

Proposal for Paper by Dr. J Cheshire, University of Lincoln

Gustave Doré's Illustrations to *Idylls of the King* and Anglo-French Politics

This paper will consider the critical response to Gustave Doré's illustrations to *Idylls of the King*, published between 1866 and 1868. Historians and critics have assumed that this edition was a commercial success, when in fact it was a dramatic failure that contributed significantly to the collapse of the Moxon firm. This paper will suggest that the critical response to the Doré edition drew upon the ambiguous nationality of the project. English commentators found the idea of their Poet Laureate illustrated by a French artist difficult to accept and interpreted the perceived failings of Doré's images in these terms. The instigator of the project, James Bertrand Payne (manager of the Moxon firm) was from Jersey and took considerable pride in his Anglo-French background and his role in advising Doré. Initially Tennyson was enthusiastic about the book and collaborated willingly with a French antiquarian on a prose translation of the *Idylls*. The poet's opinion of the edition soon changed. This was partially due to the overtly commercial approach of Payne, but arguably Tennyson's attitude was also influenced by the changing political situation in France during the build up to the Franco-Prussian War.