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A voice for the voiceless: Tony Harrison's poetic memory

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RESUME

Tony Harrison has an unusual place in the British cultural landscape: not only does he write poetry, but he is also a prolific playwright and gifted translator of plays; in addition, he has created 'film-poems', a form of expression at the crossroads between poetry and film documentary, and he has also assumed the role of journalist-poet for the *Guardian* newspaper. The multidimensional aspect of Harrison's writing reflects a persistent desire to express his poetic voice. Coming from a working-class background in Leeds, then granted a scholarship to attend a rather prestigious Grammar School which was to lead him to study Classics at Leeds University, Harrison's poetry captures the disjunction between his early family life and his later education and professional career. His poetry consequently interlaces differing perspectives: those from his background who seemed to be plagued by issues involving articulation and those of his cherished poets and playwrights from the classical Greek and Roman eras, as well as from more modern times.

This paper discusses the presence of these voices in two of Harrison's poems, 'Them & [uz]' (1974) and 'Classics Society' (1978), both published in his volume *The School of Eloquence and Other Poems* (1978). These two poems exemplify Tony Harrison's wish to be a spokesperson for the distinct voices which have shaped his life (the voices of authors that he loves, and of relatives that suffered from problems of articulation and modest social conditions). More precisely, his poems act as an enduring imprint of these voices, questioning the social and the cultural constructs within languages via the process of exploring memories and their transmission.

Mots-clés : *Tony Harrison – memory – poetry – trauma – transmission – silent voices – identity – language – norms – social classes*

Heredity

*How you became a poet's a mystery!
Wherever did you get your talent from?*

*I say, I had two uncles, Joe and Harry –
One was a stammerer, the other dumb.¹*

INTRODUCTION

Talking about heredity inevitably leads to evoke what is inherited, passed from one generation to the other². In Tony Harrison's case, the alternate rhymes which form the poem *Heredity* and most of his writings could be understood as a way to assert an existence shaped from two legacies: the one a working-class family plagued by problems of articulation and the other a very classical education (which could mean both Classical and contrary to popular). The exclamation of the first verse emphasized by the question of the second verse (l.29) conveys a feeling of surprise: 'Wherever' seeks the roots of such a poetic talent without being able to find them in a social background which does not seem to have its rightful place in traditional poems³. However, the answer of the narrator is clear: it is not *in spite of* his working-class origins that he became a poet but *thanks to* them: having inherited a voiceless past, he was driven to express himself in a very articulate way⁴. Interweaving two important and deep experiences of speech (a speechless family and the power of the Classics' speech), Tony Harrison's poems question the relations between verbal transmission and memory.

It seems that Tony Harrison has always been driven by a strong wish to act as a spokesperson for the inarticulate, the mute, those who were not able to express themselves. Born in 1937 in Yorkshire, coming from a working-class background in Leeds (his father worked in a bakery), Harrison was then granted a scholarship to attend (against his will) a rather prestigious Grammar School. Despite the difficult

¹ Harrison, T. (1978). *From the School of Eloquence and Other Poems*. London: Red Collins Ltd., p.7.

² *Online Etymology Dictionary*. (s.d.). Heredity. <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=heredity> (last consulted 05/02/17)

³ See a very thorough argumentation here: Byrne, Sandie. (2015). 'Poetry and Class'. In Edward Larrissy (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to British Poetry, 1945-2010* (pp.115-129), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Both uncles are depicted through their speech or their problems of articulation: the first one is a 'stammerer' (v.4), turning a verb into a noun thus underlining his existence as being limited in his ability to speak; the second, described as 'dumb', obliterates once and for all any hope of articulation.

See also Morrison: '(...) Harrison's interest in the question of what it means to acquire language in a community which has had none. The muteness of his uncles, 'one a stammerer, the other dumb', becomes a symbol of the suppression of working-class speech over the centuries.' In Morrison, B. (2007). *Labouring: Continuous*. In Harrison, T., *Collected Poems* (pp.217-229). Bury St Edmunds: Penguin books, p.217.

immersion into this quite posh educational environment where he was chastised and mocked for his Northern working-class accent, Tony Harrison fell in love with the Classics, which he later studied at Leeds University.

“Out of that atmosphere of inarticulation came my ravenousness for articulation, for language,” he explains. “I wanted to learn Latin and Greek and become a poet and acquire power over language. I only understand this clearly in retrospect, that my ability to study came from a hunger to learn all the resources of articulation.”⁵

Often describing this learning as extremely painful and arduous⁶, Tony Harrison later travelled and lived abroad for several years which allowed him to develop a deep interest for other languages such as Czech, Swahili, Afro-Cuban, Hausa, Yoruba and French⁷. The ‘Tongues of fire’⁸ present in a number of his poems as the burning presence of eloquence are literally used by Harrison in most of his works, interlacing echoes of other cultures and presences in his own expression. His poetry is filled with the accent and dialect of his family and native region (Yorkshire), with some demotic language too. Breaking with the codes of a highly-praised form mostly considered as belonging to the upper classes, Tony Harrison’s poetic voice resonates with a multitude of other presences.

The multidimensional aspect of his writing also reflects an endless wish to express his poetic voice. Tony Harrison is not only a poet who writes and reads poems, but he is also a prolific playwright and gifted translator of plays; his ‘film-poems’ are a unique form of expression at the crossroads between poetry and documentary film which have been broadcast on television; he has also assumed the role of war-poet for the *Guardian* newspaper (after having insisted on his writings being published in the ‘news’ or ‘comments’ pages instead of the ‘arts sections’), going to Bosnia for instance, and writing poems on the battlefields⁹. But whatever the shape his creation takes (or shapes as, for example, *The Shadow of*

⁵Jaggi, Maya. (31/03/2007). Tony Harrison, Beats of the Heart (interview). *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/mar/31/poetry.tonyharrison> (last consulted 20/04/2017).

⁶ Even in his poems, see for example ‘Social Mobility’, in Harrison, T. (2007). *Collected Poems*. Bury St Edmunds: Penguin books, p.117.

⁷ After his return from Africa in 1967, he soon took up the first of three British literary fellowships, but continued to travel frequently and extensively. His home base had become Newcastle, but between 1969 and 1977 he visited and worked in Prague, Cuba, Brazil, Senegal, Gambia, Mozambique, Wales, Leningrad and New York, and between 1979 and 1990 he divided his time between Newcastle, New York, and Florida.’ Byrne, S. (1997). *Tony Harrison: Loiner*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.7.

⁸ For instance ‘Fire-Eater’, in Harrison, T. (2007). *Collected Poems*. Bury St Edmunds: Penguin books, p.182.

⁹ ‘While not being a combatant, his fruitful collaboration with the Guardian has enabled him to reflect on the first Gulf War, the war in Bosnia – where he was sent by the Guardian, which printed his Bosnian War poems on its front page – and, briefly, the second Iraq war, with a status somewhere between that of a war poet and a war reporter:

Hiroshima¹⁰, which was, first, a poem published in the *Guardian*, then became a film-poem which script was, a week later, published by Faber and Faber), Tony Harrison asserts himself as a poet:

Poetry is all I write, whether for books, or readings, or for the National Theatre, or for the opera house and concert hall, or even for TV.¹¹

A poet at heart (and even in his passport where it is acknowledged as his official profession, as the persona states in the poem *An Old Score*¹²), Harrison could never write without the metre, which he finds to be as natural as heartbeats: not only did he declare this in his preface to his translation (or it would be more accurate to say rewriting) of *Le Misanthrope* by Racine¹³ in 1966 but one can also note that his more recent poem 'On the Metre' starts with these lines:

"I'm always quoting le Coeur bat l'iambe –

Jean-Louis Barrault on the metre of Racine."¹⁴

In an interview with Richard Hoggart (who is mentioned in the dedication of Harrison's poem 'Them & [uz]'), Harrison goes further in asserting:

"The metre itself is like the pulse. That's what it's about. I don't have the heart to confront some experience unless I know I have this rhythm to carry me to the other side. It's an existential need, the metrical form, for me."¹⁵

Relying on this comforting structure, Tony Harrison writes about the deep breach in his personal experience. His poetry interlaces different voices: the voices of his family plagued by issues of

these poems have all the adherence to objective truth, in as far as that is ascertainable, and immediacy, of a war report, combined with the literary freedom and creative subjectivity one associates with poetry. In Grafe, Adrian. (2013). Your sort of poet's task: Tony Harrison's 'A Cold Coming. *Arts of War and Peace 1.2. Can Literature and the Arts Be Irenic?* <http://www.awpreview.univ-paris-diderot.fr> (last consulted 06/02/16).

¹⁰ Harrison, T. (2007). *Collected Film Poetry*. London: Faber & Faber, pp. 233-254.

¹¹ Astley, N. (ed.) (1991). *Tony Harrison*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books., p.9.

¹² "though I'm called / poet, in my passport", ll.4-5. Harrison, Tony. *The Acts*, 1981. See the article Mika Ross-Southall An Old Score, 03/19/2013 *The Times Literary Supplement*, <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/old-score-tony-harrison/>

¹³ Harrison, T. (2014). *Tony Harrison Plays 2 : The Misanthrope; Phaedra Britannica; The Prince's Plays*. London: Faber & Faber, p.IV.

¹⁴ Harrison, T. (2007). *Collected Poems*. Bury St Edmunds: Penguin books, p.214.

¹⁵ Hoggart, R. (1991). In conversation with Tony Harrison. In Astley, Neil (ed.). *Tony Harrison*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, p.43.

articulation and the voices of Classical poets and playwrights. In his work, Harrison refuses to choose between his working-class background and the Classic poetry and literature he is so fond of. Conjuring all these different voices from his past is his way of creating a legitimacy for an existence always hovering between the margin and the centre of language as well as society.

This paper proposes to discuss the presence of these voices in two of Harrison's poems: 'Them & [uz]' (1974) and 'Classics Society' (1978), both from his volume *The School of Eloquence and Other Poems* (1978)¹⁶. They highlight Harrison's labour as a creator¹⁷, since the very etymology of 'poet' is rooted in the Greek 'poiein', meaning 'to make, create, compose'; a creator whose work is deliberately resonating with some figures so as to form a living memory of an existence torn between two polarities.

'THEM & [UZ]' OR VOCALIZED MEMORY

Tony Harrison declares that he writes his poetry for his own voice. His written poems are meant to be read aloud, to an audience. The title 'Them & [uz]' contains the ampersand which unites but also makes a distinction between the two elements associated: *Them* is clearly different from *[uz]*, even more so since one is written English whereas the other is phonetics and consequently related to oral language. The *[uz]* which includes the narrator indicates a division, both visually and linguistically: the entity *[uz]* is defined or shaped by its pronunciation, asserting a deep demarcation from *Them*¹⁸.

The following dedication "*for Professors Richard Hoggart & Leon Cortez*" echoes this note again: both men are united by the title Professors, whereas they have quite different histories. Indeed, Richard Hoggart (1918-2014) was an academic who taught British literature and sociology; coming from Leeds, like Harrison, he showed a keen interest in British popular culture¹⁹ and contributed to developing this notion of 'them' and 'us' in the British political and social life²⁰. As for Leon Cortez (1898-1970), he could be described as 'a stand-up comedian who 'translated' Shakespeare into Cockney'²¹. Harrison dubbed him with 'Professor', a meaningful qualification when one considers the etymological roots of

¹⁶ Harrison, T. (1978). *From the School of Eloquence and Other Poems*. London: Red Collins Ltd., p.18 and 21.

¹⁷ *Online Etymology Dictionary*. (s.d.). Poet. <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=poet> (last consulted 20/04/2017).

¹⁸ Harrison, T. (1978). *From the School of Eloquence and Other Poems*. London: Red Collins Ltd., p.18

¹⁹ See his book exploring the evolution of a generation of young scholarship boys educated in Grammar School: Hoggart, R. (1957). *The Uses of Literacy*. London: Transaction Publishers.

²⁰ Ezard, John. (10/04/2014). Richard Hoggart Obituary. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/apr/10/richard-hoggart> (last consulted 04/07/17).

²¹ Robinson, Peter (1998). *Shared Intimacy: a Study of Tony Harrison's Public Poetry with specific reference to his poetics, the political status of his work and his development of the genre of film/poem* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Hull. Retrieved from MLA International Bibliography Database. (Accession No. 2013420395), p.6.

this word lie in the notion of “*declaring openly, making a public statement, claiming*”²²: Cortez used to profess in the sense that he spoke out loud, on stage as well as on the radio. The dedication of this poem symbolically merges two influences which contribute to Harrison’s poetic voice: the Cockney voice of Cortez playing Shakespearean characters, thus going against the speech standards and voicing his social and geographic identity out, and the reflection of Hoggart tackling the social division of the British society by an analysis of the consequences of the ‘Education Act of 1944’ on people like Harrison. Hoggart literally *worded* the breach which marked a whole generation of pupils torn away from their families and working-class background to be put in prestigious Grammar Schools to be educated, with dramatic consequences for their lives²³.

These two ghostly presences set the tone of a poem marked by a division even inscribed in the layout of the printed page where one can see two distinct parts of equal length but with a different organization. The Meredithian sonnet of Part I mainly gives way to the English teacher: on line 3, no sooner has the narrator begun to utter a few words than the verse is appropriated by the teacher who will then be present in most of the sonnet. The rhyming couplets hammer home the teacher’s speech, imposing a linguistic and phonological norm, namely RP, Received Pronunciation. The narrator, banned from poetry, from reading verse (‘You’re one of those / Shakespeare gives the comic bits to: prose!’ 1.7-8) because of his accent, is alone on line 6: ‘I played the Drunken Porter in Macbeth.’ (1.6), this line being the only isolated one (between two blank spaces) in the whole sonnet. The teacher apostrophizes the narrator by calling him

²² *Online Etymology Dictionary*. (s.d.). Professor.

http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=professor (last consulted 05/02/17)

²³ See the following powerful article enhancing this phenomenon as a way to control the working-class and a deeply traumatic experience for the pupils: Worpole, K. (1991). Scholarship Boy: the Poetry of Tony Harrison. In Astley, N. (Ed.), *Tony Harrison* (pp.61-74). Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, pp.61-74.

Also: ‘The Education Act – or ‘Butler Act’ – of 1944 promised ‘secondary education for all’. The act attempted to achieve this goal by raising the school leaving age and dividing the all-age elementary education into primary and secondary schools. *The National Archives*. (s.d.). The Butler Act.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/butler-act.htm> (last consulted 08/27/16)

The sociolinguistic context of the 1950s to 1980s has put an emphasis on what is sometimes called “language discrimination”. Many linguistic studies have been led on that subject in Great Britain, as can be read in:

Coupland N., Sarangi S., & Candlin C. N. (2001). *Sociolinguistics and Social Theory - Language in Social Life*. New York City: Routledge, p251-252. For instance:

“In Britain (...), applied work on language discrimination has long focused chiefly, but again not exclusively, on discrimination against non-standard speakers of British English, particularly in the classroom; Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens (1964) are an early example. Much subsequent British research explores the links between social class and educational success or failure. Sociolinguists in particular have often attempted to counter linguistic discrimination in the classroom by stressing the linguistic, but not the social, equality of all dialects, and recommending tolerance of a child’s home accent or dialects, particularly while she is taught to read and write standard English.”

T.W. (l.4 and 13): the latter is thus reduced to two letters, enhancing a wish to see him disappear even in the teacher's speech. His very existence is denied, and so is his voice, as can be observed in Part I.

The strong opposition illustrated by the title appears throughout this sonnet, and is strengthened by different written forms: the italics of '*mi*' (l.3) do not bear the same meaning as on the next line *He*: the first one is part of a quotation to the letter (so to speak!) of the narrator's speech and Northern accent whereas the second aims at drawing a parallel between the narrator and the teacher who do not share the same pronunciation. As the teacher speaks of the narrator in the following terms: *you barbarian* (l.4), *You're one of those* (l.7), showing a distaste for the narrator's identity and expression, he uses *our glorious heritage* (l.5), *Poetry's the speech of kings.* (l.7), *We say [ʌs] not [uz]* (l.13), excluding him from the poetic form, depicted as the most exquisite one. The abduction of poetry and poetic voice is complete with:

“All poetry (even Cockney Keats?) you see
's been dubbed by [ʌs] into RP,
Received Pronunciation, please believe [ʌs]
Your speech is in the hands of the receivers.
Leaving the narrator silent” (*That shut my trap*, l.13).

Facing that normative figure embodied by the teacher, other presences arise. Voices are conjured up to speak for or with the narrator. The two first lines “*áiai, ay, ay! ... stutterer Demosthenes / gob full of pebbles outshouting seas*” – displays a polyphony of voices: the first “*áiai*” in Greek and italics used to open Greek tragedies, whereas the second “*ay, ay!*” conveys a pronunciation closer to the Yorkshire one²⁴. Tony Harrison himself declared this line as referring to the Greek dramas played by comedians with a Northern accent, which would thus change the whole pronunciation and personify comedy more than tragedy²⁵. Here Demosthenes, a famous Greek statesman and orator of ancient Athens, struggles with articulacy. As in ‘Heredity’, he is first identified by his problems with articulation which are then embodied by the two lines quite difficult to read: *stutterer* itself seems to encapsulate a rhetorical impossibility to go beyond stutter, and the second line, starting with the typical glottal²⁶ *gob* then swelling with *full*, the *pebbles* with the labial /b/ and the liquid /l/ ejects the air which has then to be breathed in, mouth wide open with *outshouting (seas)*. Demosthenes, as famous for his problems with articulation as

²⁴ The two written forms (Greek and Latin) seem themselves to echo with one another, embodying Demosthenes and Harrison.

²⁵ See Tony Harrison's reading, Salts Mill, Saltaire, April 30, 2017.

²⁶ See same poem, l.15-16 : ‘My mouth all stuffed with glottals, great / lumps to hawk up and spit out’.

for his powerful speeches, could be considered as an embodiment of Harrison's 'double culture': symbol of the privileged education he got, he could also be considered as someone who was silenced by his stutter. However, Demosthenes here is depicted as fighting his elocution problem by facing the roar of the sea and training to speak with his mouth full of pebbles. It is not the image of someone silenced but someone expressing himself in spite of his troubles that opens the poem. And, reading the first words of it, we cannot help but think of another homophone, 'I, I'. Demosthenes is a *personage*, a mask through which Harrison's voice shouts its existence²⁷. One can here draw a parallel between intersubjectivity and intertextuality: as stated by Bakhtin, every statement or utterance is related or refers to previous statements or utterances²⁸; the echo between the tragic Greek "αἶαι" (l.1) and the Northern "ay, ay!" (l.1) conjures up the oral addresses of two poets, the first one, a distance voice from the past, is literally re-embodied in the words of the second one, a contemporary voice: this double repetition suddenly sounds as a reverberation between past and present but also as a reply, the modern poet-persona having to fight with words as the ancient one used to. Here the transmission of incommunicability or more accurately fighting for voicing one's identity appears as this palimpsestual presence of Demosthenes opens the poem.

Half of the third line "4 words only of mi' heart aches and..." is all the poetic space that is given to the narrator's speech; it's his voice, but not his words: those come from John Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale*²⁹. Keats is mentioned by the narrator, between parentheses in the middle of the teacher's speech about poetry being detained by people like him using RP: (even Cockney Keats?) (l.9). The parenthesis, the silent voice of the narrator's reflection on what he hears, challenges the norm reigning over poetry; the alliteration *Cockney Keats* asserts a presence which does not fit: Keats the poet (poetry is likened to 'The speech of kings' by the teacher, l.7) was also a Cockney. The seemingly silent assertion between parentheses expresses all the irony of the narrator who retorts to the teacher standing for the norm that other social and regional representations are possible. Both the narrator and Keats have suffered from a linguistic label which, in the cannon of poetry (represented in the poem as a kingdom conquered by Received Pronunciation³⁰), placed them at the margins, however talented and recognized they may be.

²⁷ Demosthenes can be regarded here as a *personage* of the poem: referring to its etymology, the Latin 'personare', 'per/sonare' means speaking through, that is through the mask worn by the comedians at the time. Consequently, they had to speak loud enough through the mask to be heard by the audience. See *Dictionnaire Littré*. (s.d.). Personnage. <http://www.littre.org/definition/personnage> (last consulted 08/08/16).

²⁸ Todorov, T. (1981). *Mikhail Bakhtine. Le principe dialogique*. Tours : Editions du Seuil, p.77.

²⁹ Keats, John. *Ode to a Nightingale*, in *Annals of Fine Arts*, 1819.

³⁰ 'Keats himself was a victim of (...) snobbery on account of his speaking with a Cockney accent. In *Talking Proper. The Rise of the Accent as a Social Symbol* (1997), Lynda Mugglestone tells us that 'Cockney' was a term of

At the end of this sonnet, the narrator, fighting against his natural voice and flow, is silenced by the teacher's imperative *E-nun-ci-ate!*(l.16). This oppression is overwhelmed by Part II, a second Meredithian sonnet where the narrator takes over poetry:

“All right, yer buggers, then. We'll occupy
Your lousy leasehold poetry.” (l.1-2)

Repression gives way to expression: the *We* of the first line is not the [us] of Part I; they are radically opposed. This time, the narrator and his fellows are active agents who will conquer a forbidden territory with their words and voices. The poetic space is described as quite pitiful (for indeed, from the point of view of the narrator, limited to RP and only accessible to higher classes, one might wonder what becomes of a language's richness³¹). Here the demotic marks a break point: this is no longer a space for submission but for a free oral expression. This second part opens up a poetic space presented as taken up, conquered. As the literary format is besieged, the poetic voice is asserted as the narrator's. The use of personal pronouns such as 'we' exists because of the intersubjective confrontation with the linguistic norm incarnated by the teacher in Part I and Daniel Jones in Part II³².

The layout of this second sonnet illustrates a major change: there are sixteen lines, but the coupled rhymes are now cross rhymes, a rhythm dear to Tony Harrison. The alternation of rhymes gives a more vivid poem. The narrator is not alone anymore: his voice conjures up all the voices silenced by an excluding linguistic code, whether family, friends³³ or fellow poets. The astounding written interpretation of a non-standard pronunciation in line 3, *I chewed up Littererchewer*, is another way to express the endless possibilities of language: here it is a written form, the capital L indicates the importance of the word, but the spelling echoes both in form and in pronunciation the *chewing* of the object Literature, its appropriation, digestion by the narrator. What is left, *the bones*, are *spat into the lap of dozing Daniel*

abuse applied to many linguistic ills in the nineteenth century. One such 'ill' was the use of rhymes which were dependent on aural rather than visual correspondences. These were often condemned as 'Cockney rhymes'.³¹ Robinson, Peter. *Op. Cit.*, 1998, pp.25-26.

³¹ It seems interesting to note here that the fierce Republican Harrison could be seen in this poem as standing up against a potential high-class robbery of the poetic space.

³² « C'est par le dialogue que se déroulent les représentations sociales distribuées dans les cultures. L'intersubjectivité vient à la fois du soi et de l'autre. Pour reprendre la formule de Bakhtin (ou bien celle de Mead), (...) 'Je suis mon propre auteur'. » Le langage et l'authenticité, Ivana Markova, pp. 131-149, in Costalat-Founeau, A.M. (2001). *Identité sociale et langage, la construction du sens*. coll. Logiques sociales, L'Harmattan: Paris, p.135.

³³ 'I had a family about me with an uncle who stammered and an uncle who was dumb, and others who were afflicted with a metaphorical dumbness, and lack of socially confident articulation; and also their forebears, who although their mouths had been shaped for speech (...) had been silenced.' Harrison, T. (1991). Facing up to the Muses. In Astley, N. (Ed.), *Tony Harrison* (p.436). Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe books, 1991, p.436.

Jones (l.3-4): unlike the last lines of part I (*my mouth all stuffed with glottals, great / lumps to hawk up and spit out*, l.15-16), what is ejected by the narrator's mouth in Part II is not difficult or painful, it sounds more like a rejection of the rigid linguistic codes to digest and appropriate the core of poetry/literature. This grotesque, almost Rabelaisian vision of a literature ingested and then dejected opens up a livelier expression of poetry: Part I was mostly dedicated to a sterile and unsuccessful repetition, but in Part II, this digestive process of the first lines demonstrates a very positive and constructive appropriation of poetry by the narrator. The sleepy -thus silent- presence of Daniel Jones is a figure which, unlike the teacher of Part I, cannot debase the narrator for his speech. The normative presence evoking pronunciation cannot preside over this part of the poem and cannot witness the poet's vocal awakening either, unconscious (in both senses of the word) as he is of other possibilities of linguistic expressions.

In the following lines the repeated use of *I* (l.3,5,8,10) strengthened by *my own* (l.6) clearly shows that the narrator now stands up and speaks out. The submissive pupil, the non-existent persona behind the initials is dead, muted by the living and speaking subject: *used my name and own voice: [uz], [uz], [uz]* (l.6)³⁴; the inclusive [uz] resonates with the family and social background of the narrator: *[I] spoke the language that I spoke at home* (l.8)³⁵. Resisting the norm, the narrator chooses to side with his original poetic voice which was so far repressed: the evocation of the 19th-century poet Wordsworth (1770-1850) then serves as another vocal presence to legitimate this attitude. William Wordsworth's life sounds as an echo to Harrison's (and his textual double's) life: coming from the same region, Wordsworth has always talked with a Northern accent despite his studies at Cambridge. The sonorous allusion immediately resonates as a call for resistance to a poetic and linguistic norm which refuses any presence of local or social identity.

Finally, the question of legitimacy is evoked at the end of this second sonnet: *My one mention in the Times / automatically made Tony Anthony* (l.15-16). This powerful volta upsets the narrator's fight for his own voice: once he is finally heard and his voice is reverberated in a well-known British newspaper, it is not his name but a more elaborate *Anthony* which appears on the page. Therefore, what is really perceived of his poetic voice? Is the poet really free from the Receivers? Has he managed to give voice to his poetic expression bearing generations of silenced Northern working-class people?

'CLASSICS SOCIETY' OR THE ECHOES OF A SHATTERED CIVILIZATION

In 'Them & [uz]' Harrison conjures up voices of the past to question the meaning of poetic language and identity. Demosthenes stands for a double of the narrator suffering from and then overcoming problems of

³⁴ Also 'R.I.P RP. R.I.P. T.W. / I'm Tony Harrison, no longer you.' (l.9-10)

³⁵ Also '[uz] can be loving as well as funny.' (l.14)

articulation or expression. As was mentioned earlier, Harrison loves the Classics which he has studied, read, translated, adapted, played with in every possible poetic form. ‘Classics Society’ is a poem firmly settled in time and place from the very beginning: (*Leeds Grammar School, 1552-1952*). The epigraph of the first lines are from a 1552 edition of Robert Recorde’s (1512-1558) *The Ground of Artes*, dedicated to Edward VI; as Neil Rhodes points out, *the author explains why he declines to translate a passage from Cicero: ‘The grace of Tullies eloquence doth excel any Englysh mans tongue, [and much more exceedeth the barenesse off] my barbarous style*’³⁶. It seems worth noting that Recorde was a very educated man who fought for more widespread education: for instance, he wrote a number of elementary textbooks, mostly about mathematics, in a plain and clear English style so that everyone could study them. He even went so far as to translate some Greek and Latin expressions into English to clarify the topic of his books. Recorde’s words quoted here are even more meaningful upon knowing that, among other things, he is the first to have used the ‘equal’ symbol in a book (*The Whetstone of Witte*, 1557). Giving voice to a man concerned with equality (both socially and mathematically speaking) anticipates Harrison’s wish to create a Public poetry³⁷.

Here Recorde states his inability to translate the language of Marcus Tullius Cicero³⁸ (named here Tully) depicted as elegant, Recorde’s standard English language and style being *barbarous*. It undoubtedly recalls Harrison’s poem “The Rhubarbarians”³⁹ and the etymological root of ‘barbarous’, *barbaros*, a Greek word meaning ‘foreign, uncivilized’⁴⁰. Cicero is represented as one of the most refined speakers contrasting with the *uncivilized* aspect of Recorde’s English language. This voice from the past recalls what is then exposed:

The tongue our leaders use to cast their spell
Was once denounced as ‘rude’, ‘gross’, ‘base’ and ‘vile’
How fortunate we are who’ve come so far! (l.3-5)

³⁶ Recorde, R. (1552). *The Ground of Artes*. 4th Ed. London: 1552, Aiii-Aiiii. Rhodes, N. (2004). *Shakespeare and the Origins of English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.50.

³⁷ Robinson, Peter (1998). *Shared Intimacy: a Study of Tony Harrison’s Public Poetry with specific reference to his poetics, the political status of his work and his development of the genre of film/poem* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Hull. Retrieved from MLA International Bibliography Database. (Accession No. 2013420395).

³⁸ Ferguson, J., Dacre Balsdon, J. Marcus Tullius Cicero. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Cicero> (last consulted 05/06/17)

³⁹ Harrison, T. (2007). *Collected Poems*. Bury St Edmunds: Penguin books, pp.123-124.

⁴⁰ *Online Etymology Dictionary*. (s.d.). Barbarous. http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=barbarous (last consulted 05/06/17)

The inverted commas mark these debasing words as being quoted by the narrator and consequently insert a similar speech as the epigraph into the narrator's. However, what is used to describe language is a series of adjectives: the idea is not structured in a sentence anymore (unlike in the epigraph) but becomes a collection of qualifying terms. The past tense enhanced by *once* (l.4) intimates that things are now different from what they used to be, especially if we put into perspective the series of negative adjectives with the bewitching language described as actual, *The tongue our leaders use to cast their spell* (l.3). The exclamation in the fifth line sounds ironical: *How fortunate we are who've come so far!*

The sudden shift from *our leaders* to *we* introduces the four next lines: *We boys* (l.6) in this poem's context could be understood as the pupils of Leeds Grammar School and includes the narrator. Alluding to translation classes, the recurrent negations ("*but nothing... or...*" l.8, "*and certainly not*" l.9, "*not*" l.10) stifles any speech that would deviate from a conventional language almost likened to both *the British Empire* and *S.P.Q.R.* (l.7). Unmovable linguistic monument, the English language translating the Classics stands for a linguistic censorship: *nothing demotic or too up-to-date, / and certainly not how I speak at home* (l.8-9). This last line echoes the poem 'Them & [uz]', where the narrator's Yorkshire English is also banned from school. The emphasis *certainly not* coming after two other negations puts the narrator's voice at the bottom of the languages prohibited: he cannot express himself, he cannot give his voice to the Classics.

There is here a deep dissension between the narrator's speech and the high-cultural, excluding, over-formalized speech he is asked to use for his translations. This language gap shows an impossibility for the narrator to have his own voice and translate the Classics' one as faithfully as possible. The evocation of a Latin 'double' (line 10 to 12) named *Antoninus* acts as a parodical interpretation of the narrator's situation: located in ancient Rome, the narrator's 'double' is chastised for using demotic language. The sanction of a low grade (humorously called *gamma double minus*, l.12) is caused by the boy's speech.

The last four lines set out the consequences of such an irreconcilable position: like a loop, the poem goes back to Cicero's language (l.15) which has to convey the meaning of Burke's phrase: *a dreadful schism in the British Nation* (l.16). Translating the Classics, going from Greek and Latin to English and vice versa gives voice to a language and class struggle which opposes a quite sterile form of language dubbed by the high-classes and education to the narrator's own voice. The *schism* lies in a verbal and social division of the British society.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, the aptly named collection of poems *The School of Eloquence and Other Poems* (1978)⁴¹ contains a number of references to Tony Harrison's experience as a pupil. The memory work carried out by the poet appears as particularly relevant considering school is a place where language and the hierarchy of social classes are at the centre of the building of the self⁴².

Tony Harrison's poetry clearly interlaces voices which are all conjured up by memory: the traumatic memory of an education which implied to obliterate a part of his identity to comply with rigid social and linguistic standards. This experience is re-told again and again, through various perspectives in a possible attempt to overcome the impossible inner breach between a sophisticated education and a working-class background; the voice of the teacher crystallizes a feeling of exclusion and incommunicability. The 'literary' memory of the poets and other artists, all cherished by Harrison because they embody moments that have shaped his life --their voices haunt his verses, acting as speaking presences and sometimes safeguards against all form of pretentiousness. Harrison's poetry is also a place where his loved ones such as his parents or uncles are often remembered: once silenced either because of problems of elocution or because of their working-class background, their voices resonate in his poetic space, giving room to their lost speech. More generally, it is the voice of a whole region (Yorkshire) and social class which is expressed in Harrison's verse. His poetry is thus part of what Claire Hélie qualifies as "La littérature du Nord de l'Angleterre"⁴³, placing it within a spatial and a temporal context. The Bakhtinian use of intertextuality, with different degrees of presence of the Other⁴⁴ all underlie the presence of the past. Harrison's poetic memory sounds like an endless polyphony mirroring the poet's existence. In a poetic structure as regular as the iamb and as sound as the metre, Harrison plays with linguistic norms and social codes, shaking up the poetic standards and bringing an original diversity which confers to his work a peculiar beauty and a surprising power.

⁴¹ Harrison, T. (1978). *From the School of Eloquence and Other Poems*. London: Red Collins Ltd

⁴² "school is one of the obvious places in which to investigate language and class contact. Second, home-school and teacher-pupil interactions can be seen as microcosms of wider social interaction. Here, we might think of the school as an arena in which minority-majority relations are reflected, in which general issues of social mobility are first encountered, and in which social policy of the broadest kind (cultural pluralism or assimilation, for example) is first brought to bear upon individuals." Edwards, J., Howard G. (1984). Applications of the social psychology of language: sociolinguistics and education. In Trudgill, P. (Ed.), *Applied Sociolinguistics*, London: Academic Press.

⁴³ Hélie, Claire. (01/06/2014). La littérature du Nord de l'Angleterre : de l'étiquette au paradigme, *Études britanniques contemporaines* [online], 46 | 2014. <http://journals.openedition.org/ebc/1105> ; DOI : 10.4000/ebc.1105 (last consulted 18/02/2018).

⁴⁴ Todorov, T. (1981). *Mikhaïl Bakhtine le principe dialogique*. Tours : Editions du Seuil, p.107-115.

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