. (136-53)

Figure 7. Waterhouse's The Lady of Shalott.

John William Waterhouse (1849-1917), another painter, was to also find inspiration in Tennyson's poem. Lucinda Hawksley in *Essential Pre-Raphaelites* elaborates:

> Waterhouse was a great admirer of Tennyson and particularly of "The Lady of Shalott"; he came up with several illustrations to the poem, including a spectacular oil painting of the Lady trapped within her loom . . . Waterhouse owned a copy of the collected works of Tennyson—the pages of which are covered in the artist's sketches for proposed illustrations (236).

Waterhouse's painting, *The Lady of Shalott* (1888), (shown above), differs in many ways from Hughes'. To begin with, Waterhouse's Lady is still alive. She is depicted seated, rather than lying down. Moreover, the placing of three candles with two flames already extinguished and just one last candle left to be blown out before her death gives the painting a dramatic quality. Waterhouse, unlike Hughes, "chose to illustrate one phrase in [his] painting: 'she loos'd the chain and down she lay'" (Hawksley 236).

Figure 8. Hunt's The Eve of St. Agnes.

William Holman Hunt's *The Eve of St. Agnes* (1848), (shown above), like the aforementioned examples, is also an illustration of a poem. Keats' vivid description and pictorial details is translated beautifully on canvas. Hunt chose to illustrate stanza 41 from Keats' "The Eve of St. Agnes":

> They glide, like phantoms into the wide hall;
> Like phantoms to the iron porch they glide;
> Where lay the Porter, in uneasy sprawl,
> With a huge empty flagon by his side:
> The wakeful bloodhound rose, and shook his hide,
> But his sagacious eye an inmate owns:
> By one, and one, the bolts full easy slide:—
> The chains lie silent on the foot worn stones;—
> The key turns, and the door upon its hinges groans. (361-69)

Eight years after Hunt's pictorial interpretation of Keats' poem, Hughes was to also paint the same subject. His response to the poem however differs from Hunt's. Hughes chose to paint his rendition of the poem as a triptych. He most likely wanted to illustrate as much of the lengthy poem as he possibly could.

Figure 9. Hughes' The Eve of St. Agnes.

Hughes and Hunt were to illustrate other poems by Keats. Hunt, for example, painted Keats' *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* between 1866 and 1868. Hunt's pictorial rendition of Keats' poem came from the second half of the poem where Isabella, upon the realization that her evil brothers had murdered her beloved, Lorenzo, retrieves his severed head and conceals it beneath a basil plant. The painting is a brilliant translation of Keats's lines from stanza fifty-three, that Isabella "hung over her sweet Basil evermore, / And moistened it with tears unto the core" (423-24). Another example of an illustrative reader-response to literature is Hunt's *Rienzi Vowing to Obtain Justice for the Death of His Young Brother, Slain in the Skirmish Between the Colonna and Orsini Factions* (1849), based on the 1835 novel, *Rienzi, the Last of the Roman Tribunes*, by Bulwer Lytton. Hunt's *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus* (1851) also proves to be inspired by literature. The painting shows a scene from Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Walter Howell Deverell's *A Scene from 'As You Like It'* (1853), also takes its cue from literature, as does, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Paola and Francesca da Rimini* (1855), William Morris' *Guinevere* (1857), Ford Madox Brown's *Cordelia at the Bedside of Lear* (1854) and *Romeo and Juliet* (1867), and Sir John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* (1852).

All the aforementioned painters had been avid readers. They particularly liked the works of "Homer, Dante, Chaucer, Leonardo, Goethe, Keats, Shelly, King Alfred, Landor, Thackery, Washington and Browning" (Hilton 34). More importantly, all had been associated one way or another with the Pre-Raphaelite movement of 1848; a quintessentially English art movement which drew inspiration from poetry and literature. The movement sought to raise the discipline of painting from the "realm of humble craft practiced by artisans to an intellectually respectable art that could legitimately rub shoulders with philosophical and literary interests" (De Cars 7). As a result, a special development in the history of the

old idea that poetry and painting are "sister arts" emerged (Hilton 50). Timothy Hilton in *The Pre-Raphaelites* elaborates:

> Here began a special development in the history of the old idea (first formulated by Horace) of *ut picture poesis*, the theory that poetry and painting are sister arts, fulfilling much the same function, and consequently that a text can illustrate a picture as much as a picture a text. (50)

Although credit should be given to the Pre-Raphaelite movement for raising awareness to the interchange between painting and literature, still, the members of the movement had not been the only artists to employ an illustrative reader-response to literature. As far back as 1495 Leonardo Da Vinci was to apply a decidedly reader-response approach to his *Last Supper* (1495-98). Da Vinci's painting, with its predominantly religious theme, had been based on a passage the artist had read in the Bible. Frederick Hartt in *A History of Italian Renaissance Art* confirms this point when he states that Da Vinci's painting:

> is in truth based on the Biblical lines: "Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one to say unto him, Lord is it I?" Leonardo's overriding concern is with this single aspect of the narrative—the speculation regarding the identity of the betrayer and the consequent self-searching of the Apostles. Instead of designating the betrayer, he has shown the bombshell effect of the announcement at the feast. (457)

Twentieth century Spanish artist, Salvador Dali, also employed a reader-response approach to his paintings. The artist's passion for psychoanalysis in general, Freud in particular, led him to translate what he had read in psychology textbooks on canvas. Paintings such as *Dismal Sport* (1929), *The First Days of Spring* (1929), *The Portrait of Paul Eluard* (1929), *The Enigma of Desire* (1929), and *Illumined Pleasures* (1929) employ symbolism derived from psychology textbooks, particularly Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* (1919). The themes of the paintings revolve around neurosis, sexual frustration, castration, emasculation, and obsession—visual analogies from Freud's text. Dali biographer, Dawn Ades, informs that Dali had first read Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* when he was a student in Madrid. She quotes the artist as saying of the text: "This book presented itself to me as one of the capital discoveries in my life, and I was seized with a real vice of self-interpretation, not only of my dreams but of everything that happened to me" (qtd. in Ades 74).

Oftentimes, the reverse happens. Painters influence literary figures. Wallace Stevens (1879-1955), for example, wrote poetry that was highly influenced by the paintings of Paul Klee and Paul Cezanne. W. H. Auden (1907-1973) found inspiration in a painting by the Flemish painter Pieter Brueghel the elder (1525-1569) entitled *The Fall of Icarus*. His poem "Musee des Beaux Arts"(1938), relates the story behind the painting. The American poet, William Carlos Williams (1883-1963), was to also write a poem about Brueghel's painting, however, his bore the title: "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" (1962). Williams had been a firm believer in the strong connection between poetry and painting. For him, painters and poets were closely allied. He was quoted as saying that the principles of "impressionism, Dadaism, surrealism applied to both painting and the poem" (qtd. in Guimond 41).

Salvador Dali and Pablo Picasso were both poets and painters. Rossetti, too, had been both. Blake was a poet, painter, and engraver. Romantic painter, J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851), wrote a poem called "The Fallacies of Hope" (Prickett 9). William Morris was a painter and poet, as was Dylan Thomas, E. E. Cummings, David Jones, and a plethora of others. Thus, when a student responds to poetic pieces solely through illustrations, it should come as no surprise. The interchange between the two disciplines is undeniable.

Reader-Response Through Illustrations/Paintings

A plethora of evidence exists with regards to the intimate relationship poetry and painting share, yet, no reader-response theory explores this relationship. The only reference made with regards to the arts in general appears in Chapter Two of Jauss' *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, entitled: "History of Art and Pragmatic History." Particularly interesting had been Jauss' assertion that "the history of architecture, music, or poetry is more consistent and more coherent than that of society" (46). Placing the arts alongside poetry showed much promise. However, the entire chapter turned out to be one concerned with the "horizon of expectations" and reception processes of connoisseurs of the art genres in general, and how "each epoch had its own customs, its own tastes, and therefore its own ideas of beauty" (47). There had been no mention whatsoever of a reader's response to poetry through illustrations.

Thus, considering Bleich's *Subjective Criticism* for a second time, I realized that some of what the critic had stated seemed applicable to Ghada's case. For example, Bleich stresses that "any reading experience . . . is marked by the reader's feeling of communicative involvement with the author," adding, "many reading experiences are spontaneously oriented perceptually around 'what the author is saying'" (159). Ghada did in fact show identification with Wordsworth, she felt his love for "Shepherds, dwellers in the valleys" ("Michael" 23). In fact, Ghada's response, although illustrative, had been looked at as the outcome or response of her relationship with the author and his poems. Ghada had then merged her identification with Wordsworth's nature with her own community in the little village near Baha. This had also been in accord with Bleich's assertion that "Any reader reads in relation to his communities and societies" (162). Yet, the community Ghada identified with had not been the one Bleich had in mind. The community Bleich refers to is one which exists in the classroom, not elsewhere. So when Bleich stresses that "every person considers what others think to be important," Ghada had not (165). She had not considered her classmates, nor did she wish to be part of their community. This had been evident in her desire not to negotiate her response with her community in the classroom. She had been against what Bleich terms "collective interest" (283). Ghada's individual response did not "manifest shared values and perceptions" (Bleich 283). Whereas, Ghada's peers revealed their collective interests through obvious commonalities such as their disinterest in the Romantic period, Ghada did not share those commonalities. On the contrary, she had loved the period. Bleich concludes his text by declaring: "It is not possible to 'have' an interpretation of a work of literature in isolation from a community" (296). On the one hand, Ghada's response had been subjective and in accordance with Bleich's theory. On the other, she did not attempt to objectify her private responses. She did not negotiate her responses with members of her reading community thus rendering Bleich's theory obsolete in her case.

Holland's "Identity theme" did not fare any better (*Five Readers Reading* 61). According to Holland, "A reader responds to a literary work by assimilating it to his own psychological processes, that is, to his search for successful solutions within his identity theme to the multiple demands, both inner and outer, on his ego" (*Five Readers Reading* 128). What Holland says is noteworthy. Still, it did not apply in Ghada's case. When Ghada provided illustrations, she was not trying to recreate her identity; rather, she was trying to recreate the Romantic poets' identities through the medium of illustrations. Ghada's responses had not involved any infantile wishes, projection of fantasies, unconscious needs and defenses, or any of the psychological jargon used by Holland.

Whereas consideration had been given to both, Bleich's and Holland's theory respectively, Jauss' reception theory, had not been considered. This is mainly due to the fact that the theory's main interest is on the responses of the general reading public, not on individual readers. Fish's "interpretive community" theory had also been dismissed on account of its focus on groups rather than individual readers. And although Iser shares commonalities with both critics, still, his phenomenology theory had been of interest mainly because of the distinction the German critic makes between readers. According to Iser:

> the term "reader" can be subdivided into "implied reader" and "actual reader." The first is the reader whom the text creates for itself and amounts to "a network of response-

> inviting structures" which predispose us to read in certain ways. The "actual reader" receives certain mental images in the process of reading; however, the images will inevitably be colored by the reader's "existing stock of experience." If we are atheists we will be affected differently [by a given poem] than if we are Christians. The experience of reading will differ according to our past experiences. (Selden 53)

Ghada seemed to qualify as an "actual reader" shaped by her ability to draw. However, her response did not correspond with the remainder of Iser's theory which states that a text has multiple meanings and that "each reader creates his or her horizons of expectation—that is, a reader's expectations about what will or may or should happen next" (Bressler 67). Moreover, according to Iser, "a text does not tell readers everything; there are 'gaps' or 'blanks,' which he refers to as the indeterminacy of the text. Readers must fill these in and thereby assemble the meaning(s), thus becoming coauthors in a sense" (Guerin 360). Ghada did not participate in the creation of either "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" or "Michael" or any other poem from the Romantic period for that matter. She did not fill in any "gaps" or "blanks," to use Iser's terms. She merely provided pictorial images of poems, all the while retaining the authors' visions.

Other reader-response theories considered, and later dismissed, include: Umberto Eco's "closed" and "open" text theory; Michael Riffaterre's "Superreader" theory; Jonathan Culler's structuralist theory of interpretation; Gerald Prince's "narratee" theory; and a plethora of other lesser known theories. Numerous divergent texts had also been considered. These included: Robert C. Holub's *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (1984); Graham McGregor's *Reception and Response: Hearer Creativity and the Analysis Of Spoken and Written Texts* (1990); Roman Ingarden's *The Literary Work of Art* (1931); Elizabeth Freund's *The Return of the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism* (1987); Susan Sulleiman's *The Reader in the Text* (1980); and Jane P. Tompkins' *Reader-Response Criticism* (1980). Although the texts in question had provided outstanding insight into reader-response criticism in general, none alluded to a case similar to Ghada's, nor to illustrations that complement the powerful words of poetry.

Ghada's responses through illustrations did not fully qualify any of the reader-response theories. Yet, what constitutes validity in interpretation? Who judges the quality and rank of an interpretation of a literary text? The reader-response theorist, or, the professor teaching the course? It is true that some students misinterpret or distort texts. And, that not all responses to a text are "valid or of equal importance" (Bressler 63). Nonetheless, Ghada's responses had all been impressive renditions of the treatment of nature in Romantic poetry. She did not distort the poems through misinterpretations; rather she enhanced each work with a complementary illustration, earning her the full mark with regards to course performance. Moreover, her "written" performances in both, the mid-term and the final exam, proved exemplary thus, earning her an A+ in the "Poetry 313" course as a whole.

Conclusion

This study has considered the relationship between literature and illustrations based upon one student's response to poetry. The study explored the relationship between the two disciplines through examining the elements they have in common, upon the instances of collaboration between the two, and upon the cases of influence of a writer upon a painter, a painter upon a writer. The study however did not attempt to explore the relationship between literature and other art forms. Sculpture, architecture, dance, and music, although have been known to influence and be influenced by literature, have not been discussed as no reader as of yet has responded through such artistic expressions. One hopes that in the future a student will do so. More importantly, one hopes that this study will lead advocates of reader-response criticism to consider a reader-response theory that centers on responses through mediums other than the written or spoken word since such responses to literature do in fact exist and should be considered—hence, Ghada's case.

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