The Rimbaud of Leeds: A Contextual Study of the Politics of Tony Harrison's Poetry 1970-1985

Christine Majella Regan

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The Australian National University

December 2011

I, Christine Majella Regan, certify that this thesis is entirely my own work, except where I have given fully documented references to the work of others.

_____ December 2011

C. M. Regan

For my mother and father, Thora and John

Abstract

The Rimbaud of Leeds is a literary contextual study of the political meanings of important poems by the Leeds poet Tony Harrison (1937 -). It is based on an examination of Harrison's non-dramatic original poetry that appears in *The Loiners* (1970), *The School of Eloquence* (1978-81), and the separately published *v.* (1985). Reference is made to other germane works and to Harrison's account of his work in interviews and prefaces. The principal focus of the thesis is the political character of the poetry. The poems selected for examination are exemplars of what I argue is Harrison's radical humanist and republican poetic, and of how issues of class and colonialism are interrelated in the poetry. The thesis locates the works in previously unnoticed or neglected contexts, and shows the critical importance of history for understanding the poems. It reveals Harrison's detailed engagement with the politics and history of England and Africa in particular. New contextual information necessary for understanding the political, historical, biographical and literary references in the poems is offered in this study. This dissertation attempts to sketch the key political and aesthetic features of the poetry.

For the first time in Harrison scholarship, his poetry is seen as presenting an entwined biographical and political mythology for the Northern English working class. Harrison is here interpreted as a cosmopolitan Leeds poet whose Northern working-class background, education and travels are the empirical materials of a highly cultured poetry of place. He emerges as a partisan political poet whose poems draw critical attention to an unequal relationship, in literature and in history, between the North and South in Britain. It is shown that an internationalist humanist sense of fraternity between the working class in the North of England and colonized peoples past and present suffuses the poetry. Particular attention is accorded to the presence in

Harrison's political poetry of the poets John Milton (1608-74) and Arthur Rimbaud (1854-91). Milton is especially important for Harrison as a great republican poet. Rimbaud is of the first importance for Harrison's idea of himself as a poet. The significance of the life and work of Rimbaud has not been recognized in the scholarship on Harrison. This study seeks to illuminate Harrison's elective affinity with Rimbaud, and to show how Rimbaud haunts his imagination. This study argues that Harrison's political convictions and literary elective affinities have been consistent across the fifteen year span of the poetry selected for examination. This thesis indicates the dense allusive fields of the poetry and attends to the political and literary histories that enrich it. The aim in the thesis is to offer the first fully detailed contextual account of these remarkable poems and their politics.

'Hats and head-attire'
Portrait of Tony Harrison by Mark Gerson ©, 1999
National Portrait Gallery, London

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Tony Harrison for his poems, and for my good fortune in working on poetry that I was able to learn so much through, and for which my regard only increased in the course of my studies. I would also like to thank the poet for giving generously of his time and his kindness in talking with a student of his work.

I am deeply grateful to Dr Ian Higgins, who supervised this dissertation from its inception, and who opened up new lines of enquiry and encouraged fruitful avenues of research. I am indebted to his acute scholarly judgement. I would also like to thank Dr Higgins for his patience and, more widely, his commitment to literature and to the humanities. I could not have hoped for a finer scholar or person of good will to supervise this project.

Thora and John, my mother and father, have been so kind in their support of me and of this project. Thank you so much. My thanks lastly to Special Collections at the Brotherton Library in Leeds, and the Robinson Library and The Literary and Philosophical Society in Newcastle-upon-Tyne for permission to consult Tony Harrison's manuscripts, private papers and correspondence, and also to the librarians at the British Library and the Australian National University libraries for their assistance.

Contents

Notes on Abbreviations and References

Unless otherwise indicated all quotations are from Tony Harrison, *The Loiners* (London: London Magazine Editions, 1970). (abbreviated as *Loiners*)

Unless otherwise indicated all other quotations are from Tony Harrison, *Collected Poems* (London: Viking, 2007). (abbreviated as *CP*)

The major critical anthology on the poet: Neil Astley, ed., *Bloodaxe Critical Anthologies 1: Tony Harrison* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1991) is abbreviated throughout the thesis as *Bloodaxe 1*.

All quotations from the Bible are taken from *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, ed. with an introduction and notes by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

The *MHRA Style Guide* is followed for all footnotes and bibliographic entries.

The following further abbreviations are used:

Tony Harrison's Works

Continuous	*Continuous*: *Fifty Sonnets from 'The School of Eloquence'* (London: Rex Collings, 1981). Collection also in *CP*. Quotations from those sonnets are from *CP*.
'Conversation'	'Tony Harrison in conversation with Richard Hoggart' (1986), in *Bloodaxe 1*, 36-45.
'Inkwell'	'The Inkwell of Dr Agrippa', in *Corgi Modern Poets in Focus: 4*, ed. by Jeremy Robson (London: Corgi, 1971), reprinted in *Bloodaxe 1*, 32-5. Quotations are from *Bloodaxe 1*.
'Interview'	'Tony Harrison in interview with John Haffenden' (1983), in *Bloodaxe 1*, 227-46.
Letter to Alan Ross	Letters to Alan Ross (28 January 1967 - 8 December 1973),

included in items in *THP*, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

Letters to Alan Ross (7 Mar 1972 – 14 Dec 1980), the Alan Ross Collection, in BC MS 20c London Magazine, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

Letter to Jon Silkin — 23 letters to Jon Silkin/Stand editors (4 December 1962 – 8 August 1980), in BC MS 20c Stand/3/HAR-11, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

1 letter to Jon Silkin (29 September 1980), in BC MS 20c Silkin/8/HAR-4, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

Permanently Bard — *Permanently Bard: Selected Poetry*, ed. and with annotations by Carol Rutter (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1995). Rutter's annotations are referred to in the thesis.

The School of Eloquence — Tony Harrison's major ongoing sonnet sequence *The School of Eloquence*, which has progressively appeared in a variety of publications. This thesis examines the two most important publications of the sonnet sequence, *From 'The School of Eloquence' and Other Poems* (London: Rex Collings, 1978), and *Continuous: Fifty Sonnets from 'The School of Eloquence'* (London: Rex Collings, 1981), while later sonnets from the sequence are also referred to. Collections also in *CP*. Quotations from those sonnets are from *CP*.

'Shango' — 'Shango the Shaky Fairy', *London Magazine*, new series, vol. 10, no. 6 (April 1970), reprinted in *Bloodaxe 1,* 88-103. Quotations are from *Bloodaxe 1*.

THP	Tony Harrison papers relating to *Loiners*, London Magazine Editions, 73 uncatalogued and unnumbered items, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.
v.	*v.* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1985). Quotations from the poem *v.* are from *CP*.

Other Abbreviations

H, v. & O	Sandie Byrne, *H, v., & O: The Poetry of Tony Harrison* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998)
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*. Electronic resource, Oxford University Press, accessed Australian National University, Canberra. At: <http://dictionary.oed.com.virtual.anu.edu.au>
Poetry TH	Luke Spencer, *The Poetry of Tony Harrison* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994)
TH Holocaust	Antony Rowland, *Tony Harrison and the Holocaust* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001)
TH: Loiner	Sandie Byrne, ed., *Tony Harrison: Loiner* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997)
RCWSL	Arthur Rimbaud, *Rimbaud: Complete Works, Selected Letters*, trans. with an introduction and notes by Wallace Fowlie, rev. and with a foreword by Seth Whidden, bilingual edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005 [1966]). All quotations from Rimbaud's poems and letters are from *RCWSL* unless otherwise indicated.

Chapter 1

Out of the North: The Man 'Who Came to Read the Metre'

This is a study of the Leeds poet Tony Harrison's non-dramatic original poetry that appears in *Loiners* (1970), *The School of Eloquence* (1978-81), and the separately published *v.* (1985).[1] While I do discuss other works, the thesis largely excludes his 'imitations' of Palladas and Martial, and his dramatic poetry. Its principal focus is the political character of the poetry. The poems selected for examination are exemplars of Harrison's polyvalent artistic engagement with the politics and history of primarily England and Africa. The study shows how the poems are concerned with the interrelation of issues of class and colonialism, and the critical importance of history to understanding the poetry. Harrison's radical humanist and republican poetic and its encompassing of his class and anti-colonial politics will be established. This approach has not been taken in Harrison scholarship to date.[2] Colonialism is a critically under-appreciated preoccupation of the poetry,[3] while the importance of Harrison's republicanism for his poetry has been neglected. His humanism has been discussed but not its radical expression in giving the dispossessed a voice in his high cultural poetry. Harrison's politics are examined primarily in the sense of his consistent ideological commitments, but his politics of governance is also addressed. For the first time in Harrison scholarship the poetry is presented as an entwined biographical and political mythology for the Northern English working class. Introducing his poems at a

---

[1] The lower case *v.* in italics followed by a full stop has been used here as in all publications of the poem.

[2] The one exception is Colin Nicholson. After I had completed the researching and much of the writing of my thesis Nicholson published an essay on the dialectic between class, race and culture in *Loiners*, with reference to Harrison's radical republicanism, the neglected aspect of the volume that my thesis also addresses in detail. See Colin Nicholson, '"Reciprocal recognitions": race, class and subjectivity in Tony Harrison's *The Loiners*', *Race & Class*, vol. 51, no. 4 (2010) 59-78.

[3] The one exception here is an essay by Bruce Woodcock which examines whether Harrison can be regarded as a post-colonial poet. See Bruce Woodcock '"Internal Colonialism": Is Tony Harrison a post-colonial poet?', *New Literatures Review*, no. 35, summer 1998, 76-94.

reading in 1984 Harrison referred to the 'complicated social and historical reasons' for his poetry.[4] This thesis attends to the dense allusive fields of the poetry and seeks to illuminate the political and literary histories that enrich it. The aim in the thesis is to offer the first fully detailed contextual account of these remarkable poems and their politics.

This study accords particular attention to the presence in Tony Harrison's political poetry of the poets John Milton (1608-74) and Arthur Rimbaud (1854-91). John Milton figures prominently in Harrison's work and his importance for Harrison as a great republican poet is investigated here. The life and work of the nineteenth-century French poet, trader and explorer Arthur Rimbaud is of the first importance for Harrison's idea of himself as a poet. Rimbaud's importance for Harrison's identity and poetic and his presence in Harrison's poetry has not been recognized in the scholarship on Harrison but is examined in this study. I seek to illuminate Harrison's elective affinity with Rimbaud, as a hoodlum poet, as a regional poet with the wrong accent, as a poet who fell silent and became an explorer and fortune-seeker in Africa. For Harrison, Rimbaud is the great outsider now fêted as a high cultural poet and Rimbaud is a haunting presence in the poetry.

The thesis is organised by chronology and genre. It is divided into eight chapters and a coda. This first chapter considers the biography and the received scholarship and situates my readings of the poetry in relation to them. In each subsequent chapter a poem or a sequence of poems is given detailed exegesis in relation to some new or neglected contexts, and they are also interpreted with reference to other germane works and to Harrison's account of his work in interviews and prefaces. Each chapter provides contextual information necessary for understanding the political, historical and literary references in

[4] *Tony Harrison: Poets and People*, a Freeway Films Production for Channel 4 (1984). Harrison was referring to his adaptation of *The Mysteries* but it is equally true of most of the poetry examined in this dissertation.

the poems. Harrison is a poet of place and the thesis is also partially organized by geography. The chapters focus upon the poems about the North of England, the African poems, and discuss poems and prose about both places and about colonial themes in the Americas. An account of Harrison's political biography that explains aspects of his work, drawing on his letters, is also offered. The thesis draws upon new and familiar biographical information which elucidates political arguments latent in the poetry. Many of the poems examined are deeply personal and also highly political. The thesis attempts to tie the poems more to his biography and the historical circumstances in which the poems were produced.

This study seeks to recover the meanings of particular poems through exploration of their allusive fields. It also recognizes the distinction the French Marxist structuralist critic Pierre Macherey made in *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966) between 'what can be said of a work' and 'what the work itself is saying.' This can be true not only in the sense Macherey intended, of reading the work against the grain in order to reveal its unconscious ideology in its gaps and silences, but by disclosing Harrison's conscious topical historical allusions. The shared preoccupations of the poetry as well as concerns specific to individual works are demonstrated in this study. Prominence is given to the interrelation of issues of class and colonialism, Harrison's republican and humanist poetic, and the presence of Milton and particularly Rimbaud.

Chapter 2 discusses the Leeds poems in *Loiners* and their introduction of key ideological and stylistic features of Harrison's poems about his native background. In particular, Harrison's project is seen to be about bringing working-class Leeds content and idiom into high cultural poetic form. Chapter 2 shows how the poems reflect his republicanism and

vision of the North as an internal colony of the declining British Empire in the post-war period. Chapter 3 establishes an account of Harrison's political biography in the period when he lectured in Nigeria, drawing upon his letters from Nigeria for the first time. It argues that the anti-colonial aspect of the poetry has been under-appreciated in the criticism partly because the Nigerian years have been neglected. Poems from *Loiners* and *The School of Eloquence* that are concerned with colonial education and literature and republican politics are discussed. In Chapter 4 the deep engagement with colonial history in the African poems in *Loiners* is given detailed exegesis, addressing a perceived gap in the scholarship. This chapter also examines the political implications of the poems in their topical polemical circumstances and registers the correspondences between their rhetorical dimensions and, for example, African anti-colonial movements. The satirical mode of the poems' attacks upon European economic and sexual colonization in West Africa is discussed.

Chapter 5 interprets the last poem in *Loiners*, the autobiographical 'Ghosts: Some Words before Breakfast', by making visible the haunting of Harrison by Rimbaud, especially the late Rimbaud's poetic silence and the manner of his dying. This short chapter draws on Harrison's and Rimbaud's letters and discovers one of the great unrecognized literary friendships between the dead and the living. Chapter 6 explores the significance of Rimbaud's African years for *Loiners* and Harrison's identification with Rimbaud's poetic identity as 'the white Negro.' It also argues that Rimbaud's interest in Illuminism influences Harrison's elegiac vision, and that Harrison's highly visual poetic is influenced by Rimbaud's aesthetic of verbal photography or 'illuminations.'

Chapter 7 offers a sequence of readings of exemplary sonnets in *From 'The School of Eloquence' and Other Poems* (1978) and *Continuous: 50 Sonnets from 'The School of Eloquence'* (1981). The discussion addresses the importance for Harrison's republican poetic of classical 'eloquence', of the rhetorical voice and political significations he gives to his lyric in *The School of Eloquence*. The discussion begins with an account of the ongoing nature of the sonnet sequence and its unusual publication history. The literary antecedents for the sonnet sequence will be established. Harrison's use of the Meredithian sonnet as a vehicle for ideas which locate him in a republican literary lineage will be discussed. The structure of the sequence, stylistic questions and its paratextual framing devices will also be analyzed. The discussion of the filial sonnets will focus on Harrison's politicization of the elegy and his politics of sentiment. Particular attention will be paid to 'Heredity', Harrison's verse epigraph for *The School of Eloquence*. 'Heredity' will be read in relation to filial sonnets like 'Marked with D', which exemplify the merging of filial and political concerns in the sonnet sequence and Harrison's preoccupation with questions of class and power as they are played out on the sites of the intellect and the arts. 'Heredity' stages an eloquent defence of Harrison's family and of their class from the historical and 'scientific' charge of being 'dumb', with particular reference to social Darwinism. 'Heredity' is also an ideological lynchpin of the continuity between class and race politics in Harrison's poetry, from *Loiners* to *The School of Eloquence*.

The politico-historical sonnets 'On Not Being Milton' and 'Rhubarbarians, I' will be analyzed as major sonnets in Harrison's mythology for the Northern working class. The radicalism of these sonnets and their approving of direct political action will be discussed. The great importance of John Milton and the republican literary tradition for Harrison's republican poetic will also be examined. 'On Not Being Milton' establishes the political

and aesthetic framework for his poetry, and it has both English and African contexts. 'On Not Being Milton' announces an emotional and political homecoming after the exile of his imaginary in the African years. Chapter 3 examines the African contexts of 'On Not Being Milton.' In this chapter 'On Not Being Milton' is discussed in the English contexts of Harrison's republican poetic and his class political preoccupations. The last two sonnets to be examined in this chapter, 'National Trust' and 't' Ark' are, like 'On Not Being Milton' and 'Rhubarbarians, I', public elegies. 'National Trust' and 't' Ark' also well reflect the concern in *The School of Eloquence* with linguistic and political disempowerment in the regions and Harrison's view of internal colonialism within the United Kingdom.

Chapter 8 is concerned with the contested critical question of the political character of *v.*. This 'state of the nation' poem generated hostile criticism from many quarters. Important 'left' readings of *v.* criticized it as a liberal evasion of the political. This chapter contests these readings quite directly, and sees this work as in fact highly political. It presents a revisionist reading of *v.* in the polemical contexts of its composition and reception. The poem is examined in new contexts, including Paul Lafargue's parodic Marxist text *The Right to be Lazy*. Chapter 8 also offers an account of *v.* emphasizing the importance for Harrison of Rimbaud in the period of what might be called his classical vandalism.[5] Detailed attention is accorded to the aesthetic and political importance for *v.* of its literary model, Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard (*1751*)*, which has not hitherto been fully understood. *v.* ends with the poet's epitaph. This study ends with a coda that reflects upon the verse Harrison intends to be inscribed upon his

[5] I have adopted Bruce Woodcock's description of Harrison's poetry as 'classical vandalism', as it appears in the title of his article, and I have extended the phrase to Rimbaud's poetry. See Bruce Woodcock, 'Classical vandalism: Tony Harrison's invective', *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 2 (Summer 1990), 50-65.

tombstone, and its articulation of the enduring loyalties of his poetry, the epitaph of a steadfast poet who will be buried on Leeds ground.

1: The Man and his Work

Harrison is one of England's greatest political poets, elegists and verse dramatists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. His biography has been made familiar to his readers through the non-dramatic poetry and his interviews, prose pieces and prefaces. The central dramatic persona in the poetry selected for examination is often 'Tony Harrison.' His poems feature his parents and uncles, and other persons mentioned in the poems are often based upon people from his old neighbourhood and school, and from his travels and other experiences. The poetry characteristically moves outwards from the biographical to the historical and political. Harrison was born in Leeds in 1937, to Florence, a housewife, and Harold, a laborer in a bakery. They lived in 'a respectable working-class street' in Leeds.[6] At the age of eleven Harrison won a scholarship to Leeds Grammar School. He then attended Leeds University, completed a degree in Classics, a Diploma in Linguistics and commenced a PhD in Classics on verse translations of Virgil's *Aeneid*. In 1960 he married Rosemarie Crossfield, with whom he had a daughter Jane and a son Max, who also figure in several poems. In 1962 Harrison took up a lectureship in Nigeria and lived there with his family for four years. In 1964 *Earthworks*, a pamphlet of his early poems was published. *Aikin Mata*, his adaptation of Aristophanes *Lysistrata*, was published in 1966. Harrison lectured in Prague from 1966-67 and immersed himself in Czech theatre.

[6] *Them & [uz]: A Portrait of Tony Harrison*, *Arena*, BBC (15 April 1985).

In 1967 Harrison returned to England determined 'to make poetry a real job, and that's a question of hazarding the whole of your life on what you do.'[7] He settled in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and was awarded the first Northern Arts Fellowship in Poetry at the Universities of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Durham from 1967-68, when he wrote *Newcastle is Peru* (1969), his first important poem, which was published as a pamphlet. Two essays from his dissertation were also published under the name T.W. Harrison, in 1967 and 1969.[8] However, in a letter from 1968 Harrison wrote that 'I don't really like being an academic':[9] 'I've had to work inhumanly hard on very uncongenial tasks ... Needless to say the writing has suffered.'[10] Without an academic position, though, financial insecurity undermined his health and concentration,[11] but he still prioritized the poetry. In May 1968 he applied for an extension of time to submit his PhD[12] but it was regarded as lapsed by the 18 May 1970.[13] Harrison's first major collection of poems, *Loiners*, was published in 1970. It included the previously published 'Newcastle is Peru.'

Harrison had also taken up a UNESCO Fellowship in poetry in 1969, travelling to Cuba, Brazil, Senegal and Gambia.[14] He was awarded the Gregynog Arts Fellowship at the University of Wales from 1973-1974, and again held the Northern Arts Fellowship in Poetry in 1976-77. Harrison regards Fellowships as special preserves for that endangered species the poet, and he wanted to make his living from poetry independently. On the

---

[7] 'Interview', 246.
[8] T.W. Harrison, 'English Virgil: *The Aeneid* in the XVIII Century', *Philologica Pragensia*, X (1967), 1-11, 80-91; and T.W. Harrison, 'Dryden's *Aeneid*', in *Dryden's Mind and Art*, ed. by Bruce King (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969), 143-67.
[9] Letter to Ross (5 April 1968).
[10] Letter to Silkin (8 November 1964).
[11] Letter to Ross (7 October 1970).
[12] Letter to Professor Jeffares (May 1968, day unknown). Quoted in *TH Holocaust*, 279, where no further bibliographical details are provided.
[13] PhD acceptance document. Quoted in *TH Holocaust*, 279, where no further bibliographical details are provided.
[14] 'Shango', 88.

strength of *Loiners* he was asked by the National Theatre in London to translate and adapt Molière's *The Misanthrope* (1973).[15] It was the beginning of what is to date almost four decades of dramatic verse and international theatre work, and also verse for film and television. He was resident dramatist at the National Theatre from 1977-78 and it commissioned several of his plays. The arduous gamble was rewarded and Harrison became a successful professional writer.

Throughout his career Harrison has written dramatic and non-dramatic verse and he began writing his major continuing sonnet sequence *The School of Eloquence* in 1971. He spent four months in Mozambique in 1971 too and travelled to Leningrad in 1975. His mother and father died in 1976 and 1980 respectively and the elegiac filial sonnets appeared in *Continuous* (1981). In 1977 he visited Prague and New York. Harrison's version of Smetana's Czech libretto for *The Bartered Bride* was performed in 1978 at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Here he met the Greek-American soprano Teresa Stratas, who became his second wife. Through the 1980s Harrison divided his time mainly between Newcastle-upon-Tyne, New York and Florida. His life with Stratas in rural Florida is a subject of 'the American poems', a dozen poems first published individually from 1979-85, the most acclaimed of which is *A Kumquat for John Keats* (1981). The American poems bring mainly metaphysical meditations to their dominant subjects of sexual love, nature and death, and largely represent a self-conscious hiatus in Harrison's political engagement. The American poems are therefore not discussed in this thesis, which primarily examines political poems engaged with England and Africa.

The autobiographical long poem 'Facing North' (1983) charts Harrison's movement between Northern England and the class political commitments of *The School of*

[15] 'Interview', 20.

Eloquence, and the different territory in the American poems. 'Facing North' divides the American poems from *The School of Eloquence* in the *Selected Poems* (1984 and 1987).[16] The title 'Facing North' evokes a geographical and mental map, the idea of the poet-as-traveller and signals the importance of the North for Harrison's poetry, and its literary geography and cosmopolitanism. It refers to Harrison's study, 'the dark one facing North'[17] in the home he still has in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The poem is set in his study and ends with the much-travelled poet's temporary departure for his wife's home in America. The 'old pain' refers to his first marriage and his 'new hope' refers to Stratas (from whom he recently divorced). Hope, love and regeneration depend on risk and illusion, on 'memory shutting out half what it knows.' The poem's nautical imagery subtly presents the poet-as-voyager. He navigates his way with a 'telescope' but becomes 'lost' on a circular course, 'the two cold poles all places are between.'[18] He has felt that 'I was on a ship about to sink.'[19] The tone of the poem is contemplative and it reflects upon the fraught journey of life and of poetic composition.

The epigraph to 'Facing North' is 'The North begins inside.' It evokes a psychological landscape born of an intimate relationship to the place of origin, and the meanings we inscribe on that place and on our past. The North becomes a metaphor for the internal world of the man, Harrison. 'The North wind' carries the memories that make up who he is, and an implicit analogy is drawn between the wind rattling his home and flaying his garden, and the memories and anxieties that assail and frighten him. When the North wind

---

[16] In *CP* 'Listening to Sirens' precedes 'Facing North' as the first poem following *The School of Eloquence* and preceding the American poems. 'Listening to Sirens' is a very different poem but it also makes reference to the dialectic between an actual and symbolic North and South.
[17] 'Facing North', *CP*, 218.
[18] *CP*, 219.
[19] *CP*, 218.

is high his house shakes, and his paper lantern and the circle of light in which he writes swing alarmingly. He writes:

> I have to hold on when I think such things
> and weather out these feelings so that when
> the wind drops and the light no longer swings
> I can focus on an Earth that still has men,[20]

An end line rhyme on 'hate' / 'procrastinate' suggests the difficulty of writing and its dependence upon an internal equilibrium.[21] The 'struggle' to 'concentrate' and to weather out anxieties is in the foreground of this poetic self-portrait of the poet and man. The images of Harrison in his wind-besieged study struggling for 'some inkling of an inner peace'[22] intimates that ultimately he finds a home in his writing, an idea refuted by Theodor Adorno,[23] but poetry is a complex refuge in which he engages with biographical and historical strife.

The epigraph to 'Facing North' signals that Harrison's withdrawal from the political in the American poems is an interlude by alluding to a holiday taken by the poets W.H. Auden and Louis MacNeice. Their names raise the ghost of the literary image of the 1930s, of politics and poetry. In the 1930s Auden was at the centre of a group of politicized British poets with whom MacNeice, also left-leaning but skeptical of politically-motivated writing, was associated. However, the epigraph to 'Facing North' is taken from MacNeice's 'Epilogue', a poem about his and Auden's Icelandic holiday in 1936, for their travel book *Letters From Iceland* (1937). In 'Epilogue' the Auden figure describes such sojourns as 'Breathers from the Latin fire' of classical scholarship and elite learning.[24] MacNeice's and

---

[20] *CP*, 219.
[21] *CP*, 218.
[22] *CP*, 219.
[23] Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. by E.F.N. Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974 [1951]), 87.
[24] Louis MacNeice, 'Epilogue', *Letters From Iceland* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967 [1937]), 251.

Auden's excursion to Iceland, like Harrison's time in Florida, is a respite from the ascetism of the writer's life and, as with MacNeice, from 'the litany of doubt' after the breakdown of their first marriages.[25] 'Epilogue' refers to the rise of Nazism and the fall of Seville to Franco's fascist forces, but the Spanish civil war erupted[26] while the friends 'rode and joked and smoked.'[27] Later each man went separately to Spain during the war, both believing in the republican cause, and Auden's 'Spain' (1937) is one of his best-known political verses. *Letters From Iceland*, a playful and innovative mixture of poetry and prose, reflects the happiness of MacNeice's and Auden's trip together but also their awareness 'of a threatening horizon to their picnic.'[28]

Harrison's holiday too is 'Sandwiched in a graver show' of destructive historical forces,[29] a signification of the powerful winds that shake his home and threaten the private sphere, and of the darkness that descends at the poem's close. The implicit sense of anxiety about dark historical times in 'Facing North' recalls the mood of the literati in the 1930s, as does the subject and metaphor of travel.[30] In *Modern Poetry* MacNeice makes an anti-modernist 'plea for *impure* poetry, that is, for poetry conditioned by the poet's life and the world around him.'[31] MacNeice and Auden were, like Harrison, classically-trained scholars and formalist poets writing in metrical, stanzaic and rhyming poetry, and using a colloquial voice to speak lucidly about a wide range of private and public subjects.

---

[25] MacNeice, 'Epilogue', 253.
[26] W.H. Auden, 'Foreword', in *Letters From Iceland* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967 [1937]), 7-9, 8.
[27] MacNeice, 'Epilogue', 252.
[28] Auden, 'Foreword', 8.
[29] MacNeice, 'Epilogue', 251.
[30] Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: Bodley Head, 1976), 229. Another of Auden's works that has themes of travel and the North is the verse text he wrote for the collaborative documentary film *Nightmail* (1936), which follows the journey of the Royal mail train delivery service from London to Glasgow. Harrison's film-poem *Crossings* (2002) refers to *Nightmail*. See *Crossings*, *CP*, 399-414, 404.
[31] Louis MacNeice, 'Preface', *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay*, with an Introduction by Walter Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968 [1938]), xxi.

Harrison's poetry is impure, speaking about his life and 'open', like the window in his study in 'Facing North', to the world outside.[32] The poem's epigraph is a sign that Harrison's retreat from the North and from the political in the American poems is temporary because, as MacNeice and Auden also realized, poets live in history.[33]

Harrison's poems, especially those about Northern England in *Loiners*, *The School of Eloquence* and *v.*, are the fruits of his realization that 'the North begins inside.'[34] His poetic voice issues from a sensibility whose deepest stratum is Northern. A life-long relationship to the North that is important to the poetry is part of why Harrison alludes to MacNeice and Auden in the epigraph to 'Facing North.' In Harrison's poetry the North is firstly the cities of Leeds and Newcastle-upon-Tyne and for MacNeice it is Northern Ireland. For Auden the North is a complex of places from Yorkshire to Iceland.[35] The location of 'the North' varies geographically and imaginatively for different writers, though it is usually in a binary relation to 'the South.'[36] In 'Epilogue' MacNeice discerns that the landscape of the North educed the Icelandic saga style. The North also elicits the poetry of Harrison and, less pervasively, that of MacNeice and Auden. The North of these three poets is a place, its peoples, its history and the literatures and mythologies which emanate from it. Harrison's poetry, like MacNeice's, reflects an ambivalent relationship to the North, a painful sense of being between worlds and contains a strong dialectic between a symbolic North and South, between past and present, dark and light, the sensual and the

---

[32] *CP*, 218.
[33] Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 291.
[34] 'Facing North', *CP*, 218.
[35] Peter Davidson, *The Idea of North* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 85.
[36] Katie Wales, 'North and South: An English Linguistic Divide?', *English Today* 61, vol. 16, no. 1 (January 2000), 4-15, 4.

sense that 'all our games' are 'funeral games.'[37] Both poets were outsiders in the North, Harrison by education, MacNeice firstly by religion. MacNeice writes in 'Carrickfergus' that 'I was born in Belfast' but, as the son of an Anglican rector, was 'Banned for ever from the candles of the Irish poor.'[38] Harrison, like MacNeice, knows however that the North is ineradicably constitutive of who he is: 'But I cannot deny my past to which my self is wed, / The woven figure cannot undo its thread.'[39]

The perception 'The North begins inside' is attributed by MacNeice to Auden in 'Epilogue' and the poem is dedicated to Auden. In 'Letter to Lord Byron', from *Letters to Iceland,* Auden writes that the coalfields and industrial decay of the Northern English landscape has since childhood been 'my ideal scenery.'[40] The 1930s poets were an intellectual elite often based in the universities and their new concern with a troubled Northern England was, by some accounts, one of a series of fashionable polemical postures,[41] but Auden's preoccupation with Northern England endured. Many of Harrison's poems also refer to the iconography of Yorkshire's industrial landscape, its pollution and decay, its coal, miners and unemployment, scenery also often found in 'the Northern novel.' Other elements of Northern English life familiar in literary representations that are found in Harrison's poetry include the flat cap, 'sentimental' portraits of mam and dad, 'inarticulacy, and a warm, feeling, unbookish life', a world of

---

[37] Louis MacNeice, 'Sports Page', *Selected Poems*, ed. by Michael Longley (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 155.
[38] Louis MacNeice, 'Carrickfergus', *Selected Poems*, ed. by Michael Longley (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 24.
[39] Louis MacNeice, 'Valediction', *Selected Poems*, ed. by Michael Longley (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 13.
[40] W.H. Auden, 'Letter to Lord Byron', *Letters From Iceland* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967 [1937]), 49.
[41] George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, foreword by Victor Gollancz (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), 147.

men rarely graced by women except the mother, a world that particularly recalls Richard Hoggart's memoirs,[42] and the tribal rivalries of football.

In 'Facing North' the Northern landscape referred to is not industrial but natural. The fierce 'North wind' that strips Harrison's garden and 'the winter's chill' recalls many artistic representations of the inhospitable Northern climes. The poem's analogy for being possessed by 'huge passion', the North wind, might refer to the parallel between 'the power of the North wind' and 'the atmospheric tumult'[43] that assails the dwelling Wuthering Heights, and the wild love that visibly destroys Heathcliff and Cathy in Emily Bronte's Yorkshire novel. 'Facing North' alludes to the literary history of representations of the North, a literary history of which this poem, like Harrison's oeuvre, is a part.

Harrison's cartographic image of 'facing North' also points to the political map of the historic North-South divide, an important context for understanding this partisan political poet out of the North. In 'Facing North' Harrison speaks through Auden's 'Letter to Lord Byron' to raise the politics and history of the North-South divide in England. In his letter-poem Auden explains to Byron that the promised riches of modernity have benefited the affluent South, 'But in the North it simply isn't true.'[44] He refers to Wigan in the same year George Orwell's grim account of the North-South divide, in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), was published.[45] The working class impoverished during the Industrial Revolution are still poor and the 'scars of struggle' between North and South on 'the old historic battlefield' remain unhealed.[46] As Katie Wales observes, in the historically embedded

---

[42] Philip Dodd, 'Lowryscapes: Recent Writings about the North', *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 2 (Summer 1990), 17-28, 21.
[43] Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights,* an authoritative text, with essays in criticism, ed. by William M. Sale, Jr. (New York: Norton, 1972 [1963], 14.
[44] Auden, 'Letter to Lord Byron', 48.
[45] Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*.
[46] Auden, 'Letter to Lord Byron', 48.

binary of North and South in Britain, the North is synonymous with the working class, poverty and industry, while the South, specifically London, Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire and other Home Counties are places of privilege. London is 'the centre of power, of government, monarchy and cultural prestige located in the South.'[47] Wales regards the linguistic, cultural, political and economic marginalization of the North as a 'postcolonial' phenomenon.[48] Harrison's poetry reflects the view that 'in literature as in so much else, the relationship of "North" and "South" is one of unequal power.'[49]

In 'Facing North' he poses a rhetorical question: 'God knows why of all rooms I'd to choose / the dark one facing North for me to write.'[50] Harrison's study faces North because his poetry articulates Northern perspectives that seek to redress the 'unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority',[51] within the geopolitical division of North and South in Britain. As Philip Dodd comments, 'artistic work on "the North" is made by acquiescing in or struggling with available representations.'[52] Harrison is also a leading figure in the post-war decentralization of poetic authority in Britain, and of Northern writers gaining a voice in a discourse about the North traditionally dominated by the South. 'Facing North' does not represent the poet's permanent shift of focus from the historical and political realities of the North and nor does it suggest a primarily existentialist notion of the North, as a critic contends.[53] In an interview (with John Haffenden in 1983) the year 'Facing North' was published, Harrison comments that in *The Misanthrope* Alceste's retreat to the country speaks to the crisis of

---

[47] Wales, 'North and South', 5-6.
[48] Katie Wales, *Northern English: A Social and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4.
[49] Dodd, 'Lowryscapes', 18.
[50] *CP*, 218.
[51] Homi K. Bhabha, 'The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: the Question of Agency', in *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005 [1994]), 245-282, 245.
[52] Dodd, 'Lowryscapes', 17.
[53] *TH Holocaust*, 123.

political disengagement amongst contemporary intellectuals too. He observes that 'it is not political involvement to run off and live in the country.'[54] In *v.* (1984) Harrison is no longer in a shack on a Florida swamp writing the American poems. In *v.* he is back in Leeds and poetically engaged with '*this class war*'[55] and what he sees as a neo-colonial war between the Thatcher government in the South and the mining communities and other dispossessed people of the North.

Adorno writes that 'For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live.'[56] Harrison's exile of the imaginary is evoked by the image of the poet 'facing North' towards an absent home. However, Adorno concludes that 'In the end, the writer is not even allowed to live in his writing.' Good writing depends on the letting go of the familiar and anything comfortable 'to counter any slackening of intellectual tension.' Harrison's poetry provides both a home and a journey. The relationship between home and foreign lands, the local and the cosmopolitan is an epiphany articulated in 'Newcastle is Peru.' This marriage of the familiar and the new, in the work of the poet-as-traveller, is found in many of his poems and is prominent in 'Newcastle is Peru' and 'Facing North.' Harrison's poetry is constituted by the familiar and compelling dramatic persona 'Tony Harrison', his recognizable colloquial speaking voice in formal meter, the intimate layering of the biographical and the historical, a clear subject and narrative in a richly allusive and learned poetry that explores diverse literary and historical contexts.

---

[54] 'Interview', 239.
[55] *v.*, *CP*, 273.
[56] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 87.

Harrison's Travels

A cosmopolitan Leeds poet, Harrison's study of the languages, cultures, histories and current affairs of countries in which he has lived or to which he has travelled are raw materials of his poetry of place. The poetry is peppered with languages like Spanish, Swahili, French, German, Czech, Hausa and Yoruba, as well as 'dead' languages like Cornish, Welsh, Ancient Greek and Latin. A citizen of the world, Harrison's travels are important to the poetry's anti-colonial politics, its sense of fraternity towards the downtrodden at home and abroad, and its cosmopolitan humanist poetic.

Harrison's Education

In Harrison's vision of England, a rigorous education, intellectual life and high culture are largely the preserve of the bourgeoisie in the South. His family and their class, and his education and poetry are 'not reconcilable, it seems, in the kind of class system we have in England.'[57] Harrison was a product of the Butler Education Act of 1944, which introduced a scholarship system to place the brightest working-class children into the grammar schools.[58] His experience of class transition and cultural dislocation from his family and background, and the politics of language are major preoccupations of *The School of Eloquence* and *v.*. He was dismissed as a 'barbarian' by his schoolmaster because his thick Leeds accent[59] was regarded as inferior to the expected standard of speech, Received Pronunciation, which was the 'everyday speech in families of Southern English persons' who have been educated in public schools in the South.[60] Received Pronunciation (RP) and

---

[57] 'Interview', 246.

[58] For an account of the cultural, political and emotional impact of the Butler Education Act upon the British working class see Ken Worpole, 'Scholarship Boy: The Poetry of Tony Harrison', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 61-74.

[59] 'Them & [uz], I', *CP*, 133. See also 'Tony Harrison in interview with John Tusa', BBC Radio 3 (March 2008). At: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/johntusainterview/harrison_transcript.shtml>, [accessed 31 June 2010].

[60] Daniel Jones, *The Cambridge English Pronouncing Dictionary*, rev. edn, ed. by Peter Roach, James Hartman and Jane Setter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006 [1909]), v.

Standard English were the linguistics models established by, among others, Daniel Jones, Professor of Phonetics at University College London, in his *English Pronouncing Dictionary* (1917). Jones' *Dictionary* and RP are presented as agents of cultural oppression in 'Them & [uz], II.'[61] In order to gain the elite classical education provided by the public schools and access to high culture Harrison was expected to speak the language of the Southern bourgeoisie and had to forsake his native Leeds dialect.

Harrison (in the interview in 1983 with John Haffenden) says that the 'restricted' and 'elaborate' codes of language are a division built into the poems.[62] He is referring to the socio-linguist Basil Bernstein's influential theory, in *Class, Codes and Control* (1971), that different social classes use different codes of language, and that each has their own 'intimate', 'context-dependent' language whose use is restricted to their own group. However, Bernstein argued, it is usually only middle-class children who also have the 'elaborate' 'formal' code of language used in the schools. His intervention in educational discourse provided a cultural rather than genetic explanation for why working-class children were, in general, not benefiting from ostensibly greater equity in education in post-war Britain.[63] Bernstein's theory is consonant with Harrison's experience, presented in the poetry, of the imperative to learn the middle-class code of language used in the schools 'and *not* the English that I speak at home.'[64] But his continued belonging to his community of origin fundamentally depended upon speaking his mother tongue, a dilemma whose colonial dimensions are also dramatized in the poems. The wound of estrangement from

---

[61] 'Them & [uz], II', *CP*, 134.
[62] 'Interview', 232.
[63] Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control: Theoretical Studies Towards a Sociology of Language* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003 [1971]), 150-1. See also Hans Heinrich Stern, *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching* (Oxford and New York: New York University Press, 1983), 211-13. David Kennedy also discusses Bernstein's theories and their relevance for Harrison, Douglas Dunn and Seamus Heaney in 'Ideas of Community and Nation in the Poetry of the "Middle Generation": Douglas Dunn, Tony Harrison and Seamus Heaney' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1999), 10-11 and 62-4.
[64] 'Classics Society', *CP*, 130.

his family and background becomes the space in which political divisions and cultural reclamation are played out, in a hybrid poetry characterized by a purposeful cultural aggression.

Harrison would 'like to be the poet my father reads!'[65] The poems are for 'uz', the Northern pronoun of 'inclusion, solidarity, and family feeling.'[66] He responds to the educational and cultural exclusion of the people he came from, the Leeds working class, by making their language and lives important in his poems. The poems about his background are written mainly in Standard English but use the Leeds demotic and Northern cultural references frequently, and literacy in the Leeds demotic is essential to a full appreciation of a number of the poems. The poetry's clarity of language and subject, its direct address to the heart and its humour offers itself to a 'general readership', but especially to working-class Leeds people like his dad, 'people with no time like you in Leeds.'[67]

Harrison's poetry is for 'uz' but also for 'Them', 'a composite dramatic figure' of bourgeois authority and privilege.[68] In an interview with John Haffenden, Harrison said that the literary sophistication of the poetry 'gives maximum gratification' to a highly educated readership. But he intends to make the '*hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère*' pay for 'that literary frisson ... in social awareness, in the consciousness of social gaps and divisions.'[69] Harrison quotes from Charles Baudelaire's 'To the Reader' to convey that the anticipated hypocrisy of the generic bourgeois reader is one of his cultural targets. In the poems high cultural sources are placed alongside non-literary sources, like

---

[65] 'Rhubarbarians, II', *CP*, 124.
[66] 'Interview', 233, and 'Them & [uz], II', *CP*, 134.
[67] 'A Good Read', *CP*, 152.
[68] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: aspects of working-class life, with special reference to publications and entertainments* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), 62.
[69] 'Interview', 232. Harrison is quoting from Charles Baudelaire's 'To the Reader'. See Charles Baudelaire, 'To the Reader', *The Flowers of Evil,* trans. by James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993 [1857]), 6-7.

working-class speech, and the reader is confronted with the privilege of their literacy and an attendant responsibility to consider those traditionally excluded from Poetry.[70]

Harrison values his education in Latin and Greek. However, he is hostile to a system that removes bright working-class pupils from their culture and forces them to choose between their backgrounds and cultural participation. The poetry also presents the education system more generally as part of the ideological apparatus of the State and as inculcating dominant ideas that legitimize the power of the dominant class, a view also broadly found in diverse Marxist writings including those by Friedrich Engels, Louis Althussser and Raymond Williams. However, he is a highly-trained scholar whose research has been ploughed into his poetry. He wants Greek and Latin to be taught in the schools and was President of the Classical Association in 1987-8[71] and of the Virgil Society in 2000.[72] A secular humanist, he believes that progressive dimensions of humanity lie in education and the high cultural traditions of European culture. The generosity of spirit towards humanity associated with strands of humanism finds radical expression in the inclusion of the voices of the dispossessed and inarticulate in the classical forms of Harrison's poetry.

Reading the Meter

Harrison characterizes himself as 'a Yorkshire poet who came to read the metre.'[73] He is a highly metrically educated poet who writes in strict formal, rhyming poetic meters, which

---

[70] 'Tony Harrison in interview with Clive Wilmer', 'Poet of the Month', BBC Radio 3 (February 1991), transcript published in *Poets Talking: The 'Poet of the Month' Interviews from BBC Radio 3*, ed. by Clive Wilmer (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994), 97-103, 99.

[71] 'Facing Up to the Muses,' Presidential Address to the Classical Association (12 April 1988), first published in *Proceedings of the Classical Association*, 85 (1988), reproduced in *Bloodaxe 1*, 429-454.

[72] 'The Tears and the Trumpets,' Presidential Address to the Virgil Society (3 June 2000), in *Arion*, vol. 9, no.2 (2001), 1-22.

[73] 'Preface', *The Mysteries* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 6. Harrison uses the spelling 'metre.' Except for quotations, the spelling 'meter' is used in this dissertation.

he bends to accommodate the Leeds demotic, a voice not normal in inherited meters. He uses a wide range of verse forms including elegiac and heroic couplets, sonnets, lyric stanzas, epodic stanzas and terza rima. The genres and modes of Harrison's verse include lyric, epic, elegy, epigram, ode, tragedy, comedy and satire. He regards meter as 'an instrument of discovery', a way to control passion and as the 'pulse' of his poetry.[74] Rhythm is his existential 'life-support system.'[75] The Scottish poet Douglas Dunn observes the metrical skill with which Harrison brings his classicism to his Leeds background:

> Metrically, Tony Harrison's poetry is astute: his style is reminiscent of the sub-classical manner of Thomas Gray. Historically alert readers might also sense the pre-Augustan clarity of Dryden, or the varied urbanities of Virgil, Horace, Juvenal, Ovid and Martial, translated and possessed by a North of England working-class sensibility with all its discontents and which is supposed not to know about poetry, never mind write it.[76]

Harrison uses the iambic pentameter, the main traditional meter of English poetry, for aesthetic and ideological reasons. Antony Easthope explains that the iambic pentameter is most compatible with 'the "Received Pronunciation" of Standard English (the bourgeois norm)' 'because it legislates for the number of syllables in the line and therefore cancels elision, making transition at word junctures difficult.'[77] Harrison frequently uses elision, breaks words across lines and greatly varies the number of syllables in a line. His politico-poetic project is to usurp the Southern bourgeoisie's cultural hegemony, to take over the traditional forms of the British literary tradition for the working class.[78]

Harrison implicitly casts himself as a poetic guerilla opening the gates of high culture to the barbarians, to those who do not speak the master language, to laborers, housewives and the lumpenproletariat, to scavengers and skinheads. His approach to traditional poetic

---

[74] 'Conversation', 43-44.
[75] 'Conversation', 43.
[76] Douglas Dunn, '"Importantly Live": Tony Harrison's Lyricism', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 254-57, 255.
[77] Antony Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse* (London: Methuen, 1983), 68. Quoted in *Poetry TH*, 17; and *H, v. & O*, 44.
[78] 'Tony Harrison in interview with Paul Bailey', *Third Ear*, Radio 3 (23 February 1988).

forms is presented as a people's occupation in 'Them & [uz], II': 'So right, yer buggers, then! We'll occupy / your lousy leasehold Poetry.'[79] The bourgeoisie have a temporary 'leasehold' on Poetry that rightfully belongs to the people. The proper noun Poetry is capitalized to present it as a political and cultural space that Harrison occupies on behalf of 'uz.' His poetics of occupation can also be understood as a poetics of inclusion.

This polyphonous poetry also integrates widely diverse linguistic registers: popular, learned, literary, industrial, historical, philosophical, commercial brand-names and jingles, medical, scientific, religious and obscene. The smooth surface of received poetic forms is also visually ruffled by the unusually varied typography: upper and lower case, italics, roman type, phonetic alphabet, gothic, bold, brackets, parentheses, asterixes, footnotes and pronounced spacing between lines. An iconoclast bringing aggressive slang and subaltern voices into the genteel realm of received poetic forms, Harrison is a high cultural vandal.

The man who came to read the meter is a punning poet whose egalitarian conception of his art as a trade locates him in a community of working men. He is an artisan, a wordsmith akin to a blacksmith, skillfully wielding a sledge-hammer on 'owned language.'[80] The metaphor of physical labour for his linguistic craft is implicit in the poetry's emphasis on the physicality of articulation and the materiality of language. He 'learned by what Yeats called "sedentary toil and the imitation of great masters."'[81] He writes that 'I still find it all almost impossibly difficult, but the difference is now that, again in the words of Yeats, "difficulty is our plough."' Harrison's job 'had to be hard work', as his father's labor in a bakery was. This is a working-class poet who rose into the

[79] 'Them & [uz], II', *CP*, 134.
[80] 'On Not Being Milton', *CP*, 122.
[81] 'Inkwell', 33.

bourgeoisie only to bring with him 'the whole weight of the Protestant Ethic in its death agonies, a monstrous North of England millstone grit.'

Poetry to date

A poet of the page, stage and screen the scope and diversity of Harrison's work is formidable and, like Milton, age does not weary him. He regards it all as one poetry and thinks that 'some of the best poetry in the world is in some of its drama from the Greeks onwards.'[82] He is recognized as Britain's principal theatre poet and his works performed at the National Theatre include *The Misanthrope* (1973), *Phaedra Britannica* (1975), *Bow Down* (1977), *The Oresteia* (1981), *The Mysteries* (1985) and most recently *Fram* (2008). The New York Metropolitan Opera commissioned *The Bartered Bride* (1978) and *Medea: A Sex-War Opera* (1985). His dramatic verse has been performed internationally from Russia to Greece and in national and regional theatres. Through the 1970s and 1980s he also wrote verse for film and television, beginning with *The Blue Bird* (1975) and including *The Big H* (1984), *v.* (1987), *The Blasphemer's Banquet* (1989) and *Loving Memory* (1992). *Prometheus*, his first feature film, was screened on Channel 4 and in small cinemas in 1998.[83] Harrison also translated versions from the Greek of Palladae of Alexandria in *Palladas: Poems* (1975). He translated the Latin poet Martial into New York vernacular in the pamphlet *U.S. Martial* (1981). His dramatic and non-dramatic verse has also been translated into many languages. It was not until the publication of the *Selected Poems* in

[82] 'Authors Statement', *Tony Harrison*, Contemporary Writers Series (London: Booktrust, 1987), reprinted in *Bloodaxe 1*, 9.
[83] Edith Hall, 'Tony Harrison's *Prometheus*: A View from the Left,' *Arion,* vol. 10, no. 1 (2002), 129-40, 129.

1984 and 1987 that Harrison began to gain recognition as a lyric poet equal to the acclaim he had received as a theatre poet.[84] The *Collected Poems* were published in 2007.

Harrison's publishing history reflects his increasing cultural capital. His first poems *Earthworks* and then *Newcastle is Peru* were published by small Northern imprints. *Loiners* was published with the small metropolitan publishing house London Magazine. Rex Collings, a relatively small London imprint, published Harrison's books of dramatic and non-dramatic verse in the 1970s and also *Continuous* and *The Oresteia* in 1981. Through the 1980s Harrison's books were mainly published by either the Newcastle-upon-Tyne publishing house Bloodaxe Books, or the major publishing houses Penguin and Faber and Faber. Through the 1990s and the first decade of the twentieth century Faber and Faber have been his main publishing house. The *Collected Poems* though were published by the Penguin imprint Viking, just as both editions of the *Selected Poems* were published by Penguin. Harrison has also published poems individually in magazines throughout his career. His poetry was first published in student magazines and little magazines like *Stand*, but has increasingly appeared in major literary magazines like *The Times Literary Supplement*.[85] In the sonnet 'Them & [uz], II' he refers dryly to how 'My first mention in the *Times* / automatically made Tony Anthony!'[86] By changing the more working-class sounding 'Tony' to 'Anthony' the *Times* maintains the illusion that eloquence and cultural capital belong to the bourgeoisie. Harrison tends to publish major poems in the *London*

---

[84] Oswyn Murray, 'Tony Harrison: Poetry and the Theatre', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 262-274, 265. See also Douglas Dunn, 'Abrasive Encounters', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 346-47, 346.
[85] For a detailed account of Harrison's publishing history see Sandie Byrne, 'Tony Harrison's Public Poetry', in *TH: Loiner*, 1-27.
[86] 'Them & [uz], II', *CP*, 134.

Review of Books, including *v.* and most recently 'Piazza Sannazaro'[87] and 'Cornet and Cartridge.'[88]

Laurels

Harrison has received many honours which celebrate his achievement as a major poet. In 1972 he was awarded the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize for *Loiners*. *The Oresteia* won the European Poetry Translation Prize in 1983. *v.* won the Royal Television Society Award in 1987. The Whitbread Poetry Award for 1992 went to *The Gaze of the Gorgon* (1992). In 1994 the Prix Italia was awarded to his film *Black Daisies for the Bride* (1993). *The Shadow of Hiroshima and Other Film-Poems* (1995) won the Heinemann Award in 1996. In 2004 Harrison received the Northern Rock Foundation Writer's Award with a prize of £60 000, which he said will allow him to revise and experiment with his work free from external demands.[89] He received the Wilfred Owen Poetry Award in 2007. In 2009 Harrison became the inaugural recipient of the PEN/Harold Pinter Literary Prize. Most recently he was awarded the European Prize for Literature in 2010 for his lifetime achievement as a poet, dramatist and film-maker. He has said that he admires how the great Japanese artists changed their names, because that practice would help to keep the spirit free and the work unhindered by expectations.[90]

Harrison's poetry has attained tentative canonical status and he seems to be one of the few living poets who may still be read in fifty years. His poetry has been awarded major prizes by his peers and his poems are set in university courses. His stance towards the

---

[87] 'Piazza Sannazaro', *London Review of Books*, vol. 32, no. 20 (21 October 2010), 27.

[88] 'Cornet and Cartridge', *London Review of Books*, vol. 33, no. 4 (17 February 2011), 19.

[89] Tony Harrison quoted in Maya Jaggi, 'Beats of the Heart', *The Guardian* (25 March 2004). At: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/mar/31/poetry.tonyharrison> [accessed 1 July 2009].

[90] Tony Harrison quoted in Nicolas Wroe, 'Man of Mysteries', *The Guardian* (1 April 2000). At: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2000/apr/01/poetry.theatre> [accessed 20 August 2009].

canon is ambivalent. He is ambitious for his work to gain a lasting readership and to achieve fame in a traditional sense ('*exegi monumentum aere perennius*'),[91] which admission into the canon may provide. However, his view also seems to be that the canon traditionally lends high cultural authority and status to the language, lives and ideologies of hegemonic social groups. His political intention is to subvert the use of the canon as a prop to the *status quo*.[92] Harrison believes in a canon and in high culture as a distinct sphere. However, in building much of his art upon his working-class background his poetry reflects a view argued by Raymond Williams that culture is ordinary, a way of life mutually inhering in the arts and learning.[93] Harrison brings the way of life and culture he grew up with into the canon and this, as well as the dialectic between learned and popular traditions, is represented in the sonnet 'Them & [uz], I' by placing the intense 'αἰαῖ' of Greek tragedy alongside the 'ay, ay!' of the stand-up comics,[94] who he saw at the Northern music halls as a child.[95] He 'rescues' Art from 'a closed order of appreciators'[96] by making his eloquence as accessible as he can to his family and their class, and others outside the high cultural circle. The canonization of his poetry is a collective win for 'uz.'

Laureate of the left

Harrison is a public poet who has done much to bring poetry back into the important arenas of public life, like politics and the theatre.[97] He rejects the Modernist retreat into a coterie and addresses a wide audience about public and private themes. He praises poetry's place

---

[91] 'Interview', 233 and 235.
[92] 'Interview', 245. Harrison's comments in this interview about the Classics 'as a prop to the *status quo*' are suggestive of his view of the wider canon.
[93] Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', in *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, ed. by Robin Gale (London: Verso, 1989), 3-19, 3-16.
[94] 'Them & [uz], I', *CP*, 133.
[95] 'Interview', 237.
[96] 'Interview with Wilmer', 102.
[97] Tony Harrison quoted by Rosemary Burton in an unpublished article, quoted in Peter Forbes, 'In the Canon's Mouth: Tony Harrison and Twentieth-Century Poetry', in *TH: Loiner*, 189-199, 190.

in Greek society where 'the poets were central to the whole ability of a culture to understand itself.'[98] Oswyn Murray observes that Harrison understands the classical tradition in the theatre because, like the Greeks, he understands poetry as a public act.[99] The work has commanded full houses in the theatre for decades and a mass audience through television and newspapers. He has published urgent polemical verse in newspapers, and not in the arts pages but in the news section. His commissioned poems about the Bosnian war, for example, were written in Bosnia while the war was happening and appeared on the front page of *The Guardian*. He thinks poetry has the capacity to 'concentrate our attention on our worst experiences without leaving us with the feeling, as other media can, that life in this century has had its affirmative spirit burnt out.'[100] An atheist who attacks priestcraft, he also believes that poetry can console and shape the human spirit.[101]

Classical republicanism is one of the major intellectual traditions that Harrison is shaped by, and he sees himself in a role similar to a classical republican orator or to the Milton of *Areopagitica*, his eloquence at the service of the people. He is certainly known as a people's poet. Poetry is not a popular art and the skinhead in *v.* voices Harrison's doubts about the political efficacy of poems when he cries '*it's not poetry we need in this class war.*'[102] Nonetheless, poetry is his way of subverting the English class system. He has said: 'When anyone says that I'm fighting a battle that's been fought long ago and that the class system doesn't exist, I know it does exist, I keep banging my head against it.'[103] Humanist

---

[98] 'Tony Harrison in interview with Melvyn Bragg', *The Southbank Show*, London Weekend Television (28 March 1999).
[99] Murray, 'Tony Harrison', 273.
[100] 'Author's Statement', 9.
[101] Tony Harrison quoted in Michael Glover, 'Tony Harrison: Not to be read quietly', *The Independent* (1 April 2007). At: <http://news.independent.co.uk/people/profiles/article2411634.ece> [accessed 2 June 2010].
[102] *v.*, *CP*, 273.
[103] 'Interview', 231.

Marxism, with its emphasis on experience, history, compassion and agency is another formative intellectual tradition for Harrison.

The lyric, long poems, elegies and sonnets examined in this study are not confined to the concerns of an individual but have ambitious scope in their politics and history and statements about the state of nations. All Harrison's work is 'part of the same quest for a public poetry.'[104] These poems present an intimate relationship between the biographical and the historical, and see his relationship to his family and background as related to the historical struggle between the classes.[105] He has likened himself as poet to a pirate, and his daring adventure is 'to colonize the high style' and 'present it back as a gift to those people you were brought up with.'[106] Harrison's parents did not regard poetry as a real and respectable job,[107] but it was his life with them and his understanding of the mistreatment of the Northern working class that is at the heart of a poetry engaged in a political battle of ideas.

II: Received Views

There is a substantial corpus of criticism surrounding Harrison's life and work.[108] There are four book-length studies, two collections of essays and many book chapters and journal articles about the Harrison canon, a considerable body of commentary for a contemporary author. Harrison scholarship widely recognizes the poetry's compelling concern with the relationship between class, language and power, and that the class divisions reflected and enforced in language are often dramatized through the internally divided dramatic persona 'Tony Harrison.' There is, however, also a tendency to conflate the poetry with the

---

[104] 'Author's Statement', 9.
[105] 'Interview', 230.
[106] 'Interview with Bailey', Radio 3. Also quoted in Woodcock, 'Classical Vandalism', 55.
[107] *Them & [uz]: A Portrait*, BBC.
[108] See my Bibliography which aims to be comprehensive.

biography, an approach which undermines its dramatic truths and political observations. At its most personal level the poems are concerned with dramatic not literal autobiographical truths and it is not 'Confessional Poetry',[109] as Harrison argues in the sonnet of that name and in a letter to its dedicatee, the critic and poet Jeffrey Wainwright.[110] The politics of the poetry has been interpreted by some critics as the mistaken projection of its primarily private preoccupations onto a political plane, whereas, I think, an argument and premise of the poems is that personal experience is inescapably connected to and representative of larger social and historical issues. This thesis follows that school of criticism which examines the poems about Harrison's background, education and travels as highly crafted meditations upon history and politics. This study draws upon biographical information that helps to explain the poetry, but it rests upon the still critical need for the interrogation of the political, literary and historical contexts of the works.

It is often observed in Harrison scholarship that the poetry is preoccupied with biographical, historical, political and metaphysical divisions. The critical reception of the poetry is also characterized by division, and this is partly a consequence of Harrison's political commitments and cultural aggression. His eloquence is a masterfully crafted Trojan horse for a politico-poetic project. While the aesthetic and intellectual achievement of the work, its scope and technical mastery has won wide acknowledgement from the literary and academic community, there is a tendency for critics to marginalize its politics. But where the scholarship critically engages with the political lenses the poetry applies to its subjects Harrison attracts strong loyalties, hostilities and expectations amongst his readers.

---

[109] 'Confessional Poetry', *CP*, 139.
[110] Letter to Jeffrey Wainwright (18 December 1980), BC Ms 20c Wainwright, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

The distinguished Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton, for example, is an admirer of Harrison's who is sometimes disappointed by a perceived failure of his radical political vision.[111] Eagleton writes that what is expected from Harrison 'is a radical rather than a liberal perspective, since we aren't likely to get it from ninety percent of his literary colleagues.'[112] By contrast, Sandie Byrne's view is that much of the poetry does not offer a serious radical perspective on social injustice and that its political commitments are quite limited.[113] Byrne regards Harrison's story as 'one of escape from an oppressed into a privileged class … and not of a struggle to change the system which creates the inequality.'[114] Much of the criticism up until the late 1990s is sympathetic to the poetry's class politics. Subsequently, some of the more prominent criticism has tended to view the poetry's engagement with class as anachronistic and excessive, or as less central to its concerns.

The largest problem in Harrison scholarship is a tendency to not engage fully with the political preoccupations of the poetry or to recognize the critical importance of history to understanding the poems. This thesis contends, however, that an explication of the poetry's historical and literary contexts establishes its consistent class, anti-colonial, humanist and republican perspectives and the richness of its political vision. It addresses a perceived gap in the scholarship by providing detailed contextual information necessary for understanding the historical and political references in the poetry. There has been limited exploration of the poetry's engagement with colonial history, for example, but attention to colonial history is necessary for recognizing Harrison's strong anti-colonial poetic. Harrison scholarship has sometimes tended to restate the same concerns and contexts in accounts of the poetry.

---

[111] Terry Eagleton 'Antagonisms: Tony Harrison's *v.*', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 348-50, 350.
[112] Terry Eagleton, 'Metre v. madness', *Poetry Review*, vol. 82, no. 4 (Winter 1992/3), 53-4, 54.
[113] *H, v. & O*, 162.
[114] *H, v. & O*, 41.

The investigation of some new or neglected contexts in which Harrison's poems can be read, an aim of this thesis, discloses new dimensions of meaning in them.

The first collection of essays and reviews devoted to Harrison's *oeuvre* was the *Bloodaxe Critical Anthologies 1: Tony Harrison* (1991). *Bloodaxe 1* primarily focuses on the class political preoccupations of the poetry, particularly *The School of Eloquence* and *v.* among the non-dramatic verse. A view largely representative of the anthology is expressed by the English writer Blake Morrison who, referring to Harrison's origins, poetic subjects and class politics, describes him as probably 'the first genuine working-class poet England has produced' in the last century.[115] Harrison's 'Old Left decencies'[116] are observed by the Scottish poet Douglas Dunn in one of his several reviews collected in *Bloodaxe 1*. This study builds on Dunn's and Morrison's readings of Harrison as a highly cultured poet of working-class Leeds and of genuine class political loyalties, a perspective marginalized in some more recent commentary. The continuities in Harrison's analysis of class and colonialism and his political mythology for the Northern working class are newly established in this study.

There are few references in the Bloodaxe anthology to Harrison's poetic engagement with colonialism and his experiences in Africa. One of the few essays in the Bloodaxe anthology interested in *Loiners* and empire is by Romana Huk. Huk's larger subject is a cultural phenomenon she calls the 'Leeds Renaissance', the interest in international art and politics among a range of local poets and artists that emerged in provincial Leeds in the 1950s and early 1960s when Harrison was at Leeds University.[117] She regards the internationalization of the environment in Leeds as a catalyst for Harrison's wide-ranging

---

[115] Blake Morrison, 'Labouring: *Continuous*', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 216-220, 216.
[116] Douglas Dunn, 'Abrasive Encounters', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 346-7, 347.
[117] Romana Huk, 'Tony Harrison, *The Loiners*, and the "Leeds Renaissance"', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 75-83, 73.

travels, which are important to *Loiners*.[118] Of most interest to this study is Huk's discussion of the dramatization of the imperial relationship between Africa and Europe and the interplay between class and race in *Loiners*. Huk touches on the influence of New Left debates about political commitment in the arts but argues that the philosophy of these polycentric poems is 'more like an anti-position than a position.'[119] In *Loiners* there is no 'assignment of blame' and no 'side to be taken.'[120] By contrast this study, while examining dialectical arguments in *Loiners*, aims to explicate its politically committed anti-colonial satire.

Harrison's observations of British colonial education in Africa led to his recognition of the 'internal colonialism' of British education,[121] a view he expresses in an interview (with John Haffenden in 1983) reproduced in *Bloodaxe 1*. The importance of this statement for his poetry has not been closely examined in the scholarship except for a recent essay by Colin Nicholson, which will be returned to, and in an earlier original and scholarly essay by Bruce Woodcock, who regards this white Northern English writer as a post-colonial poet.[122] Woodcock examines the critical shortcomings of collapsing the distinct categories, but often historically intersecting experiences, of class and colonization, and ultimately argues for the validity of Harrison's view of the colonial character of aspects of his experience. The significance of the concept of 'internal colonialism' for the poetry is fully explored for the first time in this dissertation. The larger subject of Rick Rylance's essay in the Bloodaxe anthology is the usefulness and limitations of a post-structuralist and a cultural

[118] Huk, 'The "Leeds Renaissance"', 80.
[119] Huk, 'The "Leeds Renaissance"', 83.
[120] Huk, 'The "Leeds Renaissance"', 81.
[121] 'Interview', 236.
[122] See Woodcock, '"Internal Colonialism", 76-94.

materialist literary criticism for understanding Harrison's poetry.[123] Post-structuralism is compatible with the poetry's awareness of the social ground of language and discourse, its intertextuality, quotation, *bricolage* and wordplay. A cultural materialist criticism is useful for understanding the poetry's grounding in individual experience, history and agency. However, this thesis builds upon Rylance's discussion of some parallels suggested in the sonnet 'On Not Being Milton' between African colonial experience and British working-class experience,[124] a line of enquiry that remains underdeveloped in the scholarship. The thesis also builds upon Carol Rutter's brief but original and incisive discussion of Harrison's translation of an African anti-colonial politics to the circumstances of Northern England in *Permanently Bard* (1995), her annotated selection of Harrison's poetry. Rutter, like Rylance, mainly discusses 'On Not Being Milton', and both scholars link Harrison's interest in colonialism to his four month visit to Mozambique in 1971. This dissertation makes a detailed contextual argument about the importance of Harrison's earlier four years in Nigeria for the preoccupation with colonialism, and its interrelation to class, in *Loiners* and *The School of Eloquence*.

The first book-length study was *The Poetry of Tony Harrison* (1994) by Luke Spencer, who regards him as among the finest political poets of the last century. Spencer examines the politics of Harrison's oeuvre in a series of historical and political contexts. He discusses *Loiners*, for example, in the context of its perceived indebtedness to 1960s sexual and political emancipation, particularly as theorized by Herbert Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization*. In *Tony Harrison* (1996) Joe Kelleher takes a thematic and autobiographical approach and tends to interpret *Loiners*, for example, as an expression of Harrison's

[123] Rick Rylance, 'On Not Being Milton', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 114-28, 115 and 126-27.
[124] Rylance, 'On Not Being Milton', 120-5.

assumed 'sexual itch.'[125] Spencer praises Harrison's 'libertarian socialism'[126] and anti-militarism but is very critical of his gender and race politics.[127] Sean O'Brien observes that Spencer's interpretations sometimes lack subtlety and forget that 'The poems are not sermons.'[128] Spencer seeks to address a perceived lack of critical engagement 'at any real depth of moral commitment or intellectual interest' in Harrison's politics.[129] This thesis aims to explicate rather than judge the politics of the poetry's subjects and forms.

Tony Harrison: Loiner (1997) is a collection of essays by diverse contributors about Harrison's corpus, several of which are referred to in the course of this study. Christopher Butler's essay briefly notes an allusion to Rimbaud in *v.*, and this is one of the two longest references to Rimbaud in Harrison scholarship.[130] *H, v. & O* (1998) is Sandie Byrne's book-length thematic study of Harrison's corpus, and it is here she comments that his poetry is about class transition but not about 'a struggle to change the system which creates the inequality.'[131] Byrne's comment raises the question of what constitutes political engagement for a writer. Sartre famously wrote that words are actions for 'the "committed" writer.'[132] The political sincerity of the poetry is not assessed in this thesis in relation to Harrison's engagement in political activities outside the writing (which he is not involved in anyway, unlike for example the working-class Scottish novelist James Kelman). This study regards Harrison's politico-poetic project as a struggle against a

---

[125] Joe Kelleher, *Tony Harrison* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1996), 2.
[126] *Poetry TH*, 8.
[127] *Poetry TH*, 14-15 and 80-2.
[128] Sean O'Brien, 'Tony Harrison: *Showing the Working*', in *The Deregulated Muse: Essays on Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1998), 51-64, 59.
[129] *Poetry TH*, xi.
[130] Christopher Butler, 'Culture and Debate', in *TH: Loiner*, 93-114, 97. Butler briefly notes the allusion in *v.* to Rimbaud's dictum that '*Je est un autre*' ['I is someone else']. See Arthur Rimbaud, Letter to Georges Izambard (13 May 1871), the famous *Lettre du Voyant* ['The Prophet's Letter'], *RCWSL*, 370-71. Bruce Woodcock also makes a brief incisive reference to Harrison's adapting of Rimbaud's '*Je est un autre*' to say that he is the 'sublimated vandal' in *v.*. See Bruce Woodcock, 'Classical vandalism: Tony Harrison's invective', *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 2 (Summer 1990), 50-65, 60.
[131] *H, v. & O*, 40-41.
[132] Jean Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, trans. by B. Frechtman (London: Methuen, 1967 [1948]), 12.

cultural hegemony which has demeaned his class, and it argues that he gives a political voice on a high cultural stage to occluded peoples and histories.

Byrne suggests that Harrison is correct to 'not claim that' the poetry 'offers a radical perspective on the underlying determinants of social injustice, nor that it can change anything.'[133] Harrison has said that he writes with an awareness of 'the whole fatuity of the belief that writing poetry will *do* anything,'[134] recalling Auden's surmise that 'poetry makes nothing happen', in his elegy for W.B. Yeats.[135] Harrison's despair at the political inefficacy of poetry seems however to be equated erroneously with a declaration of defeat. He has commented that however dark the content of the poetry, the act of writing was itself 'a denial of the pessimistic beginning.'[136] Harrison's stance resonates with a slogan admired by Walter Benjamin and Antonio Gramsci: 'Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.'[137] Harrison's humanist Marxism is one influence in the poetry that does offer radical (in the sense of fundamentally oppositional) perspectives upon the underlying determinants of social injustice. In 'Rhubarbarians, I', for example, linguistic and industrial militancy are merged, Luddite resistance to the factory system is championed, and *laissez faire* capitalism is implicitly presented as the enemy of human freedom. He is also aware of the quite direct role of poetry in political struggle in particular historical contexts, such as anti-colonial struggles in 'underdeveloped' economies. In the second stanza of 'On Not Being Milton', which can be regarded as his politico-poetic manifesto, the bourgeoisie's ownership of cultural capital is paralleled to Capital's ownership of the

---

[133] *H, v. & O*, 162.
[134] Tony Harrison quoted in Rosemary Burton, 'Tony Harrison: An Introduction', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 14-31, 14.
[135] W. H. Auden, 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats', *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969 [1966]), 142.
[136] 'Interview', 227.
[137] See Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: New Left Books, 1981),172.

means of production.[138] In the sonnet the poet's struggle is, to continue the metaphor, to nationalize Poetry and make cultural wealth the inheritance of the common people.

There is disagreement in Harrison scholarship about the politics and prowess of his classical formalism. For Spencer, Harrison is waging an ideological and aesthetic battle 'to fashion truly oppositional meanings out of fundamentally bourgeois establishment poetic forms.'[139] Alternately, Byrne's view is that 'revolution' 'is not advocated in the forms of his poetry.'[140] Harrison's use of classical forms is conservative in its sustaining of a tradition, but he also re-energizes those forms by bringing new voices and subjects into them,[141] and his poetics of occupation has, as noted, a revolutionary dimension. There are two main schools of thought regarding Harrison's metrical prowess in using the iambic pentameter, the archetypal meter of English poetry. The main school regards the irregularities in his poetic meter as intentional and produced by bringing demotic voices into formal metrical patterns that do not conventionally accommodate them. The other school thinks that the irregularities are sometimes errors of technical or wider poetic judgment.

In the first school, Jem Poster, for example, observes the acute metrical ear necessary for Harrison's 'calculated defiance' of 'the smoother cadences.'[142] Neil Roberts notes that Harrison is renowned for his metrical craftsmanship, but Roberts regards his use of formal meter as 'quite loose.'[143] John Lucas is not convinced that the metrical irregularities can be

---

[138] 'On Not Being Milton', *CP*, 122.
[139] *Poetry TH*, 16.
[140] *H, v. & O*, 40-1.
[141] 'Interview with Wilmer', 100.
[142] Jem Poster, 'Open to Experience: Structure and Exploration in Tony Harrison's Poetry', in *TH: Loiner*, 85-91, 86.
[143] Neil Roberts, 'Poetic Subjects: Tony Harrison and Peter Reading', in *British Poetry from the 1950s to the 1990s: Politics and Art*, ed. by Gary Day and Brian Docherty (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997), 48-62, 49.

explained by imitative fallacy, wherein the form imitates the coarseness of the subjects.[144] Antony Rowland thinks that Harrison may have 'a propensity to bodge the metre.'[145] Harrison's comments about the skilful metrical irregularities and achieved 'roughness' of tone of Palladas of Alexandria implicitly answers commentary about his own breaching of established meters.[146] This study particularly follows Blake Morrison in regarding the strained meter and syntax of the poetry as embodying Harrison's point that eloquence is struggled for by the laboring class his poetry comes from.[147]

Interestingly, Byrne argues that iambic pentameter 'privileges RP no more than a working-class accent'[148] and that Harrison's bringing the Leeds idiom into the iambic pentameter is not the significant formal achievement it is widely regarded as. Rudyard Kipling also put working-class voices into poetry and valorized the working class who built the British Empire. Harrison has read Kipling's poetry[149] and there are Kiplingesque rhythms in some of his poems.[150] Kipling is a writer of whom the Left would not approve. Harrison is not so unique in his use of demotic in poetry as is often suggested.

A contested issue in interpretation of Harrison's poetry is the authenticity of its Northern character and its class politics. Since the late 1990s criticism has increasingly engaged with a wider range of subject areas in the Harrison corpus. However, in the two most recent book-length studies, Byrne's *H, v. & O* and Antony Rowland's *Tony Harrison and the*

---

[144] John Lucas, 'Speaking For England?', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 351-361, 359-360.
[145] *TH Holocaust*, 44.
[146] 'Preface', *Palladas: Poems*, in *Bloodaxe 1*, 133-35, 135.
[147] Blake Morrison, 'The Filial Art', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 54-60, 57.
[148] *H, v. & O*, 45.
[149] Harrison's childhood reading of *The Kipling Treasury* is referred to in 'Next Door, I', *CP*, 140. Kipling's poems about empire are also referred to by Harrison in 'Black and white and red all over: the fiction of Empire', *London Magazine*, new series, vol. 12, no. 3 (August/September 1972), 90-103, 95.
[150] Nicholson and Peter Porter observe that some of Kipling's verse is a model for 'The Songs of the PWD Man', *Loiners*, 50-3. See also Nicholson, '"Reciprocal recognitions"', 75; and Peter Porter, 'In the Bosom of Family', *London Magazine*, new series, vol. 10, no. 5 (1970), 72-8, 75.

Holocaust (2001), it is not only that class is not the central focus but that there is considerable skepticism about the poetry's Northern working-class character. Byrne argues, for example, that 'Harrison's methods can lead to a kind of cod-northernness',[151] with reference to his acclaimed restoration of the Yorkshire character of *The Mysteries*.[152] Rowland observes that Byrne 'risks aligning her comments with the recent critical '"Harrison-bashing."'[153] However, Rowland concurs that 'A few "fucks" and the odd dropped "h" may indeed, at times, connote a paltry [uz] ...'[154] Rowland is sympathetic to Byrne's challenging of 'the perceived opposition of "working class" and "middle class"', and of North and South in the poetry.[155]

Rowland comments that 'One ideology that Harrison has flirted with throughout his work is significantly absent in the discussion of culture here: Marxism.'[156] Rowland also regards the focus upon class in the Bloodaxe anthology as arising from 'a bourgeois critical assumption' that working-class writers naturally write about proletarian oppression.[157] Harrison's poetry delivers a striking assertion of class-based politics that is dramatically at odds with the marginalization of class in much recent academic discourse. *Tony Harrison and the Holocaust*, like *H, v. & O*, tends to understate the class politics of the poetry and may represent a partial shift in the critical reception of a poet who has primarily drawn commentary from Left-leaning critics. David Kennedy argues that the causes of mourning in *v.* can now be seen to include the decline of class as a social and political concept.[158]

---

[151] *H, v. & O*, 50.
[152] Bernard O'Donoghue, '*The Mysteries*: T.W.'s Revenge', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 316-23, 316.
[153] *TH Holocaust*, 4.
[154] *TH Holocaust*, 4.
[155] *TH Holocaust*, 4.
[156] *TH Holocaust*, 250.
[157] *TH Holocaust*, 3- 4.
[158] David Kennedy, '"Past Never Found": Class, Dissent and the Contexts of Tony Harrison's *v.*', *English*, vol. 58, no. 221 (Summer 2009), 162-81, 165.

This study aims to show that class, in dialectical relationship with colonialism, humanism and republicanism is very important to the political character of the poetry.

Rowland's view in *Tony Harrison and the Holocaust* that the poetry does not authentically represent the working class also emerges from his interest in theories of the inability of the 'real' to speak through language, particularly the inability of language to represent the Holocaust.[159] Rowland brings certain Holocaust debates to Harrison studies and regards the sense of struggle for articulation in Harrison's poetry as evidence of a post-Holocaust aesthetic in relation to atrocity and to class. In *Holocaust Poetry: Awkward Poetics in the Work of Sylvia Plath, Geoffrey Hill, Tony Harrison and Ted Hughes* (2005) Rowland attributes metrical irregularities in *The School of Eloquence* solely to 'registering the impact of the Holocaust on contemporary culture.'[160] By Holocaust Rowland particularly refers to the Final Solution but also to Hiroshima and Nagasaki and a projected nuclear holocaust. However, Harrison's struggle for articulation in relation to atrocity extends to 'all those places where non-combatants were burned to death.'[161] His dramatization of atrocity's power to silence victims and witnesses stretches back at least to the ancient Greeks, and Greek tragedy particularly influences his aesthetic approach to atrocity. His dramatic use of the Greek mask, with its unflinchingly open eyes and mouth, is a symbol of the difficult need to keep on looking and speaking in the face of horror.

In presenting Holocaust as a major neglected theme of the non-dramatic poetry, Rowland particularly builds upon Rylance's observation that the history of war and the Cold War condition are as important to Harrison's perception of community as his 'other

---

[159] *TH Holocaust*, 13.
[160] Antony Rowland, *Holocaust Poetry: Awkward Poetics in the Work of Sylvia Plath, Geoffrey Hill, Tony Harrison and Ted Hughes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 11.
[161] Tony Harrison, 'Fire & Poetry', introduction to *Prometheus* (London: Faber, 1998), vii-xxix, xx.

great themes, the segregations of culture and class.'[162] Harrison's preoccupation with childhood memories of WWII has been widely recognized. Rowland explores references to WWII in *Loiners* but does not refer to the Nigerian-Biafran war (1967-70) and its genocide, which is a major preoccupation of *Loiners*, as is the Irish potato famine, for Harrison a sign of British misrule.

Scholarship on *Loiners*

Loiners received mixed reviews when it was first published in 1970 but Harrison was angered not by criticism but by the condescension of some reviewers.[163] However, in a letter to Alan Ross, the editor of London Magazine which published *Loiners*, he quoted the Irish poet Derek Mahon's review of *Loiners* 'as among the liveliest and most exciting to be published in Britain for some time.'[164] Harrison also kept a copy of a review by the English poet David Tipton who described *Loiners* 'as one of the most entertaining and serious books I've read for some time' and observed its iconoclastic wit and combination of colloquial and cosmopolitan language.[165] Tipton concluded that *Loiners* was such an outstanding first volume 'it would be hazardous to predict the directions the author may take.' Harrison wondered whether *Loiners*, whose preoccupations include 'the business of the loins,'[166] might be 'too dirty for them, or not good enough' to win any prizes.[167] In 1972 *Loiners* was awarded the prestigious Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize. Mrs Harrison's

---

[162] Rick Rylance, 'Doomsongs: Tony Harrison and War', in *TH: Loiner*, 137-60, 160. Quoted in *TH Holocaust*, 2.
[163] Letter to Alan Ross (7 March 1972).
[164] Derek Mahon in the *Dublin Fortnightly*, quoted in Letter to Alan Ross (8 September 1970). See also Peter Porter, 'In the Bosom of Family', *London Magazine*, new series, vol. 10, no. 5 (1970), 72-8, 74-6.
[165] David Tipton, *Twentieth Century*, copy in *THP*, uncatalogued and unnumbered.
[166] *THP*, uncatalogued and unnumbered.
[167] Letter to Alan Ross (7 March 1972).

local newspaper announced her son's award with the headline: '4-LETTER WORD POEMS WIN TONY £250 PRIZE.'[168]

In *The School of Eloquence* sonnet 'Bringing Up' Harrison, who avoided showing *Loiners* to his mam,[169] recalls her hurling the library copy into the purifying flames of the lounge room fire. The hanging line of 'Bringing Up' quotes his weeping mother's assessment, in iambic pentameter, of her poet-son:

But I still see you weeping, your hurt looks:

You weren't brought up to write such mucky books![170]

Harrison animatedly agrees: 'And I wasn't, I wasn't brought up to write such mucky books' but 'the lack of discussion about such topics as sex was one of the things I wanted to become a part of what I articulated when I cultivated the powers of the poet.'[171] The image in the sonnet of Mrs Harrison hurling *Loiners* into the flames also resonates with Baudelaire's poem 'Benediction', from *Flowers of Evil* which Harrison has read,[172] in which the Catholic mother longs to throw not just the book but her poet son, 'this misshapen mouse' 'into the flames.'[173]

Commentary about *Loiners* has usually centered on its concern with the politics of sexuality,[174] including in the contexts of colonialism[175] and the Cold War.[176] Anne Cluysenaar more widely observes that in *Loiners* sex is 'a fundamental test' of men's

---

[168] Letter to Alan Ross (undated postcard).
[169] 'Interview with Bragg.'
[170] 'Bringing Up', *CP*, 178.
[171] *Them & [uz]: A Portrait*, BBC.
[172] 'Interview', 232.
[173] Charles Baudelaire, 'Benediction', *Flowers of Evil*, trans. by James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993 [1857]), 11.
[174] *Poetry TH*, 21-42.
[175] *H, v. & O*, 8-12.
[176] Rylance, 'Doomsongs', 158-60; and *TH Holocaust*, 45-52.

attitudes to race, morality and mortality.[177] Huk comments that criticism of *Loiners* as 'uneven' because of its varied locations, voices and rhythms misrecognizes the complex polycentrism of the sequence,[178] and that this misrecognition is part of why *Loiners* has been less praised than the more accessible *The School of Eloquence*. Huk's reference to the '"Them & [uz]", two-way dynamics'[179] of *School* overlooks its underlying complexity but she is right to suggest that *Loiners* has received insufficient critical attention.

A recent essay by Colin Nicholson opens up some of the historical contexts through which scholarship may explain *Loiners*, particularly the neglected African poems, and it shares the most points of confluence with the examination of these poems in this study.[180] Nicholson's essay, like this thesis, examines the context in which Harrison was teaching in the former British colony of Nigeria and its impact upon his race politics and upon *Loiners* and *Aikin Mata*. Nicholson's study, like my own, explores the relevance of African anti-colonial literature and politics for *Loiners*. Nicholson discusses the parallels in *Loiners* between the third-world and an underclass in Leeds as a radically sympathetic response to Frantz Fanon's call for 'a world of reciprocal recognitions.'[181] This study discusses the common bond of exploitation between the Leeds working class and the Africans suggested in *Loiners* and also in *The School of Eloquence*, with reference to African anti-colonial literature and particularly to the *négritude* poet Aimé Césaire. Nicholson rightly observes that the poems render Fanon's vision of 'a terrifying future' for the colonizers in the last

---

[177] Anne Cluysenaar, *Stand*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1970), 73-4.
[178] Huk, 'The "Leeds Renaissance"', 80. Huk seems to be referring to Alan Young's comment about 'some unevenness' in *Loiners*. See Alan Young, 'Weeds and white roses: The poetry of Tony Harrison', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 167-173, 169.
[179] Huk, 'The "Leeds Renaissance"', 80.
[180] Nicholson '"Reciprocal recognitions"', 59-78. Nicholson's essay was published after the discussion of *Loiners* in this thesis had been written.
[181] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967 [1952]), 218. Quoted in Nicholson, '"Reciprocal Recognitions"', 61.

days of imperialism.[182] This study emphasizes the preoccupation in *Loiners* with the rise of neocolonialism and its characterization of multinational 'sharks' as the new conquistadors. Nicholson frames his essay with reference to how the radical English republican tradition finds continuance in Harrison's poetry, where it is often expressed 'as an impassioned dialectic between race, class and culture.'[183] Within the larger space of this dissertation there is a detailed examination of several influences upon Harrison's republicanism and how it encompasses his class and anti-colonial humanism in *Loiners*, *The School of Eloquence* and *v.*.

Scholarship on *The School of Eloquence*

Harrison's major ongoing sonnet sequence *The School of Eloquence* has progressively appeared in a variety of publications. It is the two most important publications of the sequence, *From 'The School of Eloquence' and Other Poems* (1978), and *Continuous: Fifty Sonnets from 'The School of Eloquence'* (1981) that are examined in this thesis, while later sonnets from the sequence are also referred to. Dunn comments that with the publication of *Continuous*, as well as the separately published *A Kumquat for John Keats* and *U.S. Martial* in the same year, wider critical recognition of Harrison's non-dramatic verse began to emerge. Before *Continuous* contemporaries with fewer publications had wider reputations.[184] Dunn wryly suggests that Harrison received less support than poets like Hughes, Heaney and Hill because his subject, class, is less palatable than religion and nature.[185] Ken Worpole also observes that Harrison's sonnets 'rarely gained access to the

---

[182] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965 [1961]), 27. Quoted in Nicholson, '"Reciprocal Recognitions"', 68.
[183] Nicholson, '"Reciprocal Recognitions"', 59.
[184] Douglas Dunn, 'Acute Accent', in *Bloodaxe* 1, 212-15, 212.
[185] Dunn, 'Acute Accent', 212.

metropolitan literary and cultural journals.'[186] Woodcock notes that 'it is significant that Harrison shares none of the Oxbridge connections of the New Establishment poets of the 1970s and 1980s.'[187] His reputation outside the theatre continued to be largely limited to a contemporary poetry readership and to the literary press until the publication of the *Selected Poems* in 1984. Dunn regards the prolonged critical exclusion of Harrison as 'a tactic which tries to prove that it is a big mistake for a poet to be aware of the political feeling that is in him.'[188]

It is difficult to separate the subjects of grief and class in *Continuous* but, Morrison observes, 'most reviewers' did just that by focusing upon the filial sonnets that first appeared in *Continuous*, rather than the politico-historical sonnets, and praising them for being 'moving.'[189] Alternately, Rylance comments that contemporary literary criticism tends to prefer the cerebral and to be uncomfortable with the emotional candor of Harrison's poetry.[190] It has tended 'to dismiss the sentient as sentimental.'[191] Joyce defined sentiment as emotion that is unearned and Dunn accordingly argues that Harrison's poetry, like Larkin's, is not sentimental, and that personal experience is the life-blood of lyricism.[192] O'Brien aptly observes that Harrison values sincerity over decorum.[193] It is also the case that a number of critics regarded the filial sonnets as exploitative of the private experiences of their subjects.[194] In this study Harrison's deeply felt and highly crafted bid

---

[186] Worpole, 'Scholarship Boy', 73.
[187] Woodcock, 'Classical vandalism', 51.
[188] Dunn, 'Acute Accent', 212-13.
[189] Morrison, 'The Filial Art', 55.
[190] Rick Rylance, 'On Not Being Milton', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 114-28, 116.
[191] Dunn, '"Importantly Live"', 254.
[192] Dunn, '"Importantly Live"', 254-55.
[193] O'Brien, 'Tony Harrison: *Showing the Working*', 56.
[194] Claude Rawson, 'Family Voices', *Times Literary Supplement* (4 January 1985), 10; Robert Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and its Discontents 1950-2000* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 131. Tom Leonard, 'On Reclaiming the Local', in *Reports from the Present: Selected Works1982-94* (London: Cape, 1995), 38.

for the heart is regarded as a humanist political weapon of poetic dissent against the British class system.

Scholarship on *v.*

Harrison's 'state of the nation' long poem *v.* was highly praised by literary critics after it was first published in the *London Review of Books* on the 24 January 1985,[195] and it was subsequently published in a variorum edition by Bloodaxe Books (1985). Richard Eyre's film of *v.* was first broadcast by Channel 4 on 4 November 1987, and 'it reintroduced poetry into public life in a way that has not happened for many years.'[196] Bringing *v.* to a mass audience was a significant cultural event that resulted in national controversy because of its alleged obscenity, especially its heavy use of aggressive slang. In the second edition of *v.* (1989) the poem was followed by a selection of the media and political reaction to it.[197] *v.* was savaged in the right-wing press as a 'torrent of four-letter filth.'[198] Questions were asked in the House of Commons about 'television obscenity' a month after the screening of *v.*.[199] Tory MPs expressed concern to the Independent Broadcasting Authority about their decision to broadcast it.[200] *v.* was defended by literary heavy-weights like Harold Pinter who identified calls for its censorship as 'philistine.'[201]

Eagleton and Dunn, both left-leaning, have different views about the politics of the poem that are indicative of the subsequent main critical schools of thought about *v.*. Dunn observes that '*v.* confronts head-on the subject of class.'[202] Eagleton regards the poem as

---

[195] *v.*, *London Review of Books*, vol. 7, no. 1 (24 January 1985), 12-13.
[196] Jonathon Barker, 'Peru, Leeds, Florida, and Keats', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 46-53, 52.
[197] *v.: New Edition with Press Articles (*Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1989).
[198] John Deans and Gary Jenkins, *Daily Mail* (12 October 1987), reprinted in *v.: New Edition*, 40.
[199] *v.: New Edition*, 66.
[200] *Why Did We Broadcast v.*? (IBA, 1988), extract reprinted in *v.: New Edition*, 73.
[201] Harold Pinter quoted by Geordie Greig, *Sunday Times* (18 October, 1987), reprinted in *v.: New Edition*, 51.
[202] 'Abrasive Encounters', 346.

ultimately a liberal evasion of the political.[203] One school of interpretation alleges that Harrison has abandoned a radical working-class critique in *v.*, and that he is more concerned with 'Tony Harrison' than cultural and political crises.[204] The second school regards *v.* as an ambitious cultural intervention into the politics of 1980s England.[205] Some commentary reflects both interpretative tendencies. Woodcock, for example, regards *v.* as a 'magnificent attempt to take on Thatcher's Britain', but as ultimately failing to be 'a badly needed "Mask of Anarchy" for the 1980s.'[206] Both schools of criticism tend to judge the poem according to its perceived politics. This study follows that scholarship which regards *v.* as a cultural response from a man of the left to the polemical contexts of its composition, but it partially revises that scholarship by arguing that Harrison is also engaged in a different political debate to his critics and in *v.* is looking at a different political class.

Harrison is generally understood as a singular presence in contemporary British poetry and his literary influences are usually seen to be classical and seventeenth century. Peter Forbes observes that Harrison could like William Blake 'be a complete one-off' because he is not part of any school and has few followers.[207] There have been efforts to see Harrison as a regional poet and his work has been discussed in the context of the post-war cultural decentralization in Britain.[208] He has been compared with Dunn and Seamus Heaney as

---

[203] Eagleton, 'Antagonisms', 350.
[204] Worpole, 'Scholarship Boy', 72-3; *TH Holocaust*, 283; Sandie Byrne, 'On Not Being Milton, Marvell, or Gray', in *TH: Loiner*, 57-83, 80-2.
[205] Neil Corcoran, *English Poetry since 1940* (London and New York: Longman, 1993), 162; John Lucas, 'Speaking For England', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 351-361, 351-3; *H, v. & O*, 69-70; Linden Peach, 'Them and Uz: Tony Harrison's Eloquence', in *Ancestral Lines: Culture & Identity in the Work of Six Contemporary Poets* (Bridgend: Seren, 1993), 111-133, 126.
[206] Woodcock, 'Classical vandalism', 59 and 62.
[207] Peter Forbes, 'In the Canon's Mouth: Tony Harrison and Twentieth-Century Poetry', in *TH: Loiner*, 189-199, 198.
[208] Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000 [1992]), 282-4; Raymond Hargreaves, 'Tony Harrison and the Poetry of Leeds', in *Poetry in the British Isles: Non-Metropolitan Perspectives*, ed. by Hans-Werner Ludwig and Lotar Fietz (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), 231-52; Claire Hélie, 'Private Voice and Public Discourse: A Poetics of Northern Dialect', in *Intimate*

writing 'consciously as "barbarians" from outside the traditional cultural centre.'[209] Dunn regards Harrison and Heaney as 'middle generation' poets who 'share a perception of how their voices are not those of the proprietorial language of the literature to which they have devoted themselves.'[210] Harrison's metaphor of a people's occupation for his poetic in 'Them & [uz], II'[211] resonates with Dunn's 'The Come On'[212] and 'Gardeners,'[213] and less aggressively Heaney 'walking, by God, all over the fine / Lawns of elocution.'[214] Harrison's underappreciated concern with cultural and political 'internal colonialism' in the United Kingdom and his internationalist anti-colonial poetic is examined in this study.

This thesis builds on the insights of Harrison studies and draws upon wider literary and historical scholarship. While Harrison's class political analysis is central to much of the discussion of his poetry, his concern with colonialism generates relatively little commentary in the received interpretations of the poetry. His humanism tends to be seen as at odds with his politics[215] but this study instead presents the radical political inclusiveness of his humanism. The dissertation examines the importance of his republicanism and the English republican literary lineage for the poetry, an occluded lineage that David Norbrook notes Harrison has excavated.[216] This study aims to identify new or underappreciated contexts within which to analyze the poetry. It places strong emphasis upon the critical

---

Exposure: Essays on the Public-Private Divide in English Poetry Since 1950, ed. by Emily Taylor Merriman and Adrian Grafe (London: McFarland & Co., 2010), 160-173.

[209] Simon Armitage and Robert Crawford, 'Introduction: The Democratic Voice', in *The Penguin Book of Poetry from Britain and Ireland Since 1945*, ed. by Simon Armitage & Robert Crawford (London: Viking, 1998), xix-xxxii, xxi.

[210] Douglas Dunn, 'Formal Strategies in Tony Harrison's Poetry', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 129-132, 129.

[211] 'Them & [uz], II', *CP*, 134.

[212] Douglas Dunn, 'The Come-On,' *Selected Poems 1964-1983* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 99-100.

[213] Douglas Dunn, 'Gardeners,' *Selected Poems, 1964-1983* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 105-6.

[214] Seamus Heaney, 'The Ministry of Fear,' *New Selected Poems 1966-1987* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 82-3.

[215] See for example O'Brien, 'Tony Harrison: *Showing the Working*', 63.

[216] David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics 1627 –1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 7.

importance of history to understanding the politics of the poems and Harrison's political character.

Chapter 2

Harrison's Loiners: 'The Leeds Quatrains'

The Loiners volume was first published by London Magazine in 1970. In the original publication Harrison divided *Loiners* into five related parts. Attention was drawn to this division on the contents page, the title pages that preceded each part, and in Harrison's own unpublished account of *Loiners*.[1] The division of *Loiners* is an important aspect of its form and meaning though it was dropped from *CP*, perhaps for ease in preparations for publication. The division of *Loiners* is based upon the different places in which the poem's protagonists are located and the distinct histories and cultures that these poems of place register. Part One contains five poems set in Leeds during WWII and the post-war period, which Harrison had intended to give the general title 'The Leeds Quatrains.'[2] Only the first poem, 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System', is in the strict quatrain form of four line stanzas with alternate rhymes. The poems mix learned and popular registers and dictions, and use aggressive slang liberally. *Loiners* uses various formal rhyme schemes but the meter is usually varied iambic pentameter. *Loiners* is written in what might be called Harrison's 'bastard high style.'

'Loiners' is local argot for the citizens of Leeds, in Yorkshire.[3] The different Parts of *Loiners* are linked by the travels of a loiner, a peripatetic protagonist broadly linked to the dramatic persona 'Tony Harrison.' The shifting locations in different Parts of the book mirror Harrison's wide-ranging travels in the 1960s from Leeds, Africa, Eastern Europe,

---

[1] *THP*, uncatalogued and unnumbered.
[2] Letter to Alan Ross (28 January 1967).
[3] Letter to Alan Ross (5 April 1968).

South America, and ending in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Part Two of *Loiners* contains four poems set in Africa mainly in the 1960s but also in earlier centuries. The seven poems in Part Three are set in Eastern Europe, North East England, Cuba and Brazil in the twentieth century, and in sixteenth century Spain. Part Four, 'Newcastle is Peru', and Part Five, 'Ghosts: Some Words before Breakfast', are set in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the 1960s. *Loiners* consists of eighteen poems but one, 'The White Queen', also contains further sequences of poems. Harrison explained to Alan Ross, the editor of London Magazine which published *Loiners* that 'The book moves obsessively in a circle from the North of England out into the world and back again.'[4]

The title of *Loiners* was intended to indicate that the poems in the collection are about 'loins in a general sense.'[5] Harrison has succinctly said that *Loiners* 'dealt with sex and history.'[6] It is concerned with 'the interrelation of … exploitations, empire, cruelties, with the business of the loins.'[7] The poems explore 'the realization that the nightmare of history is not only outside but inside under the bed, and enacted in the very forms our sexuality chooses to express itself.'[8] His perception that history is manifest in the forms our sexuality takes also suggests that conversely history can be read through sex. Different poems examine sex in different historical and ideological contexts but the focus on loins is most sustained and explicit in the African poems of Part Two. *Loiners* offers an historical contextualization of sexuality that yields an account of the human experience and the ideology of that history.

---

[4] *THP*, uncatalogued and unnumbered.
[5] Letter to Alan Ross (5 April 1968).
[6] 'Interview', 231.
[7] *THP*, uncatalogued and unnumbered.
[8] *THP*, uncatalogued and unnumbered.

The title of *Loiners*, the Leeds argot for its citizens, also announces the poetic worthiness of Harrison's native working-class city, which had not seemed 'to be the stuff that literature could be made of.'[9] *Loiners* begins Harrison's ambivalent poetic reclamation of the people and place from which he came. The photo of 'the author in native dress'[10] that appeared on the dust jacket of *Loiners* is a paratextual framing device that conveys the cultural and class specificity of the author and the poems inside the cover.[11] Harrison's 'native dress' in the photo is working-class denim and he is smoking, 'a sign of working-class identity and even solidarity (smoking is very much a class issue in the UK)', as Edith Hall notes of the old miner dying from his smoking addiction in *Prometheus*.[12] In the photo a youthful Harrison is standing on what is presumably a Leeds street-corner, leaning against a lamp-post with a disaffected expression. The photo is a classic portrait of an angry young working-class man. Harrison provided the photo to his publisher during preparations for publication of *Loiners*.[13] Harrison's choice of photo and identification of his 'native dress' intends to convey that the poet and his poetry are culturally Northern and working-class. He has said that 'I wanted to do it, make things that were classically formed, but in my own voice.'[14] Harrison is self-conscious about wanting his work to defy the cultural piracy of the canon of 'English' literature by 'them', the metropolitan ruling-class educational establishment.[15] His poetry is defiantly Northern working-class in its content and idioms while using high literary forms.

---

[9] 'Conversation', 39.
[10] Letter to Alan Ross (30 December 1969).
[11] For a theoretical account of how paratextual devices mediate interpretation of texts see Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* , trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1997).
[12] Edith Hall, 'Tony Harrison's *Prometheus*', *Arion*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2002), 129-40, 131.
[13] Letter to Alan Ross (30 December 1969).
[14] 'Conversation', 40.
[15] *Them & [uz]: A Portrait of Tony Harrison*, *Arena*, BBC TV, 15 April, 1985.

Naming *Loiners* after the citizens of Leeds was inspired by James Joyce naming his collection of stories *Dubliners* after the citizens of Dublin. Joyce was a major author in Harrison's canon of admired writers.[16] He was 'very impressed with Joyce's *Dubliners*. And I began writing stories about Leeds; they were a little like imitations of Joyce's *Dubliners*.'[17] Like the stories in *Dubliners*, the poems in Part One of *Loiners* are about ordinary people and unremarkable experiences. Harrison was determined to bring the life of the city and Joycean and dramatic influences to bear on his poetry about the North.[18] 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System', 'Newcastle is Peru' and 'Ghosts: Some Words before Breakfast' present Leeds and Newcastle-upon-Tyne as colonial cities, presided over by statues of the 'Empress, Queen' Victoria, which resonates with Joyce's vision of Dublin as a colonial city.

Harrison's egalitarian republicanism is also signaled by his definition of loiners as 'citizens of Leeds, *citizens* who bear their loins alone through the terrors of life, "loners."'[19] The emphasis on loiner's citizenship, on 'one's role as a citizen of Leeds and the world',[20] suggests the right and responsibility of the common people to be concerned with local and international public affairs, to have a voice in public life and be enabled to exercise political agency. The title also plays upon the individual and collective dimensions of the poems through the 'I' in the communal lo(i)ners. Communal experience is often explored through the dramatic persona 'Tony Harrison'. He is a loner but as a poet of Leeds he is a loiner. The title connects the personal and the political, one of the preoccupations of the poems in *Loiners*.

---

[16] Desmond Graham, 'The Best Poet of 1961', in *TH: Loiner*, 29-41, 32.
[17] 'Conversation', 40.
[18] 'Conversation', 40.
[19] 'Inkwell', 34.
[20] *THP*, uncatalogued and unnumbered.

The first edition of *Loiners* had two epigraphs which together signified that the poet has been produced by the culture of Leeds, and that Leeds, the North and Britain have been produced by the political and military history of colonialism:

There was a young man of Leeds
Who swallowed a packet of seeds.
A pure white rose grew out of his nose
And his arse was covered with weeds.

Traditional

inventa Britannia et subacta

Tacitus, *Agricola*[21]

The combined epigraphs also signal the relationship between verse and history, and popular and learned culture in the poems. The first epigraph, an anonymous quatrain about Leeds, is a traditional limerick. The pure rose of poetry blooms incongruously from a man whose 'arse was covered in weeds.' The epigraph signals the hybridity of high and low culture in the poetry most Leeds' lads would regard as 'cissy.'[22] The organic metaphor most importantly shows Harrison's poetry growing from Leeds soil. His native roots are reaffirmed in *v.* where, back in Leeds again, he tells us his poetry grows from 'SHIT.'[23]

The white rose has a number of associations that Harrison activates. Formerly a royal dynastic emblem of the House of York and the House of Stuart, it is the floral emblem of Yorkshire. Harrison transplants the emblem in his poetry. He remembers playing cricket 'with white roses cut from flour-sacks on our caps' in *v.*.[24] The white rose is used in the logo of Leeds United Football Club, whose fans desecrate the graveyard in *v.*. His dad places roses on the family grave in *v.*.[25] The white rose is emphatically a symbol of

---

[21] *Loiners*, 7.
[22] 'Me Tarzan', *CP*, 126.
[23] *v.*, *CP*, 279.
[24] *CP*, 276.
[25] *CP*, 264.

Harrison's native culture. From *Loiners* to *v.* it becomes a sign of the poet's native cultural nationalism. The royal rose is now associated with indigenous Northern culture and grafted onto Harrison's republican poetics. It is the flower of loiners.

The second epigraph to the *Loiners* volume recalls the subjugation of the native peoples of Britain by the Roman Empire. The Latin epigraph is taken from the Roman historian Tacitus's biography of *Agricola*. Agricola was a Governor of Roman Britain who expanded the Empire to the furthest Northern point of the known world. The epigraph '*inventa Britannia et subacta*' ['We have both discovered and subdued Britain'], is from Agricola's address to his soldiers before battle with the Caledonians (the Scots).[26] Agricola recalls victories against Rome's enemies, most appositely here the Brigantes, a Celtic tribe who had controlled most of Northern England. The Roman battle against the 'Brigantes, the British / guerrillas',[27] is also imagined in 'The Excursion', whose immediate setting is Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The reference to Hadrian's Wall and contemporary British soldiers moving, like the Romans, from Northern England to Scotland, recalls that boundaries laid by Rome are still reflected in the political geography of Britain. In the poem military and other forms of dominance still characterize the ancient divide between North and South. The North is still part of the British 'empire we can't get away from.'[28] A prophecy of revolution in Seneca's *Medea*, in which Thule, the North, overcomes its marginalization in the empire is alluded to in an epigraph to 'Newcastle is Peru.' The epigraph from *Agricola* at the start of *Loiners*, the epigraph from Seneca's *Medea*, and the classical allusion in 'The Excursion' signpost Harrison's vision of Northern England as a defeated colonial region.

---

[26] Cornelius Tacitus, *Agricola*, trans. by William Peterson, in *Agricola, Germania, Dialogus*, trans. by William Peterson and Maurice Hutton, rev. edn (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970 [1914]), 87.
[27] 'The Excursion', *Loiners*, 72.
[28] *Loiners*, 71.

The epigraph from *Agricola* is the first sign of Harrison's conception of Britain as an empire whose unity, he believes, still derives from the cultural and economic oppression of the regions by London. Harrison reminds us that Britain began with Rome's military imposition of one nation and language on culturally diverse tribes. The Roman's view of the natives as barbarians, as well as the Ancient Greek's definition of non-Greek speakers as barbarians, is a source for the subversive identification of contemporary Northerners as barbarians in *The School of Eloquence* sonnets.[29] The epigraph from *Agricola* is also relevant to the African poems in *Loiners* because it hints at a parallel between the history of native Britons being subjugated by Rome and the colonization, centuries later, of African countries by the British Empire. Further, the independence from the British Empire achieved by African countries in the 1960s is implicitly contrasted, in the collection as a whole, to the continuing subjugation of the North by the British state.

The preoccupation with internal colonialism and class in Harrison's poetry about Leeds and Northern England, in *Loiners* and *The School of Eloquence*, begins with the first poem in *Loiners*, 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System.' The first of 'the Leeds Quatrains' 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System' is an important yet little discussed narrative poem about Leeds, which is also usefully read with reference to the Leeds sonnets in *The School of Eloquence*. 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican system', and the more complex *School* sonnet 'On Not Being Milton', are the leading poems in their respective books, and their respective sections of *Selected Poems* and *Collected Poems*. This prominent placement reinforces the sense that these are significant poems introducing central preoccupations of the books.

[29] 'Them & [uz], I', *CP*, 133; 'The Rhubarbarians , I', *CP*, 123; and 'Classics Society', *CP*, 130.

Thomas Campey was a loiner, a figure from Harrison's childhood who scavenged and sold books. Harrison has a personal bookplate of Thomas Campey.[30] Harrison has said that he thought Campey carried the weight of English culture on his back.[31] In the poem 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System' Campey survives the anarchic winds of *laissez-faire* in the industrial city of Leeds by dragging books to market with his bad back.[32] Harrison has drawn attention to the Campey bookplate by giving permission for it to be reproduced in the *Bloodaxe Critical Anthologies 1: Tony Harrison*,[33] and by discussing its significance in interview:

> While the reader is enjoying the sentiment of the achieved literary poem he should be reminded, at the very same moment, that there is a cost to pay, and that it is probably someone other than the reader who has paid that cost. The first poem in *The Loiners* is about a man named Thomas Campey, who – without partaking of this culture – dragged books to market with his bad back, and enabled me to equip myself with a 'gentleman's' library. In all my books I now have a bookplate with a drawing of this man – Thomas Campey, with his 'warped spine', this man from whom I bought my books – and that's exactly the kind of reminder that is in my poetry.[34]

The long dead Thomas is a specter Harrison's poetry materializes.

At the bottom of the Campey bookplate is 'TONY HARRISON' in capital letters, as if he is carrying the man who once carried his books. Harrison's name on the bookplate is consistent with its prominence on the covers and spines of his work, and with the affirmation of 'my *name*' in 'Them & [uz], II.'[35] Above the sketch of Campey the bookplate also has a line of verse from the poem: 'And every pound of this dead weight is pain / to Thomas Campey (Books) ...'. The bookplate and poem are conjoined visual and verbal reminders of the underbelly of cultural privilege. The Campey icon is an important

---

[30] 'Interview', 233.
[31] *Tony Harrison: Poets and People*, a Freeway Films Production for Channel 4 (1984).
[32] Letter to Alan Ross (1 February 1970).
[33] In the Acknowledgements in *Bloodaxe 1* its editor Neil Astley writes that the frontispiece drawing of Thomas Campey is from Tony Harrison's own bookplate.
[34] 'Interview', 233
[35] 'Them & [uz], II', *CP*, 134.

paratextual component of Harrison's poetry and prefigures the succession of 'worn out' working-class men in *The School of Eloquence*, like the old busker in 'Punchline' and the pensioners in 'Painkillers', who are figured as a series of paternal ghosts.

Like Harrison's dad, Campey wears the flat cap, an icon of his class, generation and region. In *The School of Eloquence* sonnet 'Turns' the scholar son dons '*your dad's cap*': 'I thought it made me look more "working class."'[36] This self deception is bitterly mocked as Harrison observes he has turned, treacherously, into a busker for 'the class that broke him for the pence.' Nonetheless, Harrison wore the flat cap in his portrait for the National Portrait Gallery in London in 1999, a sartorial code expressing allegiance to his place and class of origin.[37] In the portrait Harrison also has a very pronounced gleam of light from the camera in his right eye. The portrait, perhaps inadvertently, reproduces 'the gleam, the light' in his father's 'blind right eye' in one of two family photographs taken by Harrison and described in 'Background Material.'[38] In this sonnet the accidental light in the photo contains a minute reflection of the son photographing his father, and similarly the photo of his mother has a shadow in which her son is reflected. Although the accidental light and shadows would 'mar each shot' for a professional photographer, to the poet his reflection in photos of his parents becomes a symbol of their mnemonic imprint upon his mind. In the official portrait of Harrison the light in his eye may be an intentional 'marring' of the photo by a professional photographer in order to invite interpretation of it through the lens of 'Background Material', and to see the light in Harrison's eye as signifying the metaphorical ghost of his father.

---

[36] 'Turns', *CP*, 162.
[37] 'Hats and head-attire', portrait of Tony Harrison by Mark Gerson ©, National Portrait Gallery, London.
[38] 'Background Material', *CP*, 185.

'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System' is the first poem born of Harrison's realization that the world he came from was a worthy subject for poetry. The trope of Campey's 'warped spine'[39] recalls the 'gilt-worked spine'[40] of the books he carries. Campey has a story worth telling, and is worthy of inclusion in the literary culture from which he has been excluded. Similarly, Harrison makes his dad, 'the baker's man', a compelling poetic subject in *The School of Eloquence* sonnet 'A Good Read.'[41] Campey's spine has been warped by back-breaking labour. The rhyme in the second last quatrain on 'back' / 'crack' suggests that the weight of the books,[42] and metaphorically the cultural and material exclusion of the man who carries them, will crack Campey's back and his hopes. By the time Britain's welfare state was established Campey was an ailing old man without a pension, discarded like the junk on the 'heavy handcart' 'He drags for life.'[43] Thomas's veins are 'like fused / and knotted flex.' Because flex is electric cable it reminds us that Campey with his handcart does not have electricity, or a car, standard material features of modernity. Campey's confused reference to Copernicus' heliocentric theory indicates that he could not read the books he carted for the benefit of the educated. Harrison considers Campey's pre-modern condition alongside Copernicanism and the Enlightenment it was part of. The Enlightenment forecast of human progress through reason and education has failed Campey and the working class he represents in the poem.

Campey's spine has also been bowed by *tabes dorsalis*, or syphilitic spinal sclerosis. Campey's syphilitic bow is inadvertently mimetic of his subservient social position, metaphorically associating the disease with oppression. Campey's disease-riddled body is

---

[39] 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System', *Loiners*, 12.
[40] *Loiners*, 11.
[41] 'A Good Read', *CP*, 152.
[42] *Loiners*, 12.
[43] *Loiners*, 11.

a symbol for class-ridden England. The poem examines the British class system in the context of the decaying British Empire, and begins the trope of syphilis for Empire that runs through *Loiners*. *Tabes* is Latin for decay and *tabes dorsalis* is a tertiary syphilis. The poem suggests England is a society in a terminal state of decay and the prognosis for the British Empire is also terminal.

The real Thomas Campey kept books on the decline of empire and the collapse of civilizations, as he does in the poem: Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; Theodore Mommsen's *The History of Rome*; and Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*. Campey used to talk to the young Harrison and said that he thought England had been a great nation but had gone into decline after WWI.[44] The poem suggests that the declining British Empire still treats the North as an internal colony in the post WWII period. Leeds in 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System', and Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 'Newcastle is Peru' and 'Ghosts: Some Words before Breakfast', are presented as cities still defined by the imperialist outlook, landscape and economy of the faded British Empire. The imperial character of Victoria's domestic reign is emphasized in the political topography of the North in *Loiners*.

Three statues of Queen Victoria in the Northern poems of *Loiners* symbolize the British class system she represents and the empire that doubled during her reign (1837-1901). A statue of Queen Victoria, located near Leeds Grammar, represents 'that Imperial Host' in 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System.'[45] There is a statue of the 'Empress, Queen' in the grounds of the Royal Victoria Infirmary in 'Ghosts.'[46] 'Ghosts' also features a statue

---

[44] *Harrison: Poets and People*, Channel 4.
[45] *Loiners*, 12.
[46] 'Ghosts: Some Words before Breakfast', *Loiners*, 91.

of the 'Tynemouth Queen' 'on her seawind-eroded throne.'[47] 'Newcastle is Peru' refers to the seventeenth century Royalist domination of the North and reproduces the royalist motto that is still on the city's Coat of Arms.[48] *The School of Eloquence* sonnet 'The Queen's English' is also about how the class-based psychological power of royalist landmarks like the Queen's Hotel in Leeds, 'that grandish pile of swank', and 'the Queen's English' or Received Pronunciation, psychologically intimidate Harrison's father and his class.[49]

Harrison also humorously describes his encounter with a statue of Victoria when, as a Leeds Grammar schoolboy, he escapes a physical education class:

> I ducked behind the pedestal of a huge Queen Victoria for a furtive drag. At her draped feet Africa and India did obeisance, the very stone kow-towed, and I, exhausted and bent double, was more or less slumped in a like posture of devotion.[50]

He ironically laments the melting of statues of Victoria into *chapatti* pans, upon independence in India, when they could have been 'sent back home to congest our parks.'[51] He 'felt only triumph as the Empire fell to pieces.'[52] The prose adds an explicit and humorous angle to the poem's far more complex and serious articulation of political resentment at an unwelcome imperial presence in the North, symbolized by the statue of Victoria.

The existential power of 'Queen Victoria's ghost' is evoked by Harrison in his unpublished account of *Loiners*:

> Each *Loiner* exists in the environment brooded over by Thomas Campey's Victoria Regina, which drives the expatriates of Part Two to the wider spaces of Africa, where, nevertheless, Queen Victoria's ghost also stalks the savannah and the coast.[53]

---

[47] *Loiners*, 95.
[48] 'Newcastle is Peru', *Loiners*, 81.
[49] 'The Queen's English', *CP*, 147.
[50] Tony Harrison, 'Black and white and red all over: the fiction of Empire', *London Magazine*, new series, vol. 12, no. 3 (August/September 1972), 90-103, 93.
[51] 'Fiction of Empire', 94.
[52] 'Fiction of Empire', 94.
[53] *THP*, uncatalogued and unnumbered.

That Queen Victoria's ghost still walks at home and abroad suggests the materially diminished empire's continuing hegemony, in Raymond Williams's sense of a way of seeing the world and the concepts and assumptions which legitimize power. The 'dominant ideas which in fact express the needs of a dominant class'[54] are suggested by the down-trodden Campey's regret at the decline of the 'great' British Empire. Campey's veneration of the leader of the empire that oppresses him is satirized in 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System', in which he has ardent fantasies of a God-like Victoria.[55] The poem suggests the modern role of the royal family and religion in maintaining the popular consensus required in democracies like Britain's. It is only in death that Campey and the working class he represents will find 'leisure of the simplest kind.'[56] The poem suggests that the system Victoria represents killed Campey through hard labour, a system of class and colonial exploitation characterized as deadly through the trope of syphilis.

An iconoclastic conceit of the poem is that Campey contracted *tabes dorsalis* from the syphilitic puritanical Queen, and this is suggested through narrative and metaphor. In Campey's fantasies God has cross-dressed as Victoria, perhaps also humorously suggest the mental decline associated with *tabes dorsalis*. Thomas Campey dragging 'painfully collected waste' to survive, 'often dreams' of a transcendent death:

> Of angels in white crinolines all dressed
> To kill, of God as Queen Victoria who grabs
> Him by the scruff and shoves his body pressed
> Quite straight again under St Anne's slabs.[57]

---

[54] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983 [1976]), 145.
[55] *Loiners*, 11.
[56] *Loiners*, 12.
[57] *Loiners*, 11.

The God-like Queen transports Thomas to St Anne's grave slab. Victoria and the angels are there 'To kill.' The Queen has given poor Campey terminal syphilis. '*Angina -a, Angina Pectoris*'[58] brought on by the excitement of Victoria and the angel's visitation may have finished him off. The conceit is consistent with Harrison's comment that Queen Victoria 'haunted and killed Thomas Campey in the first poem of the book.'[59] In *Loiners* predatory sex and syphilis are (historically germane) tropes for colonialism. An implicit conceit of *Loiners* is that Victoria colonized countries, from the North to Africa, by sexually transmitting the 'disease' of empire.

The highly allusive scatological last quatrain of 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System' images the Empress 'squat' upon her 'thrones' as if defecating and urinating upon her Northern territories and subjects. The imperial 'thrones' Victoria squats upon 'literally base the city's wealth in its mills on colonialist trade.'[60] Victoria's throne is 'Swathed in luminous smokes like factories', and set against 'a dark, Leeds sky.'[61] The poem invites comparison of Leeds with the 'dark Satanic mills' of Blake's 'Preface' to *Milton*.[62] The modern industrial landscape of Leeds was once made up of cotton mills and Leeds like Manchester was a major site of the textile industry. The exploitation of the Northern industrial working class who worked in the mills and the colonial trade are different dimensions of the same empire. The history Harrison evokes in this poem and elsewhere, as in *The School of Eloquence* sonnet 'Working',[63] points to the exploitation of the

---

[58] *Loiners*, 12.
[59] *THP*, uncatalogued and unnumbered.
[60] *Permanently Bard*, 126.
[61] *Loiners*, 12.
[62] William Blake, 'Preface' to *Milton*, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman, commentary by Harold Bloom, newly rev. edn (Berkley: University of California Press, 1982 [1965]), l. 8, 95.
[63] 'Working', *CP*, 135.

domestic proletariat and the spread of syphilis and exposes the hypocrisy of Victorian morality.

The elevated statue of Victoria 'Most High' in the closing quatrains is a site of homage to empire: 'Leeds! Offer thanks to that Imperial Host.' Leeds's subservience to its long dead Empress is rendered with bitter irony but it also symbolizes the continuing power of the system she represents. Victoria's 'squatting' puns upon illegal occupation, a prosecutable offence when carried out by the homeless, and mocks the once standard discursive glorification of the Empire's forcible occupation of vast territories. The poem suggests that 'Britain' designates not a nation but the Southern-based ruling class, for whom Victoria is also a figurehead. The Crown enriched itself, and the class that attends fee paying schools like Leeds Grammar, by plundering the North's resources.

The final quatrain of 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System' contains an allusion to Milton's great republican damnation of monarchy. Queen Victoria is depicted squatting over the dark industrial landscape of Leeds:

> Leeds! Offer thanks to that Imperial Host,
> Squat on its thrones of Ormus and of Ind,
> For bringing Thomas from his world of dust
> To dust, and leisure of the simplest kind.[64]

The stanza clearly alludes to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book II, lines 1 – 6:

> High on a throne of royal state, which far
> Outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind,
> Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
> Showers on her kings barbaric pearl and gold,
> Satan exalted sat, by merit raised
> To that bad eminence.[65]

---

[64] *Loiners*, 12.

[65] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, *The Poems of John Milton*, ed. by John Carey and Alastair Fowler (Harlow: Longman, 1968), Book II, ll. 1– 6, 508-09. See now also Nicholson, '"Reciprocal recognitions"', 62.

The poem demonizes Victorian imperialism as satanic and Harrison associates his own hostility to the monarchy with England's great republican poet.

There is a further allusion to *Paradise Lost* in 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System' that evokes the merged power of state and capital. The deified Crown is surrounded by armed angels swathed in factory smoke: 'These angels serried in a dark, Leeds sky.'[66] This line alludes to *Paradise Lost*, Book I, line 548, where Milton describes the warring angels with their 'serried shields in thick array.'[67] 'Serried' is a military term and by using it Harrison evokes the might of the state, for which Queen Victoria is a figurehead in this poem:

> And round Victoria Regina the Most High
> Swathed in luminous smokes like factories,
> These angels serried in a dark, Leeds sky
> Chanting *Angina -a, Angina Pectoris*.[68]

The poem's depiction of Victoria Regina replete with angels makes her, like Milton's Satan, a monarchical figure with god-like pretensions.

The poem which follows 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System' in *Loiners* is 'Ginger's Friday.' Joyce's *Dubliners* is an inspiration for Harrison's *Loiners* and this collection about Leeds people and colonialism also contains a poem on an Irish Catholic. 'Ginger's Friday', as its title signals, is about a day in the life of its eponymous young protagonist Ginger, who has taken the day off school. Ginger's birth name is John Kelly, a typically Irish name, and his nickname derives from the fair red or 'ginger' hair typical of the Irish. The title also ominously puns upon the Christian Good Friday, the anniversary of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and intimates Ginger's victimization. The industrial

---

[66] *Loiners*, 12.
[67] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book I, l. 548, 494.
[68] *Loiners*, 12.

character of Leeds is established in the first lines by a reference to a local fruit-processing factory, and the poem begins with Ginger's visit to the Catholic Church to make his confession: 'Strawberries being bubbled in great vats / At *Sunny Sunglow's* wafted down the aisle.'[69] The industrial processing of strawberries, whose color is the same as the boy's strawberry-blonde hair, metonymically invites us to imagine the working-class Ginger's likely future as factory fodder.

The poem's representation of the persecution of an innocent child exposes the religious bigotries and taboos present in a particular church and ethnic and class community. Ginger confesses to the priest he 'could not see' 'through the slats': 'Grateful, anonymous, he catalogued his sin', which includes masturbating while secretly watching his neighbour 'Mrs Daley, all-bare on her knees,' fellate her husband. The priest says: '*Remember me to Mrs Kelly, John.*' Ginger's confession has not been anonymous and the priest knows his mother. In the last lines of the poem it is clear that the priest has betrayed the sacrament of confession and told the Kellys Ginger's sins. After loitering in the park, until he is frightened and tempted by shell-shocked returned soldiers, 'bad men with their luring spice and shell- / shocked feelers', he runs home shouting his prayers only to find his father and Mr Daley cracking their 'broad, black belts.' Ginger is imaged as if in 'Hell.' 'He smelt / That burning rubber and burnt bacon smell.'[70] The colloquialism of 'burnt bacon' for being in trouble suggests Ginger is going to the slaughter like a pig but also recalls the sacrifice of the lamb of Christ on Good Friday.

The published poem centres on the depiction of Irish Catholic taboos, and its emphasis upon the treachery of the priest reflects Harrison's anti-clerical sentiment. A manuscript

---

[69] 'Ginger's Friday', *Loiners*, 13.
[70] *Loiners*, 13.

version of 'Ginger's Friday' contains a dropped stanza which makes explicit the poem's concern with the divided Irish diaspora settled in Maude Place, in the working-class suburb of Beeston where Harrison grew up. The cut stanza depicts the continuation of religious conflict between Catholic and Protestant Irish, as Rowland has observed.[71] However, the cut stanza also satirizes the local population's bigotries against outsiders from Jews to blacks to Irish, which co-exist with traditional working-class hostility to the Tories. Ginger is depicted as running a gauntlet of racial abuse. The Catholic Irish in Leeds are pariah figures identified with the Jews:

> The potato-famine Irish of Maude Place
> Kept up their church connections through their kids.
> Gangs yelled: 'ail Mary, wash yer mucky face!
> Or, Down wi' Catlicks! Down wi' Yids!
> Down wi' Conservatives and Down wi' Blacks!'
> As Ginger ran the gauntlet down the street.
> They'd send the Jews to Dublin on your backs,
> Swimming with four wogs tied to your feet.[72]

The activity of the IRA and the Troubles as well as popular anti-Catholicism might explain why the Leeds mob wants Ginger as a sacrifice.

Harrison may have cut the stanza because in it the oppressors are the working-class of Leeds, who are anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic and hate Blacks and Irish. Its depiction of the bigotries of the local population is at odds with the otherwise humorously sympathetic or compassionate portrayal of working-class loiners in Part One. White working-class hatred for Jews and Blacks in the cut stanza does though anticipate the hatred for 'Yids' and 'Niggers' by the Leeds skinhead in *v.*.[73] The cut stanza, as Rowland observes, very clearly shows Harrison's 'determination to join together various victims of religious, racial and

---

[71] *TH Holocaust*, 52.
[72] Northern Arts Ms. Collection Vol. 6, 'Tony Harrison', Literary and Philosophical Society, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Quoted in *TH Holocaust*, 52.
[73] *v.*, *CP*, 269.

political ideologies.'[74] The cut stanza does show the politics of the poem since it is particularly concerned with the working-class Irish diaspora's historical origins and fate - the continuing victimhood of those Catholic Irish who escaped the Great Hunger in 'the coffinships': 'The potato-famine Irish of Maude Place.'

Ginger, the Kelly family and their brawling neighbours show the influence of Joyce. Harrison said Joyce's work is important to him. In Joyce's 'The Dead', the last story in *Dubliners*, and in *Ulysses* the potato-famine is a sign of British misrule. The potato-famine is also a sign of British misrule in 'Ginger's Friday.' In 'The Dead' the feast held to celebrate Christmas continues 'the tradition of genuine warm-hearted courteous Irish hospitality, which our forefather's have handed down to us.'[75] An implicit irony of the story is that the Irish known for their hospitality starved to death in their millions in their own country during the Great Hunger. The Irish forefathers who fell during the Great Hunger are especially and implicitly figured among the 'vast hosts of the dead' that fall like snow in the last lines of 'The Dead.'[76] In a less reverent tone than Joyce, 'Ginger's Friday' also raises the memory of the 'potato-famine Irish' through their descendants, now settled in Maude Place.

The allusion to the potato famine as a sign of British misrule in 'Ginger's Friday' might also recall Joyce's *Ulysses*. In *Ulysses* the Citizen, based on the one-eyed Cyclops of Homer's *Ulysses*, is a stereotype of a myopic, bigoted nationalist. The Citizen says that the British Sassenach had a policy of mass starvation, continuing to export crops and livestock

---

[74] *TH Holocaust*, 52.
[75] James Joyce, 'The Dead', in *Dubliners: an illustrated edition with annotations*, ed. by John Wyse Jackson and Bernard McGinley (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 181.
[76] Joyce, *Dubliners*, 198.

from Ireland during the famine.[77] Harrison follows a poem about Queen Victoria's satanic presence in the North with a poem referring to the Irish potato famine. Harrison's intertextual association of Victoria with the potato famine agrees with the Citizen's view, who at this point seems to be a mouthpiece for Joyce. Harrison presents the Great Hunger, as Joyce does, that is, as a horrific chapter in the history of the British Empire. The historian A.J.P. Taylor controversially compared the impact of the potato famine, in which nearly two million Irish died in five years, to the Jewish holocaust[78] and 'Ginger's Friday' along with 'Allotments' and 'The Pocket Wars of Peanuts Joe' are instances of Harrison's concern with the history of holocaust, as Rowland observes.[79] The first two poems in *Loiners*, therefore, explicitly focus on a dark 'satanic' empire. The first poem focuses on the consequences of the empire for Northern England and the second poem focuses on its consequences for one of the islands in the British archipelago. The vision of Victoria as Satan in 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System' casts the shadow of her empire over 'the potato famine Irish' in 'Ginger's Friday.'

The poem which follows 'Ginger's Friday' is 'The Pocket Wars of Peanuts Joe', which examines the impacts of WWII and genocide upon a loiner's sexual psychology. Like 'Ginger's Friday', 'The Pocket Wars of Peanuts Joe' depicts the general atmosphere of sexual repression in respectable working-class Leeds in the war and postwar period, and the religious policing of sexuality. Like 'Ginger's Friday', it recalls adolescent onanism and religious taboos like 'The vicar's bogey against wankers' doom.'[80] In the first stanza there is rhyme on 'doom' / 'Home.' This is a full rhyme only when spoken in the Leeds

---

[77] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. by Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior (New York: Garland, 1984), 709-11.
[78] A.J.P. Taylor, 'Genocide', in *Essays in English History* (London: Hamilton, 1976), 73-79, 73.
[79] *TH Holocaust*, 45-53.
[80] 'The Pocket Wars of Peanuts Joe', *Loiners*, 14.

vernacular and it is an early instance of the regional character of some of Harrison's rhymes. The title of this punning poem, 'The Pocket Wars of Peanuts Joe', refers to a social misfit the local children dubbed 'Peanuts Joe' because he is 'peanuts' or crazy. 'Pocket wars' puns upon Joe's habit of indiscreet masturbation, and introduces the character's and the poem's association of male sexuality with militarism.

The first line of the poem tells us that the children also call Jo 'pea-nuts' as a code for the forbidden word 'penis': 'The *-nuts* bit really *-nis*.' The respectable adults of Leeds make Jo a scapegoat for petty crimes. He is 'A masturbator they made bear the blame' for offensive war-time graffiti like swastikas. 'The gormless one',[81] Jo lacks social sense but he is harmless enough. He masturbates while illicitly watching lovers, but his big mistake is to publicly salute VD Day celebrations with his penis: 'crowds saw the cock / That could gush Hiroshimas start to shrink.' Jo imagines that his penis is military hardware and semen the ammunition, and before his suicide he 'Bequeathed his gonads to the Pentagon.' 'Poor Penis' had not done military service but his imaginative landscape perversely mirrors the war and the poem uses his almost theatrical crudity to caricature and expose the pervasive cultural inscription of militarism on the phallus.

The last of the five poems in Part One of the original edition of *Loiners* is 'A Proper Caution', a title which idiomatically signifies 'a bit of a lad' who is mildly badly behaved, and it is also interested in the sexuality of loiners. This one stanza poem is much lighter in its tone than the other poems of Part One and has a cartoon-like quality but it lends dignity to the common man and to Harrison's loiners, and draws its allusions from the famous Yorkshire and crypto- republican poet Andrew Marvell. The poem has an English sea-side setting and a 'fat man', 'Red-conked and ludicrous, but still a man', instinctively

[81] *Loiners*, 15.

comprehending passion as more than 'cuddlesome and cute' commercialized romance, throws proper caution to the wind and runs along the seashore with his lover.[82] This loiner responds to his mortality with *carpe diem* 'seize the day' argument, and takes his lover with him. The poem alludes to Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress', where Marvell's narrator is urging his mistress to hasten to amorous sport. In the last line of 'A Proper Caution' Harrison's loiner, like Marvell's lover, urges active lovemaking. Marvell's lovers cannot make the sun stand still, 'yet we will make him run.'[83] The loiner cannot stop death but does run after life. He 'Shouts' 'To death and darkness: *Stop!* to prove they ran.'[84] A rhyme on 'man' / 'ran' emphasizes the urgent pursuit of private pleasures in response to the speed of 'Time's winged chariot'[85] and the nearness of death. In Harrison's later poem 'Deathwatch Danceathon' Marvell's seduction argument in 'To His Coy Mistress' is summarized as 'we're soon dead, / my sweetest darling, come to bed!'[86]

Harrison recognizes Marvell as a fellow Yorkshire poet and has observed the dark Yorkshire humor of 'To His Coy Mistress', which is also reportedly one of his favorite poems to recite at dinner parties.[87] Marvell alludes to his Yorkshire origins in the poem, whose speaker resides in Hull: 'I by the tide / Of Humber would complain.'[88] The echoing of Marvell's poem in 'A Proper Caution' is appropriate for the Northern character of Part One of *Loiners*. Marvell is also a significant model for Harrison's wider aesthetic of

---

[82] 'A Proper Caution', *Loiners*, 18.
[83] Andrew Marvell, 'To His Coy Mistress', *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. by Nigel Smith (Pearson: Longman, 2003), ll. 45-6, 84.
[84] *Loiners*, 18.
[85] Marvell, 'To His Coy Mistress', l. 22, 82.
[86] 'Deathwatch Danceathon', *CP*, 327.
[87] Graham, 'The Best Poet of 1961', 32. Harrison also chose to read 'To His Coy Mistress' for a poetry recording for 'Poets on Screen', *Literature Online*. At: <http://lion.chadwyck.com> [accessed 20 December 2010].
[88] Marvell, 'To His Coy Mistress', ll. 6-7, 81.

'using the forms of a genre to resist or subvert its traditional content.'[89] 'A Proper Caution' alludes to Marvell's poem as an amatory lyric and not as a political allegory. However, Harrison's poem contains republican references which might recall the wit of 'To His Coy Mistress', which 'consists partly in transferring a recognizable political discourse to the erotic sphere.'[90]

'A Proper Caution' is a cautionary republican tale about the absurdity of monarchies and how all men stand equal before larger forces and before each other. The fat loiner by the sea-side on 'his deck chair' is implicitly likened to 'King Canute', the Danish King of England (994-1035) who had a seat placed by the sea and commanded the waves 'not to flow over my land, nor presume to wet the feet and robe of your lord.'[91] The loiner like Canute tries to command larger forces by shouting 'To death' to '*Stop!*' Canute's purpose, however, was to 'Let all men know how empty and worthless is the power of kings.'[92] Henceforth Canute never again wore his crown, and symbolically surrendered it to God. The loiner also accepts 'the ebbing sea', and is content to drag 'his toe-ends' in it.

The allusion to Canute reflects Harrison's hostility to English monarchy and rejection of its original divine right justification. Canute was a king who peacefully surrendered his crown because he knew he was not God. Harrison later bids 'Goodbye! Good riddance, Divine Right!' in the anticipatory 'A Celebratory Ode on the Abdication of King Charles III.'[93] In this 'Ode' Canute again appears as a king who saw 'the tides of change' 'lapping at his well-licked boot.'[94] However, 'later kings chose to ignore / the breakers crashing on

---

[89] Sandie Byrne, 'On Not Being Milton, Marvell, or Gray', in *TH: Loiner*, 57-83, 64.
[90] David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics 1627 –1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 285.
[91] Lord Raglan, 'Canute and the Waves', *Man*, vol. 60 (1960), 7.
[92] Raglan, 'Canute and the Waves', 7.
[93] 'A Celebratory Ode on the Abdication of King Charles III', *CP*, 321.
[94] *CP*, 322.

the shore.' 'A Proper Caution' uses poetic conceits to deliver a republican caution to kings who refuse to surrender their crowns.

Part One of *Loiners* shows the republican character of Harrison's politics and poetry, and this is more fully developed in the poems examined in the next chapter. His preoccupation with WWII and historical atrocities against the Jews and Japanese, and in a nineteenth century context against the Irish, are also reflected in these poems. Part One recreates the Leeds of Harrison's childhood but it is, like all the poems in *Loiners*, preoccupied with the penetration of the most intimate spaces of the human psyche by history. The way history and power shape sexuality, in a series of historical contexts, is a unifying and defining preoccupation of the *Loiners* volume.

Harrison's vision of the history and legacy of the British Empire within the United Kingdom is particularly important to the first two poems of Part One of *Loiners*. His view of the consequences of internal colonialism for Northern England is also important in Parts Four and Five of *Loiners* and continues in *The School of Eloquence*. Throughout *Loiners* there are also recurring allusions to revolutionary thought and action.[95] Firstly, the reference in 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System' to Copernicus' disproving of the Ptolemaic account of an earth and man-centered universe in *De Revolutionbus*, the book that began the scientific challenge to Papal authority, and also to the revolutionary republicanism of Milton. *Loiners* articulates a dialectical interplay between colonial and class structures and experiences and in Part Two, where its interest in the British Empire shifts to West Africa, it looks to the example of the anti-colonial movements. The importance of Harrison's life in Africa in the 1960s and of colonial literature for his poetry,

[95] See also Romana Huk, 'Tony Harrison, *The Loiners*, and the "Leeds Renaissance"', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 75-83, 81.

particularly for poems from Part Two of *Loiners* and for 'the poems of education and history' in *The School of Eloquence* will now be considered.

Chapter 3

Loiner in Africa: 'The White Negro'

The importance for the formation of Harrison's political character of the years he lived in Nigeria and 'explored' Africa are rarely noticed or discussed, even though he has drawn attention to the importance of this time for him.[1] The African years are, indeed, absolutely crucial for understanding *Loiners* and *The School of Eloquence.* Harrison left Leeds as a young doctoral student to teach in Nigeria from 1962 until 1966, and began writing *Loiners* there in 1964.[2] Nigeria had recently declared independence from Britain in 1960. What Harrison read, experienced and observed in Nigeria is of vital relevance to the African poems and to his conception of Northern England as an internal colony in *Loiners* and *The School of Eloquence*, to his identification with *négritude*, and to the idea of British education as a form of 'internal colonialism' which he develops in 'the poems of education and history' in *The School of Eloquence*. Harrison's preoccupation in the 1960s and early 1970s with *négritude*, an anti-colonial literary movement, and the literature and history of colonialism also importantly shaped his republicanism and humanism. His republican and humanist politics encompass his anti-colonialism.

Teaching British literature to Nigerian students and *négritude* literature profoundly affected Harrison's understanding of education and poetry as arenas of cultural and political struggle. Terry Eagleton has observed that Harrison shows 'how in a class-divided society language is cultural warfare and every nuance a political valuation.'[3] Eagleton's observations can also be adapted to Harrison's important but largely neglected concern with

---

[1] 'Interview', 236.
[2] 'Tony Harrison: Work Chart', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 511.
[3] Terry Eagleton, 'Antagonisms: Tony Harrison's *v.*', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 348-350, 349.

language, education and wider culture in colonized societies. As Eagleton observes in another context:

> 'Culture' here means less those spiritual goods made available by wealth, leisure and education than language, customs, religion, tradition, popular art – everything, in short, which constitutes a particular people as distinctive. And since these are primary targets of colonial power, they are inevitably arenas of political conflict.[4]

Colonial education in Africa and the anti-colonial humanism of *négritude* writers, and especially of the African-Martinican poet and politician Aimé Césaire, are related and central sources for an enduring commitment in Harrison's poetry: to make the native voice heard and to bring it into dialogue with the cosmopolitan. Harrison's approach is very much to speak in one's own voice but also to learn other languages.

In recent years it has become possible for scholars to read Harrison's letters from Nigeria, which provide new insights into his experiences and preoccupations there.[5] This chapter begins with a biographical account of Harrison's life in Nigeria, drawing upon his letters. Not all of the poems examined in this chapter are about Africa but they were selected because they are about colonial history, education and literature, and sometimes specifically about *négritude*, or are strong examples of Harrison's republican poetic. I also refer to his dramatic work *Aikin Mata* ['Women's Work'], which has Nigerian themes. The *Loiners* poems 'Doodlebugs' and 'Durham' are examined here because they are concerned with education and reflect respectively Harrison's anti-colonial and republican poetic. 'Me Tarzan', 'Classics Society' and 'Them & [uz]' I, II', from 'the poems of education and history' in *The School of Eloquence*, are analyzed in this chapter because they exemplify Harrison's presentation of the internal colonialism of British education and his wider blending of class and colonial politics.

---

[4] Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff & the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), 241.
[5] Letters to Jon Silkin (1962-64).

Harrison (in the interview in 1983 with John Haffenden) called 'On Not Being Milton' his 'poem to Africans.'[6] The sonnet's African context and concern with anti-colonial politics and *négritude* are discussed in this chapter. 'On Not Being Milton' was first published in *From 'The School of Eloquence' and Other Poems* in 1978 but it was written in 1971 following Harrison's visit to Mozambique that year, and only a few years after he completed writing *Loiners*. The sonnet shares the preoccupation with Africa and *négritude* found in *Loiners*. In the interview Harrison said there were a number of reasons why 'On Not Being Milton' is the leading sonnet in *The School of Eloquence*,[7] and it can 'be read as a gloss on all his poetry.'[8] The English republican poetic and class politics of 'On Not Being Milton' will be explained in the chapter on *The School of Eloquence*.

'from *The Zeg-Zeg Postcards,* XVIII' is discussed here because it is an example of Harrison's complex and ambivalent attitude to different aspects of *négritude*. This chapter also considers '*Travesties*, I, II, II', three poems from Part Two of *Loiners*. '*Travesties*, I, II, II' are linked by genre - they are Harrison's translations – and by content – they reflect his immersion in the colonial relationship between Europe and Africa and in European and African poetry. I also attend to several of Harrison's prose pieces germane to his republican and anti-colonial politics and literary interests which help to elucidate the poetry.

---

[6] 'Interview', 236.
[7] 'Interview', 236.
[8] *Permanently Bard*, 171.

I

Harrison's 'passion for the idea of Africa'[9] began as a schoolboy when the greengrocer gave him *Livingstone's Travels*.[10] As Huk observes, the internationalized environment at Leeds University in the 1950s also encouraged the wide ranging travels that begin with Africa and provide the map for *Loiner*s shifting locations.[11] Harrison was writing a doctoral dissertation in Classics at Leeds University when he accepted a lectureship at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Northern Nigeria, in 1962, the year it was founded and when he was twenty-three. When he was Head of the English Department Harrison secured a job for another Leeds' student, the Irish poet James Simmons.[12]

Harrison watched the installation ceremony of the first University Chancellor, Sir Ahmadu Bello. Bello was also the Emir or Sardauna, the traditional Muslim leader of Northern Nigeria. Harrison describes the ceremony as a staging of feudal power: 'We had the Sardauna of Sokoto installed as Chancellor with feudal retinue keeping back the crowd with long hide whips, striking from rearing Arab stallions.'[13] He found an 'absolutely feudal' society of staggering inequities: 'The Emir and courtiers and the serf.'[14] The 'serfs' were the *talakawas* (commoners), who appear in the background of the African poems as impoverished objects of European lust or participants in tribal bloodshed. The establishment of the University was part of the fraught process of modernization in Northern Nigeria, a process associated with the colonizer's culture. Harrison's letters show

---

[9] Catherine Lamb, 'Tony Harrison', in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Poets of Great Britain and Ireland Since 1960, ed. by Vincent B. Sherry, Jr., vol. 40, part I (Columbia, SC: Bruccoli Clark – BC Research, 1985), 158-9.
[10] 'Introduction', 19. See also Romana Huk, 'Tony Harrison, *The Loiners*, and the "Leeds Renaissance"', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 75-83, 80. 'The Act', a later poem, is also dedicated to James Simmons and fellow Irish poet Michael Longley. See 'The Act', *CP*, 281.
[11] Huk, 'The "Leeds Renaissance"', 81.
[12] Huk, 'The "Leeds Renaissance"', 80.
[13] Letter to Silkin (8 November 1964). Harrison uses the spelling 'Sardauna' and the alternate spelling is 'Sarakuna.'
[14] Letter to Silkin (28 February 1963).

his awareness of the relationship between education and colonialism, which becomes very important to 'the poems of education and history' in *The School of Eloquence.*

The African poems view colonialism through the satirical lens of its sexual psychology. As a lecturer Harrison recognized that the English Literature course was culturally alien and perversely oblivious to African experience.[15] He introduced African, Afro-Cuban and Afro-American Literature courses.[16] He also, rather than elevating canonical British literature in the colonies, taught the literature of colonialism. In a literature review, 'Black and white and red all over: the fiction of Empire', that Harrison wrote for London Magazine, he presents the high cultural and popular literature of colonialism, from E.M. Forster's *Passage to India* to G.A. Henty's novels, as popularizing the imaginative allure of the British Empire, which awkwardly accompanied its 'political, military, socio-economic and missionary' project.[17] Harrison's study of the literature of colonialism also drew on early work by scholars like Benita Parry. Harrison anticipated the postcolonial scholarship which was established in the universities in the 1980s. He also distributed to his students an English translation of Sartre's *Black Orpheus*, which had appeared in *Stand*, the important Leeds-based little magazine which Harrison briefly edited and to which he contributed.[18] *Black Orpheus* was an influential interpretation of *négritude*, which Sartre defined 'as being *against* Europe and colonization.'[19] Harrison's disruption of colonial education also displays sympathy with the politics of anti-colonial Black writers.

---

[15] 'Interview', 236. For a discussion of the wider issues involved in colonial education in Nigeria see *Education and Politics in Nigeria*, ed. by Hans Weiler (Freiburg: Verlag Rombach, 1964).
[16] Letter to Silkin (10 May 1964).
[17] Tony Harrison, 'Black and white and red all over: the fiction of Empire', *London Magazine*, new series, vol. 12, no. 3 (August/September 1972), 90-103, 92.
[18] Letter to Silkin (8 November 1964). Jean Paul Sartre, *Black Orpheus*, trans. by Arthur Gillet, part one in *Stand*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1962; and part two in *Stand*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1962. Volume 5 also contains a short story by Harrison, 'The Toothache.'
[19] Jean Paul Sartre, 'Black Orpheus', trans. by John MacCombie, *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1965) 13-52, 33-35.

Harrison and Simmons also translated and adapted Aristophanes (c.450 - 388 B.C) ancient Greek comedy *Lysistrata* into a modern Nigerian setting in *Aikin Mata*, directing and staging it there in 1965. The hierarchy in *Lysistrata* between the Attic Greek of the Athenians and the despised Doric Greek of the Spartans is translated into Standard and Pidgin English, and assigned respectively to the dominant Muslim Fulani and the Christian Igbo minority in Northern Nigeria. It is the first time Harrison shows the political terrain of language and updates an ancient classic into a contemporary context. It would become an enduring aspect of his poetry. *Lysistrata* is a sex-comedy which proposes that women stage unarmed resistance to war by refusing their soldier-husbands sex. In the 'Preface' Harrison refers to 'latent or blatant tribal rivalries',[20] which had escalated into mass killing in 1962, 1964 and 1966. *Aikin Mata'* is 'an "indecent" but deeply pacifist plea'[21] for peace in Nigeria.

Aikin Mata was compatible with Chancellor Bello's statement in 1963 that the University's 'cardinal principle' was 'to impart knowledge and learning to men and women of all races without any distinction on the grounds of race, religious, or political beliefs.'[22] Education was professedly used to foster national unity in Nigeria because the federal system had produced an ethnically and regionally divided nation.[23] However, in his role as Premier Bello declared the goal of having 'Northerners gain control of everything in the country.'[24] Under Bello's leadership the ruling Northern Congress Party, like the other governing regional political parties, used ethnic and religious mobilization in violent

---

[20] 'Preface', *Aikin Mata*', reprinted in *Bloodaxe 1*, 84-7, 86.
[21] 'Preface', *Aikin Mata*', 84.
[22] Ahmadu Bello University Charter. At: <http://www.abu.edu.ng/alumni/html/mission.php> [accessed 5 October 2011].
[23] Larry Diamond, 'Class, Ethnicity, and the Democratic State: Nigeria, 1950-1966', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 25, no. 3 (1983), 457-89, 457-9.
[24] Ahmadu Bello, Northern House of Chiefs Debates (1958), quoted in B. J. Dudley, *Parties and Politics in Northern Nigeria* (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1968), 22.

pursuit of the class interests of its economic and political elites.[25] *Aikin Mata* translates Aristophanes perennially meaningful laughter into a prescient warning against the approaching Nigerian-Biafran War (1967-70).[26]

Harrison also objected to Christian influences at the University and to Christian missionary education. He was teaching in a country where Christianity began as a colonial import. Based in the Islamic Northern region, he found that 'Most of the staff are Christians who dare to talk about "liberalising Islam"',[27] which he evidently regarded as rhetorically camouflaged paternalism. He observed that 'many of the students come straight from mission schools'[28] and found that 'it is pitiful having to teach literature to mission school educated men.'[29] He found that the Christian students had 'quite explosive' responses to *Culture and Anarchy* and received it as if it was 'written yesterday.'[30] Although *Culture and Anarchy* addresses nineteenth century England the Nigerian Christian students might be challenged by its argument for the replacement of religious thought with 'the best that has been thought and said' in humanist culture. Harrison was heartened by the student's responses because it 'suggests that poetry can be an eruption, and you can tell what that kind of confirmation means to me.'[31] Teaching Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* was an instance of the cultural activism Harrison brought to education.

Harrison also writes of the wider destructive impact of Christian missionary education and its cultural dislocation of Africans:

---

[25] Diamond, 'Class, Ethnicity, and the Democratic State', 474.
[26] For a discussion of *Aikin Mata* and its Nigerian themes see Colin Nicholson, '"Reciprocal recognitions": race, class and subjectivity in Tony Harrison's *The Loiners*', *Race & Class*, vol. 51, no. 4 (2010) 59-78, 64-6.
[27] Letter to Silkin (4 December 1962).
[28] Letter to Silkin (4 December 1962).
[29] Letter to Silkin (28 February 1963).
[30] Letter to Silkin (4 December 1962).
[31] Letter to Silkin (4 December 1962).

> Christians have done great harm here. They drag people from the bush and a limited but in many ways very fine society, and educate them. The educated then despise their origins and wear Christian principle like old maids in England ... I hope the harm done them is not irrevocable.[32]

Harrison clearly shows the view that the modern missionaries continued the early 'religious commando attack, aimed at extirpating "superstitious and idolatrous practices."'[33] He also mocks the mythology of 'the white man's burden', alluding to Rudyard Kipling's poem of that name in a literature review.[34] Kipling is similarly alluded to as popularizer of Empire in *The School of Eloquence* sonnet 'Next Door, I.'[35]

Harrison's identification of Christian missionaries with colonial rule also reflects his reading 'a most moving and well written novel Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe.'[36] *Things Fall Apart* examines the historical origins of colonization in Nigeria, and in it the missionaries are the ideological spearhead for the colonial economic and military invasion. Achebe saw the need to 'look back and try to find out what went wrong, where the rain began to beat us',[37] in order to understand the cultural trauma in postcolonial Nigeria.[38] In *Things Fall Apart* the beginning of what went wrong was the Christian missionaries' insidious erosion of the indigenous religion and cultural identity of the Igbo. Achebe adds to Harrison's awareness of the vulnerability of cultural identity to colonial education and religion. His sensitivity to 'the harm done' to missionary-educated Africans also reflects his

---

[32] Letter to Silkin (28th February 1963).
[33] Jacques Maquet, *Africanity: the Cultural Unity of Black Africa*, trans. by Joan R. Rayfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 38.
[34] 'Fiction of Empire', 95. See also Rudyard Kipling, 'The White Man's Burden', *Complete Verse* (New York: Anchor Press, 1989 [1940]), 321-3.
[35] 'Next Door', *CP*, 140.
[36] Letter to Silkin (28 February 1963).
[37] Chinua Achebe, 'The Novelist as Teacher', in *Morning Yet On Creation Day*, 42-5, 44. Also quoted in Simon Gikandi, 'Chinua Achebe and the Invention of African Literature', in Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational, 1996 [1964]), ix-xxvii, xi.
[38] Gikandi, 'Achebe and the Invention of African Literature', xi.

realization that his estrangement from his origins was produced by the internal colonialism of British education.

Harrison came to a stark understanding of his own education through his teaching experience in Nigeria:

> My education had already opened my mind to other cultures through learning other languages. What Africa did for me was literally to put in perspective my own education: it's one of the reasons why *The School of Eloquence* begins with a poem to Africans. I found the drama of my own education dramatically posed in black and white: people coming from illiterate backgrounds and reading about Wordworth's daffodils because it was set in their exam papers, when they didn't know what a fucking daffodil was. There was an almost surrealistic perversity about 'O' level questions, which were set by a board in England for African students. That kind of dichotomy made me think about my own education and dramatise it, and find some of the polarities through that dramatisation. Harold Acton talked about external and internal colonialism, and I found in the history of colonial Africa a very broad, dramatic portrayal of some of the things that had happened to me.[39]

In Africa Harrison refused to acculturate Africans in Britishness by, for example, teaching them poems about British daffodils. As a teacher in Nigeria and as a poet of working-class Leeds, Harrison focuses on the alienness of the high cultural English canon to the 'natives.' Wordsworth's 'Daffodils' is alien both to the Nigerians and to his own working-class Leeds, where Wordsworth was the local man who built church organs and daffodils are not symbols in the poetry of high culture, but simply flowers which his father puts on the grave.[40]

The Nigerian experience of English cultural hegemony Harrison found replicated in the imposition of that same Southern English ruling class culture on the Northern English working class. Harrison's perception of internal colonialism in England importantly includes the sphere of his own education. Harrison's identification with Africans in the

---

[39] 'Interview', 236. In response to my question whether Harrison could mean Harold Acton, in a personal communication (email, 14 June 2006) John Haffenden commented to me that Harrison was referring to Lord John Acton, who wrote on internal colonialism in the British Empire.
[40] *v.*, *CP*, 264.

context of education directly leads to his understanding of the colonial character of his education in England. This realization is given poetic expression over a decade later in 'the poems of education and history' in *The School of Eloquence*.

II

In *The School of Eloquence* education is part of an internal colonialism. However, two poems in *Loiners* present education and religion as repressive but not as ideological instruments of colonialism. 'Doodlebugs' and 'Durham' were both first published in the 'Other Poems' section of *From 'The School of Eloquence' and Other Poems* (1978)) but retrospectively added to *Loiners* in *Selected Poems* and *CP*. 'Doodlebugs' is a sixteen line sonnet divided into two octaves whose immediate setting is a classroom. Within the sonnet form Harrison uses learned and popular registers, literary and historical allusions, and mixed dictions ranging from medical terms to aggressive slang. The schoolboy's obsessive sexual curiosity is humorously conveyed with over a dozen terms in sixteen lines for sexual parts of the body or for sex, including 'cunt', 'prepuce', 'fannies', vaginas', 'pubis', 'phalluses', 'groins' and 'breasts.'[41] English classical schooling and the Vicar repress the schoolboy's natural imaginative and sexual explorativeness in 'Doodlebugs.' The lewd doodles alluded to in the title of the poem are early signs of 'adult exploration, the slow discovery / of cunt as coastline, then as continent.'[42] 'Doodlebugs' is the first of several poems in *Loiners* where sexual, geographical and colonial discovery and conquest are merged.

In the second octave of 'Doodlebugs' doodles of groins become 'the beard of Conrad, or the King of Spain', 'fannies Africa.' The poem alludes to Joseph Conrad's journey along

[41] 'Doodlebugs', *CP*, 22.
[42] *CP*, 22.

the Congo and his novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899), a dramatization of Belgian colonialism in the Congo and the savagery behind Europe's 'civilizing mission.' The iconoclastic allusion to the King of Spain sees Philip II, who presided over a vast empire, punningly depicted as a cunt, his beard likened to pubic hair.[43] 'Doodlebugs' became the last poem in Part One of *Loiners*, replacing 'A Proper Caution.' 'Doodlebugs' introduces preoccupations of later poems in the *Loiners* volume, particularly the poem 'Heart of Darkness' which alludes to Conrad's novella, and 'The Nuptial Torches', in which Philip II of Spain is depicted as a sadistic historical figure.

The first eight lines of 'Doodlebugs' suggests the emergence of the American Empire, partly by contrast to the second octave which focuses upon European and Spanish Empires. The lines on the American Empire are placed before the stanza on Empires of past centuries to suggest American ascendancy in the post-war period, when Harrison was a schoolboy. In the first half of the poem the schoolboys' doodles reflect their exposure to American culture and society. The poem registers the globalization of American popular culture in the 1950s. The schoolboys sketch 'Caspar the friendly ghost or Ku-Klux-Klan' and 'Even the Vicar' 'sees stiff phalluses in lynched negroes / the obvious banana.' The poem mixes comic and tragic registers outrageously. The allusion to lynched negroes is followed by a rhyme on 'negroes' / 'mustachios' and a phallic 'nose.' The Southern American secret society the Ku-Klux-Klan wear white sheets (It was thought the ghostly appearance would terrify African Americans). The poem ironically appropriates Caspar the friendly and very white ghost as a mascot for the Ku-Klux-Klan. Caspar the friendly ghost is an instance of the popularization of a culture that is anything but friendly to Black Americans. The vicious underbelly of vigilante American racism is juxtaposed with the insipid, insidious character

[43] *CP*, 22.

of its popular culture. The allusion to the lynching of Negroes in modern America in the first octave, and to colonized Africa in the second octave, scans geographically and temporally the victimization of the Black race. 'Doodlebugs' presents the schoolboy Harrison's emerging interest in the literature and history of Empire, his fascination with Africa, and it intimates his later voyage there and the focus upon the Africans in Part Two of *Loiners*.

The other *Loiners* poem that considers education, 'Durham', aligns institutions of education, religion and the law as ideological apparatuses of the State. 'Durham', like 'Newcastle is Peru' and 'Ghosts: Some Words before Breakfast', is a long poem in which the narrator, implicitly 'Tony Harrison', presents his vision of a Northern city, of his predicament, social and political ills and the human condition, whose motif is his own circular journey. 'Durham' was therefore placed between 'Newcastle is Peru' and 'Ghosts' in the *Selected Poems* and *Collected Poems*. 'Durham' is comprised of ten rhyming eight line stanzas, and the meter and diction create the effect that the poet is speaking to a mute listener, the lover directly addressed in the poem and also the reader. In 'Durham' the poet looks out over the city from the tower of its famous Gothic Cathedral. He imagines 'all the enemies there've ever been / of Church and State, including me' being guillotined by the choppers of prison helicopters.[44] 'The enemies' of 'Church and State' include 'me', Harrison, as an anti-clerical poet interested in fundamental political transformations to the society he surveys from the church tower.

In 'Durham' the University is linked to a grimly imagined nexus of power in the last line of the poem: 'University, Cathedral, Gaol.'[45] Harrison held a joint Fellowship at Durham

---

[44] 'Durham', *CP*, 71.
[45] *CP*, 72.

and Newcastle Universities in 1968 and the poem reflects his political disaffection with the Universities. In 'Durham' the University, the Church and institutions of law and order are implicitly presented as part of what Louis Althussser termed the ideological and coercive apparatuses of the State. 'Durham' may reflect Harrison's reading of *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, in which Frederic Engels argues that in a society of 'irreconcilable anatagonisms' and conflicting class interests 'it became necessary to have a power seemingly standing above society that would alleviate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of "order",' and that power was the State.[46] In 'Durham' irreconcilable antagonisms are signaled by repeated references to 'the enemies' of the 'State', to communists, liberals, prisoners, rapists, thieves, escapees and the lovers. The 'Quiet' repressiveness of the Northern town and of England, where 'Threat / smokes off our lives like steam',[47] is reflected in Durham's topography. In the poem the institutions and servants of the state are standing above society imposing order on it. The judges move 'from courtrooms to the Castle',[48] and in the poem the Castle is a towering architectural symbol of the *status quo*, to which the institutions of law and order are linked in the poem. Harrison, as a University Fellow, is at one level a metonym for the University and he is also 'standing above society', from his position in the Cathedral that also towers over the city. In 'Durham' the University, the Church and institutions of law and order are implicitly presented in Marxist terms as arms of the State whose persuasive and coercive function is to legitimize and enforce the *status quo* in England.

---

[46] Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, trans. by E. Untermann (Chicago: C.H. Kerr, 1902), 157-8. Harrison elsewhere refers to 'what Engels called the historical defeat of the female sex', i.e., to *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. See 'Interview', 241.
[47] *CP*, 71.
[48] *CP*, 70.

Harrison is the hunchback of Durham. The solitary poet in the bell tower has 'Quasimodo's bird's eye-view.' He then addresses the lover: 'I feel like the hunch- / back taking you for lunch.' The literary allusion is of course to the hunchback Quasimodo in *Notre-Dame de Paris*, a novel set in fifteenth-century Paris and written by the great nineteenth-century French author Victor Hugo. Hugo is attractive to Harrison as an anti-clerical writer and a republican writer,[49] and in 'Durham' Harrison speaks through Hugo and *Notre-Dame de Paris* to express strong anti-clerical and republican sentiments. The poem also echoes Hugo's rejection of the cruelties and injustices perpetrated by institutions of law and order. There are a number of explicit references and implicit allusions in the poem to *Notre-Dame de Paris*. A 'bird's eye-view' of Durham from a tower of its Gothic Cathedral refers for example to part II of Book Three of Hugo's novel, 'A Bird's Eye View of Paris', a reference to the view from the top of the towers of the Notre-Dame Cathedral.[50] In 'Durham' the presentation of key features of the city's landscape, the 'University, Cathedral, Gaol', mirrors the 'three townships of City, University, and Town' in *Notre-Dame de Paris*.[51] The Cathedral and the city are central presences in both works and this is signalled by their titles. 'Durham' also reflects Harrison's interest in Hugo's aesthetic and philosophical ideas about the history and role of architecture and its relationship to printing, subjects directly addressed in part II of Book V of *Notre-Dame de Paris*. For example, the poet in 'Durham' likens himself, and the lover, to 'medieval masons',[52] an allusion to

---

[49] Tony Harrison's *The Prince's Play* (1996) is a translation of Hugo's irreverent republican play *Le Roi s'amuse* [*The King's Fool*]. In conversation with the poet at the National Theatre, in London on 11 April 2008, Harrison also discussed his great interest in Hugo and his regard for Graham Robb*'s Victor Hugo: A Biography* ((New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997).
[50] Victor Hugo, *Notre-Dame de Paris*, trans. and with an Introduction by Alban Krailsheimer, Oxford World Classics, 2nd edn (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 128.
[51] Hugo, *Notre-Dame*, 132.
[52] *CP*, 71.

Hugo's idea that before the fifteenth century stones served as letters and that in the Middle Ages anyone born a poet became an architect.[53]

In 'Durham' breaking 'hunchback' across the line enables the rhyme on 'hunch' / 'lunch' and evokes the 'enormous hump' on Quasimodo's back.[54] If Harrison is the reclusive and unlikely hero Quasimodo then the unnamed lover is the gypsy dancer La Esmeralda, Hugo's heroine. Unlike Quasimodo, the poet's passion is requited, but 'Durham' extends the analogy with Quasimodo and Esmeralda by suggesting that the lovers are in the Church. It is 'God's irritating carrillon' that 'brings you to me', and it is in the Church that the lover's make a shrine to their 'liberty.' They listen to the 'church-/ high' helicopters. The poem implicitly imagines that, like Quasimodo, Harrison tries to give 'Esmeralda' refuge from the judicial authorities by keeping her in the church, whose sanctuary is threatened in the novel:

> All afternoon two church-
> high prison helicopters search
> for escapees down by the Wear
> and seem as though they're coming here.
>
> Listen! Their choppers guillotine
> all the enemies there've ever been
> of Church and State, including me
> for taking this small liberty.[55]

'Durham' presents sexual liberty as a refusal of the moral authority of the church, but also appropriates the religious register of 'beatitude' to describe the secular blessing of sexual love as a refuge from 'the public mess.'

However, in 'Durham' intimacy is also contaminated by public ideologies, as it is in other *Loiners* poems. Militarism and Fascism are figured as sexual predators breathing 'down small countries' necks.' The lover complains that problems of 'Power' 'shouldn't

---

[53] Hugo, *Notre-Dame*, 197.
[54] Hugo, *Notre-Dame*, 58.
[55] *CP*, 71.

interfere with sex.' The poet replies 'They *are* sex, love, we must include / all these in love's beatitude.' The poem asks whether the penetration of the private by the public conversely suggests that lovers can be 'love's antibodies in the sick, / sick body politic', a formulation which implicitly asks whether individual agency can counter 'Power.' Like the gargoyles on the church, however, the lovers are merely an outgrowth of the *status quo's* edifice: 'On the *status quo's* huge edifice / we're just excrescences that kiss.'[56] The rhyme on 'edifice' / 'kiss' reinforces the poem's explicit argument that love is not transcendent and is moulded by and subject to 'Power.' The poem evokes the helplessness of individuals before larger circumstances and the power of the State, recalling Quasimodo's ultimate inability to save Esmeralda from execution in Hugo's novel. The rhyme on 'include' / 'beatitude' suggests Harrison's belief in a politics of inclusiveness, perhaps in which dignity and compassion are extended to all citizens, even to pariahs like Esmeralda and Quasimodo.

Harrison's affinity with the French republican principle that 'men are born and remain free and equal',[57] and his atheism, is suggested by his refusal to 'genuflect' before priests, judges, 'bigwigs and their retinue.'[58] He is one of those who 'stay standing.' His allusion to his 'liberty' also recalls the ideals of the French Revolution enshrined in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*. The significance of French republican history for 'Durham' is also signaled by the allusions to Hugo's work. In *Notre-Dame de Paris* the King is unsympathetically portrayed as greedy and cruel, but in 'Durham' the imagined execution method for enemies of the state is the guillotine, an allusion to the thousands of French citizens guillotined during the Terror of the French Revolution in 1789. The

---

[56] *CP*, 72.

[57] See Article 1 of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789)*: 'Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be based only on common utility.' See *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, in The French Revolution and Human Rights: a Brief Documentary History*, ed. by Lyn Hunt (Boston: Bedford Books, 1996), 77-9, 78.

[58] *CP*, 70.

Republican Revolution of 1789, and the July Revolution of 1830 which installed a constitutional monarchy, are alluded to in *Notre-Dame de Paris*,[59] and the 1789 Revolution is also the backdrop to Hugo's *Les Misérables*. The historical memory of the Terror imposed by the dictatorship of Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety may be why Harrison adds a libertine and anarchist inflection to his republicanism in 'Durham.' In the poem 'liberty' is rhymed with 'me', suggesting the anarchist emphasis on individual agency in opposition to representative governing bodies and institutions of authority like the Church, the Courts and the University.

The first word of 'Durham is 'ANARCHY' reproduced in the capitals used by the graffitists who have written it on 'crumbling stone', and there are two other references to anarchy in the poem. The significance of anarchy in the poem is ambiguous and might include a threat to the *status quo*. As Carol Rutter observes, anarchy stands opposite the institutions of social order in the poem, like the Gaol, the courts and the Church.[60] However, 'ANARCHY' is written alongside 'GROW YOUR OWN', which signals that the 'student smokers getting high' are probably the graffitists. The graffiti reflects their irreverent attitude towards authority, which recalls the students in Hugo's novel, but also suggests that their anarchism is probably youthful political posturing. The poem suggests that any entity that represents a serious political threat to the *status quo* will be crushed by 'the power-driven mill' of the State.[61] There is a stark implicit contrast between Durham's stoned students and the direct political action of students in Paris in 1968. The attention in the poem to anarchy and graffiti, which were prominent elements in May 1968, registers the events unfolding in Paris when Harrison was at Durham University. In the poem Durham's

---

[59] For a good general introduction to the novel see Alban Krailsheimer, Hugo, *Notre-Dame*, vii-xxv.
[60] *Permanently Bard*, 134.
[61] *CP*, 71.

citizenry is comprised of the students, church choirs, uncultured tourists and impotent prisoners who 'circle and circle at their exercise', and whose incarceration is also a metaphor for the hegemonic control exerted over the citizenry. The image of a dog chasing its tail in the second last line of the poem suggests that the citizens of Durham are like creatures with no sense of the futility of their existence, and the misanthropic element of the poet's vision in 'Durham' may be another reason he likens himself to Quasimodo.

In 'Durham' 'ANARCHY' painted on the wall importantly alludes to the Greek word 'ANÁΓKH written on the wall in capital letters in *Notre-Dame de Paris* by the archdeacon Claude Frollo, and translated in the novel by the student Jehan as 'fatality.'[62] In the novel 'ANÁΓKH signals that regimes, like human beings, are destined for a fatality and that all things must pass.[63] Hugo's view was that 'one power was going to succeed another power' and that religion would pass away.[64] Like Hugo writing in the 1830s about fifteenth-century Paris, in 'Durham' Harrison responds to Hugo with the benefit of historical hindsight. In the poem the presence of the poet in the Church tower, and even of the tourists who come to admire the Cathedral seems to recall Hugo's view that in the future the architecturally magnificent Gothic Cathedrals will no longer belong to the priests but will be 'invaded by the citizens.'[65] However, in 'Durham' the Church and the choirs and the wider condition of the citizenry are among the signs that religion remains a powerful force, even though the Church no longer dominates society as it did in the Middle Ages.

In the last lines of the poem the poet is looking out from the departing train as dusk descends, and he is 'glowering at Durham':

---

[62] Hugo, *Notre-Dame*, 291.
[63] Kathryn E. Wildgen, 'Romance and Myth in *Notre-Dame de Paris*', *The French Review*, vol. 49, no.3 (1976), 319-27, 324.
[64] Hugo, *Notre-Dame*, 189.
[65] Hugo, *Notre-Dame*, 196.

there, lighting up, is Durham, dog
chasing its own cropped tail,
University, Cathedral, Gaol.[66]

The 'dog / chasing its own cropped tail' also alludes to part IV of Book Four of *Notre-Dame de Paris*, which is entitled 'The Dog and his Master' and which explains Quasimodo's slavish devotion to archdeacon Frollo, who raised him: 'In Quasimodo the archdeacon had the most submissive of slaves, the most docile of servants' because Quasimodo loves Frollo as much as he loves the Cathedral.[67] 'Durham' alludes to Quasimodo's blind devotion to the archdeacon, who represents the Church, as an allegory for the psychological enslavement of religion. 'Durham' suggests that the Church still casts its spell over the citizenry of Durham, just as fifteenth-century Parisians were blinded by the magic of priests. Hugo's view was that 'Every civilization begins with theocracy and ends in democracy.'[68] 'The press will kill the church'[69] because 'human thought' will be 'volatized by the printing press' and liberated from 'its theological container.'[70] In 'Durham' religion has not been destroyed by printing and mass literacy, and education has not liberated human intelligence. Instead the poem implicitly aligns religion and education as hegemonic institutions which have impeded the liberation of the people in what Harrison suggests is the failure of meaningful democracy in contemporary English society. In the poet's vision the Church and the Universities have the free citizenry of 'Quiet Durham' and of England ideologically entrapped as surely as the judges and the Gaols physically imprison the political enemies of the State.

---

[66] *CP*, 72.
[67] Hugo, *Notre-Dame*, 170.
[68] Hugo, *Notre-Dame*, 195.
[69] Hugo, *Notre-Dame*, 189.
[70] Hugo, *Notre-Dame*, 192.

The *Loiners* poem introduces a theme that is also central to *The School of Eloquence*. The *School* sonnet 'Me Tarzan', for example, is an instructive poem for analysing Harrison's presentation of the colonial character of his elite classical education, and how it distanced him from the working-class culture of his family and neighbourhood. The poem shows the cultural imperialism of post-war American mass culture, as 'Doodlebugs' did, and its penetration of working-class Leeds. The title and poem allude to the different versions of the Tarzan story found in the American pulp fiction *Tarzan* novels, and the Hollywood films loosely based upon them. 'Me Tarzan' was first published in 1972,[71] the year Harrison also published his review on the literature of colonialism.[72] The poem shows Harrison's readings of the novels and films as imperial romance tales in which class and race politics converge, and reflects his anticipation of postcolonial literary criticism. *Tarzan* and classical literature are the main low and high cultural lenses through which the poem examines notions of the 'civilized' and the 'savage' in intersecting contexts of class, colonialism, gender and education. The poem has a range of registers and conflicting perspectives on the subjects addressed, creating a complex ambivalence characteristic of Harrison's poetry. 'Me Tarzan' is also an instructive example of Harrison's blending of class and race politics.

In 'Me Tarzan' Harrison's classical education civilized the working-class savage and severed him from his tribe. In the poem Tarzan is an icon of a savage white 'native.' The poem alludes to the Tarzan films, in which the Englishman raised by apes in Africa is a version of Rousseau's uneducated, primitive man. The working-class boys from Harrison's old neighbourhood are identified as primitive white 'natives' by the 'Tarzan yodel' with

[71] 'Me Tarzan', *London Magazine*, new series, vol. 12, no. 5 (December 1972 / January 1973), 71.
[72] 'Fiction of Empire.'

which they invite him *'to t'flicks.'*[73] The scholarship boy rejects the popular working-class cultural activities of '*flicks*', '*laikin*', *then to t'fish oil*', and perseveres with his civilizing classical education. Putting his head through the skylight of his study to address the boys below, he resembles the Roman orator Cicero addressing the people. His physical elevation symbolizes the supremacy of the literary culture of the master race over the oral culture of the savages:

> He shoves the frosted attic skylight, shouts:
>
> *Ah bloody can't ah've gorra Latin prose.*
>
> His bodiless head that's poking out's
> like patriarchal Cissy-bleeding-ro's.[74]

The young classicist still speaks the Leeds vernacular but he reads Latin. Eventually, 'the tongue that once I used to know / but can't bone up on now' will be 'mi mam's.'[75] Losing his mother tongue means losing his native culture. The image of the Ciceronian decapitation of his head, or intellect, from the 'body' of his family and community symbolizes how his classical education ruptures his relationship with them. Harrison's education at Leeds Grammar is presented as a process of cultural and ideological colonization which also implicitly threatened to remove the next generation of the working class' intelligentsia and artists.

Through the figures of Cicero and Caesar the conceptual roots of Harrison's classical education are traced to the scholarship and military power of imperial Rome. It is Caesar's Latin account of his conquest of Gaul, *De Bello Gallico*, which the native schoolboy must study. The reference to *De Bello Gallico* merges territorial and ideological colonization. Caesar's conquest of Gaul is paralleled to the conquest of Harrison's intellect by the

---

[73] 'Me Tarzan', *CP*, 126.
[74] *CP*, 126.
[75] 'Wordlists, II', *CP*, 128.

imperial race's account of history, and by the Ciceronian rhetoric that formed the core of his education. An honorary member of the imperial race, he resolves to oppose Rome as an archetype of imperial power. The boy declares that 'he's against / all pale-face Caesars, *for* Geronimo', the last Native American to lead military resistance to colonization, and the poem valorizes resistance.

Harrison observed that the white versions of 'native' cultures 'is a movement wide enough to include Tarzan of the apes.'[76] Tarzan is a projection of a European fantasy of the savage onto the domesticated lower classes. In *Tarzan of the Apes*, as Cheyfitz observes, the white lower classes, black Africans and apes are all brutes: 'In this imperial romance the lower class is as much a foreign country to the upper class as Africa is to Europe.'[77] 'Me Tarzan' makes connections between the suppression and poetic reclamation of Harrison's native identity and attendant political loyalties, and larger historical relationships of dispossession and resistance between classes, imperial powers and native peoples.

However, Harrison's identification as Tarzan also specifically affirms his loyalties to his tribe. 'Me Tarzan' evokes the ethnography of the 1950s working-class Leeds of his adolescence. The identification as a native of a specific cultural and historical formation recalls Raymond Williams's regional differentiation of a working class homogenized in the minds of bourgeois Marxists: 'But I am of my tribe.'[78] In the poem Tarzan, *Twelfth Street Rag*, a popular black jazz number the boys whistle, and the 'cowboys and Indians'

---

[76] 'Shango', 91.
[77] Eric Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 10.
[78] Raymond Williams, *Loyalties* (London: Hogarth Press, 1985), 292-3. Quoted in Dai Smith, 'Relating to Wales', in *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Terry Eagleton (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 34-53, 48.

Westerns that Geronimo appeared in are also signs of the post war 'Americanization' of local cultures through mass media technologies . In the conflict between 'Americanization' and the preservation of native cultures Tarzan and the historical Geronimo are symbolic opponents. The American Edgar Rice Burroughs wrote twenty-five Tarzan novels, reportedly translated into over fifty languages, which spawned over fifty Tarzan movies and endless cartoons.[79] Tarzan is an icon of a globalized mass culture consumed by all classes. However, 'Me Tarzan' specifically parallels white territorial expansion in America, and American cultural encroachment upon working-class Leeds.

The poem is interested in the working-class Leeds boys' identification with Tarzan. The intermingling of the boys' Leeds vernacular, like '*tartin*" with the Hollywood 'Tarzan yodel' suggests the imperial culture intervening in the 'native' script of working- class masculinity. 'Me Tarzan' was one of the Hollywood films Harrison saw when was growing up,[80] with the muscled Johnny Weissmuller in a loincloth, holding a limp, semi-naked Jane. These films exemplify the 'sex in shiny packets' that Richard Hoggart thought had seduced the working class. The grunting ape-man is a version of masculinity that is presented as seductive to Harrison and his 'tribe.' The machismo, bare literacy and terminal unemployment of an underclass of young Northern men will be the subjects of *v.* and 'Divisions I, II.' 'Me Tarzan' laments the cultural betrayal of working-class boys and men by dominant cultural scripts, of which Tarzan is an icon in the poem, which encouraged them to reject education. To be accepted as a working-class man Harrison would have had to reject meaningful literacy: 'down with polysyllables.' He must choose between his education and his tribe. The title's grunting declaration, 'Me Tarzan', mocks

---

[79] Jason Haslam, 'Introduction', in Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, ed. by Jason Haslam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010 [1914]), xxv.
[80] Tony Harrison, 'Flicks and This Fleeting Life', in *Collected Film Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), vii.

Northern machismo. The last line of the poem suggests that 'all the boys' thought Harrison was a 'Cissy.' His education and attendant embourgeoisement are seen to emasculate him. Education is for cissies and for the ruling class.

In 'Me Tarzan' the exclusion of the working class from a rigorous education, and their saturation in an insidiously idiotic mass culture, are implicitly ideological instruments of their oppression. 'Me Tarzan' also reflects Harrison's reading of *The Uses of Literacy*[81] in which Richard Hoggart, a dedicatee of 'Them & [uz]', suggests that the benefits of universal education and mass literacy have been radically undermined by consumption of mass culture. The reference to *De Bello Gallico* and the Tarzan films shows elite and mass culture representing the natives as savages. 'Me Tarzan' invites the view that the imputed genetic intellectual inferiority of the lower classes and savage races, in Tarzan and other imperial fictions, is an 'imperial alibi for domination.'[82]

Harrison presents Tarzan as a white native[83] but also as 'that apeman aristo.'[84] In contrast to the films, at the end of the novel *Tarzan of the Apes* the savage is a cosmopolitan, French and English speaking sophisticate.[85] The African loincloth has been replaced by a suit to wear in the offices and drawing rooms of the European bourgeoisie. In contrast to Tarzan, born Lord Greystoke, Harrison is born a working-class 'ape' but become an 'aristocrat.' Lord Greystoke went from Africa to Europe and Harrison went from the proletariat to the bourgeoisie. The parallels between Greystoke and Harrison also parallel class and colonial hierarchies. Harrison and Greystoke both move uneasily

---

[81] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: aspects of working- class life, with special reference to publications and entertainments* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957).
[82] Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism*, 16.
[83] 'Shango', 91.
[84] 'Fiction of Empire', 97
[85] Haslam, 'Introduction', *Tarzan of the Apes*, viii.

between, respectively, the civilization of the bourgeoisie and Europe, and the primitivism of the proletariat and of Africa.

Tarzan of the Apes mediates Harrison's story of the re-routing of his trajectory as working-class primitive into a sophisticated member of the educated class. Harrison is primitive man and civilized man. In the novel, the orphaned Tarzan is mothered by an ape. He learns the English language from a book and eventually he can no longer talk to the illiterate apes: 'As he had grown older, he found that he had grown away from his people ... They had not kept pace with ... the active brain of their human king.'[86] Harrison's allusion to the novel satirizes the elite status his education bestowed upon him and his underestimation of those who loved him, a subject of a number of *The School of Eloquence* sonnets such as 'A Good Read', 'Currants', 'Illuminations, I' and 'Aqua Mortis.' As in 'Me Tarzan', so in 'Classics Society', Harrison's classical education threatens to destroy his allegiance to his class.

In 'Classics Society' Harrison's classical schooling is presented as a process of linguistic colonization, and of inculcating the worldview of the ruling classes.[87] Like 'Me Tarzan', 'Classics Society' elides the Roman and British Empires and their governing classes. The title 'Classics Society' suggests that a classical education gives you access to an elite society. The first line of the poem is a quotation, from the preface to *The Grounde of Artes* by Robert Recorde:[88] *The grace of Tullies eloquence doth excell / any Englishmans tongue ... my barbarous stile ...*'[89] Recorde expresses the historical view that Latin, the language of Marcus Tullius Cicero, was a superior language. The dedication to 'Leeds Grammar

---

[86] Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 91.
[87] 'Classics Society', *CP*, 130.
[88] Robert Recorde, 'Preface', *The Grounde of Artes* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969 [1542]). Noted in *Permanently Bard*, 143.
[89] *CP*, 130.

School 1552-1952' signals the focus of the poem. The Grammar schools were founded in the sixteenth century to teach Latin in the belief that it was superior to the vernacular and because it was Britain's official language, the language of Church, law, government and learning. The poem focuses on language teaching. It emphasizes the importance of the classical languages as a class marker, the tongue of the governing class's institutions. But the poem shows that it is the working-class Harrison who gets the As and puts the fact of class schism into Latin.

The poem is punning on translation. The working-class schoolboy Harrison is working 'the hardest in his class at his translation' into the upper class. He is literally translating the Hansards, the official reports of the proceedings of Parliament written in what Harrison elsewhere calls Received Pronunciation, 'the educated pronunciation of the metropolis, of the court, of the pulpit, and of the bar',[90] into the official language of the fallen Roman Empire, Latin: 'We boys can take old Hansards and translate / the British Empire into SPQR.' SPQR (*Senatus Populusque Romanus*, the Senate and People of Rome) is the Latin logo of the Roman Empire. 'Classics Society' suggests that historically changing hierarchies of language reflect changing empires, and also correspond to hierarchies of class. The poem shows that the idea of inferior languages applies within the English language itself. When Latin was the official language of England English was denounced as 'rude.' Now Standard English and RP, the dialect and pronunciation generally used by the English ruling class, excludes the 'vile' dialect of Harrison's family and class and wider colloquial language from public discourse.

---

[90] Alexander J. Ellis, *On Early English Pronunciation*, vol. 1 (London : E.E.T.S., 1869-1936), 23. Quoted in A.C. Gimson, 'The RP Accent', in *Language in the British Isles*, ed. by Peter Trudgill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 45-54, 45.

Harrison's description at a poetry reading of the way his dialect was regarded as inferior at Leeds Grammar suggests that there is a general correlation between the dialect spoken and the political view expressed, and reflects his focus on language as the carrier of specifically political messages. Introducing 'Classics Society' Harrison said: 'And there was I, speaking the wrong kind of English, and there was I, translating bits of Tory philosophy into Roman upper class Latin.'[91] In 'Classics Society' the schoolboy translates into Latin the conservative political theorist Edmund Burke lamenting '*a dreadful schism in the British nation.*' As Rutter points out, Burke was speaking against class conflict in England as class warfare raged during the bloody French Revolution.[92] The dialect of the ruling class is used to express views which protect the politico-economic and wider interests of that class and its empire. The poem's specific concern with the role of language in governance is also signaled by the references to Hansards and SPQR. Latin and Received Pronunciation are 'The tongue our leaders use to cast their spell.' 'Classics Society' breaks the spell by exposing how linguistic hierarchies reflect historically shifting power, and justify the exclusion of languages or dialects in which the interests of subordinate classes or races are expressed. The preoccupation in 'Classics Society' and 'Me Tarzan' with the politics of language and the suppression of 'native' working-class voices is very much representative of the *School* 'poems of education and history.' My final example from *The School of Eloquence* sonnets on this theme is 'Them and [uz], I, II.'

In 'Them & [uz] I, II' Harrison's native voice emerges from his assimilationist education and attacks that system. The title signals the importance of the Northern vernacular and the worldview it carries for the poem and its politics. '[Uz]', the Northern

---

[91] *Tony Harrison: Poets and People*, a Freeway Films Production for Channel 4 (1984).
[92] *Permanently Bard*, 144.

pronoun of 'inclusion, solidarity, and family feeling',[93] signals that Harrison's politics extends the best values associated with Northern families to their working-class community. 'Uz' signals that Harrison's politics of inclusion and solidarity importantly derives from a characteristic Northern working-class sensibility, as well as recalling other seeming influences such as the Marxian history of Raymond Williams. The title also refers to a Northern working-class conception of 'Them', 'a composite dramatic figure' of bourgeois authority and privilege.[94] The poem presents bourgeois cultural authority and privilege as based on the exclusion and exploitation of 'uz.' The title uses an upper case 'T' for 'Them' and a lower case 'u' for '[uz]', a typographical pun on upper and lower class. Square brackets are a phonetic convention and '[uz]' typographically suggests that Harrison is inserting the otherwise absent Northern vernacular into his high cultural poem. The title alludes to a chapter in Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*. The poem's dedicatees are Harrison's fellow Leeds scholarship boy Professor Hoggart, and 'Professor' Leon Cortez, a music hall comedian who translated Shakespeare into Cockney. Harrison identified the techniques of stand-up comedians like Cortez as an important cultural influence upon *The School of Eloquence*.[95] The dedication reflects the capacity of the working class to speak in learned and popular registers. The poem proceeds to give a virtuoso performance of the normally divided high and low registers of Them and uz.

In 'Them & [uz], I' the erasure of Harrison's native identity and voice at Leeds Grammar is symbolized by the replacement of his name, the more working-class sounding 'Tony', with the more formal 'T.W.',[96] 'the initials I'd been harried as.'[97] The class divide

---

[93] 'Interview', 233; and 'Them & [uz], II', *CP*, 134.
[94] Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, 62.
[95] 'Interview', 237.
[96] 'Them & [uz], I', *CP*, 133.
[97] 'Them & [uz], II', *CP*, 134.

between civilized and primitive man is played out in the relationship between the 'well spoken' schoolmaster and the boy he really did call a 'barbarian' because he did not speak RP:[98] 'you barbarian, T.W.!'[99] 'Them & [uz], II' launches a full frontal attack on the system the teacher represents and 'dozing Daniel Jones':

> Jones' *English Pronouncing Dictionary* (1917) set up models for 'received pronunciation' and 'standard English.'.. these forms were judged 'socially, intellectually superior' not just because they gave 'literary, cultural and educational access' but because they were 'aesthetically' superior.'[100]

The schoolboy Harrison's thick Leeds accent was not regarded as aesthetic and disqualified him from reading poetry at Leeds Grammar School: 'I played the Drunken Porter in *Macbeth*', a prose comic part in keeping with low social rank. He is not allowed to read other parts of the tragedy in blank verse because 'Poetry's the speech of kings.'[101] Harrison asserts that '[uz] can be loving as well as funny',[102] capable of the dramatic as well as comic parts. Harrison's education allows him to intellectually master Jones and the system he helped to establish. The schoolboy does not yet know 'All poetry (even Cockney Keats?) you see / 's been dubbed by [AS] into RP.'[103] He learns that 'Wordsworth's *matter/water* are full rhymes.' The point is that if 'uz' keep their language then they can get pleasures out of high art that speakers of RP do not get. RP deprives the reader of the pleasures of rhyme. 'Uz' widens to encompass other 'barbarian' regions as the poem exposes the cultural piracy of the genteel Southern bourgeoisie.

By writing a masterful poem in 'my *name* and own voice', using high and low registers, Harrison also discredits the cultural exclusion of the 'barbarians', those who are not meant

---

[98] 'Tony Harrison in interview with John Tusa', BBC Radio 3 (March 2008). At: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/johntusainterview/harrison_transcript.shtml>, [accessed 31 June 2010].
[99] *CP*, 133.
[100] *Permanently Bard*, 125.
[101] *CP*, 133.
[102] *CP*, 134.
[103] *CP*, 133.

to speak the master language, and whose own language is inadequate. 'Them & [uz], II' opens with Harrison declaring his poetic project of occupying high cultural forms on behalf of the 'barbarians.' He speaks the low linguistic register of the Leeds vernacular: 'So right, yer buggers, then! We'll occupy / your lousy leasehold Poetry.' He implicitly and subversively adopts the identity of the 'barbarian.' He ironically and eloquently quotes the master discourse's homogenizing representation of diverse peoples as barbarians, a representation which justified their subjection by conquering powers.[104] 'Them & [uz], II' asserts, as 'Me Tarzan' did, an empowering identification with his 'barbarian' race, the domestic proletariat but also other 'barbaric' peoples, particularly the Africans he feels an affinity to. In the poem 'barbarian' is also deployed in the Greek sense of one who is not a speaker of the master tongue but it also has the sense of 'savage' – Harrison is seeing himself as a barbarian. He is on the side of the barbarians, of Geronimo, the Africans and uz. The class his colonial education removed him from will benefit from his education through his poetry.

III

Harrison's recognition of the colonial character of his education also importantly came through reading the *négritude* poet Aimé Césaire's account of his French education. Harrison saw the essence of his experience in Césaire's and this is important for 'On Not Being Milton':

> And I also remember in this poem Aimé Césaire, who was a poet from Martinique and went through a French colonial education system, became as French as possible, sat on a train with a black sailor and suddenly found himself feeling racial prejudice and said 'what on earth has happened to me', what has my education done to me that I should feel this, and I felt something similar in the way my education and my commitment to poetry

[104] Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism*. Cheyfitz does not mention Harrison but I am applying his analysis of the role of translation in colonization to 'Me Tarzan.'

had uprooted me from my background so I quote *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Césaire's poem, in this one, 'On Not Being Milton.'[105]

Harrison's engagement with *négritude* writers is explicit in this interview, *Them & [uz]: A Portrait of Tony Harrison*, and also in personal correspondence.[106] This engagement is an important context for his poetry which has not been considered in detail in Harrison scholarship.

Harrison announces his *négritude* through an allusion to 'my *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, / my growing black enough to fit my boots' in the sonnet 'On Not Being Milton', from *The School of Eloquence*.[107] Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* [*Notebook of a return to the native land*] is a major poem of *négritude*, of anti-colonial empowerment through the development of a Black aesthetic in which to express Black experience and recover and reinvent Black identity and sexuality, and it examines the deep psychological grip of the colonizer's culture upon the black subject.[108] The English contexts and republican poetic of 'On Not Being Milton' and its significance for *The School of Eloquence* will be explained in the chapter on *School*. Here I am discussing its dedication and its relationship to *négritude* and this will explain why Harrison called 'On Not Being Milton' his 'poem to Africans.'[109]

Harrison's identification with Césaire has an historical basis in certain parallels between the embourgeoisement of the post-war British working-class academic elite and the acculturation of the African native elite. The 1944 Butler Education Act placed bright

---

[105] *Them & [uz]: A Portrait of Tony Harrison, Arena*, BBC TV (15 April 1985).
[106] Letters to Silkin (28 February 1963 and 8 November 1964).
[107] 'On Not Being Milton', *CP*, 122.
[108] Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* [*Notebook of a return to the native land*], in *Aimé Césaire: The Collected Poetry*, trans. and with an Introduction by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 34-85. See also 'Interview with Aimé Césaire', in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. by Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 65-79.
[109] 'Interview', 236.

working-class children like Harrison into the grammar school system. These children were then 'estranged from their own families (and therefore from their own class) and disinherited from their political and cultural traditions.'[110] Harrison's poetry tries to 'make connections where I can',[111] of a cultural and emotional kind, with his family and class. However, Harrison's education does not seem to have disrupted his connection to the political traditions of his class. The political impact of the Butler Education Act was typically to direct the best working-class youth through the education system and away from the Labor and socialist allegiances of their class and recruit them to Toryism. Worpole has compared this 'pre-emptive attack on the possibility of a popular working-class socialist politics' in England to Herod of Judea's Massacre of the Innocents to protect his throne from potential rivals.[112] However, rather than being politically alienated from his class by Leeds Grammar, Harrison says 'I was quite bolshie in my attitude to the school, always.'[113] In 'On Not Being Milton' and *The School of Eloquence* there is a deeply felt and highly literate political commitment to the class from which he was culturally dislocated by his education.

Rylance writes that in 'On Not Being Milton' and elsewhere Harrison 'invites analogies between the post-war educational enfranchisement of his generation of the working-class, and the history of colonial and post-colonial independence movements.'[114] It needs to be stressed that in the poems, Harrison's working-class generation were not educationally enfranchised: his peers are semi-illiterate in 'Me Tarzan', his class is still stammering and tongue-tied in 'On Not Being Milton.' In Harrison's post-war Britain, and historically, it is

---

[110] Ken Worpole, 'Scholarship Boy: The Poetry of Tony Harrison', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 61-74, 61.
[111] 'Lines to My Grandfathers, II'', *CP*, 192.
[112] Worpole, 'Scholarship Boy', 61.
[113] *Them & [uz]: A Portrait*, BBC.
[114] Rick Rylance, 'On Not Being Milton', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 114-28, 121.

only the academic elite of the working class who receive a rigorous classical education. The educational enfranchisement Rylance refers to would be the introduction of free secondary education for all in the post-war period, but under the tripartite system introduced by the Butler Education Act working-class children were mainly channeled into the non-academic 'practical' tiers. In Harrison's poems the academic education that the brightest children received was a rote education in the classic canon and official culture that excluded other voices and experiences.[115] African political enfranchisement from colonialism was not paralleled by working-class educational enfranchisement, though the success of one implicitly underlines the defeated state of the other. Instead, Harrison's point of identification with Césaire and the black elite is that their education also directs them away from communities of origin that are in need of their loyalties.

In the poems Harrison's embourgeoisement is also presented as a process of acculturation that is strongly resonant with Sartre's description of the European 'white washing' of the African elite:

> The European élite undertook to manufacture a native élite. They picked out promising adolescents; they branded them, as with a red-hot iron, with the principles of western culture, they stuffed their mouths full with high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth. After a short stay in the mother country they were sent home, whitewashed.[116]

'Growing black enough to fit my boots' in 'On Not Being Milton' suggests Harrison will now undo his education's 'white washing' of his working-class identity, which he links to a 'black' identity and experience. Harrison has almost certainly read Sartre's account of the 'whitening' of the African elite, from his 'Preface' to *Wretched of the* Earth, by the French-

---

[115] David Kennedy, 'Ideas of Community and Nation in the Poetry of the "Middle Generation": Douglas Dunn, Tony Harrison and Seamus Heaney' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1999), 7-10.
[116] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Preface', in Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965 [1961]), 7.

educated African-Martinican anti-colonial revolutionary Frantz Fanon, whom Harrison has read.[117]

Harrison's sense of being 'black' and 'white', of being between antagonistic classes and languages, is a point of identification with Césaire's liminalist poetry. *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* draws upon Césaire's Negro and French cultural inheritances and dramatizes the conflict between them. 'The quarrel with ourselves' in *The School of Eloquence* often emanates from conflicts between the working-class and bourgeois dimensions of Harrison's identity. The ambivalence expressed in the title 'On Not Being Milton' reflects his defining himself by his distance from both classes, and from other important influences that are discussed in Chapter 7. The title 'On Not Being Milton', in which Harrison defines himself by what he is not, also registers Césaire's defining his *négritude* by what it is not in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*: 'my negritude is not a stone, its deafness hurled against the clamor of the day / my negritude is not a leukoma of dead liquid over the earth's dead eye.'[118] *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* is a prose poem, written in Césaire's 'black French', which uses French Surrealism's liberation of unconscious forces to release the black subject buried beneath French rhetoric and constrained by accepted poetic forms.[119] Inspired by Césaire, Harrison bends traditional poetic forms to give a high cultural poetic voice to working-class Leeds.

Harrison adapts the master language to speak through and against it, as Césaire does in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* and as Sartre advocated in *Black Orpheus*. The imposing of the colonizer's culture takes a specific and intensified form in the education of the

---

[117] 'All Out', review of *The Penguin Book of Socialist Verse*, *London Magazine*, new series, vol. 10, no. 12 (March 1971), 87-91, 90; and 'Fiction of Empire', 90.
[118] Césaire, 'Notebook of a Return to the Native Land', 67.
[119] See also 'Interview with Aimé Césaire', 78-9.

'native' elite, as with Harrison and Césaire, but is also part of a wider process of colonization. Harrison's politics of language enables him to adapt *négritude* to his predicament and to the wider circumstances of his class. He has said (in the interview of 1983 with Haffenden) that 'the language of the powerful ruling class always kills off the language of the class beneath it.'[120] Harrison was referring to the extinction of the languages of colonized races and it is significant that he does not use the word 'race' but 'class.' Harrison's adaptation of *négritude* on display in 'On Not Being Milton' reveals the continuities in his analysis of colonialism and class, a vital feature of *Loiners* and *The School of Eloquence*.

'On Not Being Milton' presents the place of *négritude* in the critically neglected linkage of class and anti-colonial politics in Harrison's poetry. 'On Not Being Milton' translates *négritude* into a Northern working-class context. The poem begins with Harrison's return to his native land after his travels, with particular reference to his time in Africa. He reclaims his native roots, after the cultural exile produced by his education, through *négritude*. In the second and fourth lines he rhymes 'roots' with 'boots.' His 'growing black enough to fit my boots' suggests he is growing black - black enough for his black roots. The defiant term *négritude* is derived from the racist '*négre*' or 'nigger', as 'a violent affirmation' in a world where to be black was to be ashamed, and was coined by Césaire in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*.[121] Harrison's *négritude* affirms his pride in being of the Northern working class, just as *négritude* was most simply an affirmation of pride in being black. The personal project of *négritude* is also inherently and self-consciously extended to the community of origin. *Négritude's* cultural empowerment of Negroes inspires Harrison to give a powerful poetic voice to his people in *School*. The

[120] 'Interview', 234.
[121] 'Interview with Aimé Césaire', 69.

place of *négritude* in Harrison's poetry is complexly set forth in his politico-poetic manifesto 'On Not Being Milton.'

The translation of *négritude* into the circumstances of Northern England in 'On Not Being Milton' is also based on historical parallels Harrison suggests between the experience of the working class and Africans. 'Black' is the skin color of Africans and the color of coal, mines, slagheaps, pollution and other features of the industrial landscape. 'Black' is a motif in the poetry, established in 'On Not Being Milton', for *négritude* and the bond between the inferior white domestic classes and the Africans. As Rutter observes:

> Harrison's struggle politicises art and articulacy in order to discover an aesthetic of language and poetry that can accommodate a voice that emerges out of the working class of Leeds, a city that turned its native sons black with the grime of post-Industrial Revolution urban pollution.[122]

The metaphorical conceptualization of the Northern working class turned 'black' in the mines and factories is important to his poetry about the North from 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System' to 'On Not Being Milton', and other poems in *Loiners* and *School* including 'Dark Times', 'Working', 'Cremation', discussed in Chapter 7, and implicitly for *v.*, discussed in Chapter 8. In 'Newcastle is Peru' the protagonist's fingerprints are 'still lined with coal' after preparing a fire: 'I see my grimy fingers smudge / everything they feel or touch', including 'bosoms, nude / and tanned almost to *négritude*.'[123] Thomas Campey beholds black factory smoke in the 'dark, Leeds sky.'[124] In the poems the Northern working class was turned 'black' by industrial enslavement.

Harrison likened Capital's treatment of miners with the enslavement of blackamoors, with reference to nineteenth century English socialist verse and poetry about the hypocrisy

---

[122] *Permanently Bard*, 170.
[123] 'Newcastle is Peru', *Loiners*, 87.
[124] 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System', *Loiners*, 12.

of coal-owner Abolitionists.[125] He viewed the mining areas as 'particularly important.': 'The mines are the classic battlefield between capital and labour in the nineteenth century.'[126] Blackness, like that of coal and the mines, is Harrison's key metaphor, in *Loiners*, *School* and *v.*, for class and colonial oppression, and for cultural resistance through his poetry. In 'On Not Being Milton' 'The stutter of the scold out of the branks / of condescension' refers to the iron bridles used to silence 'scolds', outspoken women, but similarly recalls the bridles used on black slaves. The allusion to the Norse 'skold' or poet suggests the stuttering poet's struggle to speak for himself and on behalf of his downtrodden people in the tradition of *négritude*.

'On Not Being Milton' is dedicated to the poets Sergio Vieira and Armando Guebuza, who in 1971, the year 'On Not Being Milton' was written, were leading members of the anti-colonial liberation army *Frelimo*, which became the Marxist governing party of Mozambique. The allusion to *Frelimo* and Césaire, who as a politician was directly involved in the political process of the decolonization of Martinique, shows Harrison's construction of a small canon of poets who were also directly engaged in political or military struggle against colonialism, while the republican revolutionary John Milton fought a different form of tyranny. The allusion to *Frelimo* and Césaire also registers conflicting perspectives on *négritude*, an aspect of the complex ambivalences signalled in the title. *Frelimo* rejected *négritude* as 'nothing more than the theories of the ruling classes of neo-colonialism, hence of imperialism.'[127] Poetry though was central to *Frelimo's* cultural struggle against colonialism, as it was for the *négritudinists*. Accomplished poets

---

[125] 'All Out', 87.
[126] 'All Out', 87.
[127] Graca Machel, Minister for Education and Culture, Frelimo, quoted in Chris Searle, 'The Mobilization of Words: Poetry and Resistance in Mozambique', in *Marxism and African Literature*, ed. by Georg M. Gugelberge (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1985) 150-164, 159.

like Vieira and Guebuza 'used poetry as a new way of pamphleteering.'[128] Poetry was no longer used for individual expression but in the struggle for national liberation.[129] Poetry and mass literacy campaigns were very important to *Frelimo's* struggle to redefine Mozambique's culture and accompanied their military struggle against the colonial power Portugal.

Harrison met *Frelimo* members in Dar-es-Salaam in 1971:

> I had all night conversations, discussions, with *Frelimo*, the liberation army of Mozambique, who were writing poetry and were guerrilla soldiers. They were fighting a war then, a war of liberation and they were there at the conference, and we had long, all night discussions on poetry and revolution, poetry and politics, and they had no doubt about what poetry should do, it should serve their struggle, and when I came back to England I wrote the first poem of *The School of Eloquence* series, 'On Not Being Milton', which is dedicated to those two *Frelimo* members, one I think ended up becoming Minister of Culture and the other a Minister of Finance, but then they were poets in khaki battle dress.[130]

The dedication of 'On Not Being Milton' to members of *Frelimo*, among the African nationalist movements in this era, salutes their great emphasis upon the 'poetry of combat'[131] and upon education in their war of liberation. Rylance also observes that the importance of poetry and education in *Frelimo's* revolution, and their developing of native culture would appeal to Harrison.[132]

Meeting *Frelimo* may also have influenced Harrison's decision to place his education and poetry at the service of his class in *The School of Eloquence*, implicitly announced in 'On Not Being Milton.' There was considerable conflict in *Frelimo's* ranks about whether those privileged with elite education could honorably pursue individual ambitions abroad, or should come back to support their struggling communities. The dedication may also

---

[128] Searle, 'The Mobilization of Words', 157.
[129] Searle, 'The Mobilization of Words', 157.
[130] *Them & [uz]: A Portrait*, BBC.
[131] Searle 'The Mobilization of Words', 152.
[132] Rylance, 'On Not Being Milton', 120-21.

signal regard for *Frelimo's* Marxist commitment that a new native class of exploiters would not enable multinationals to continue extracting Mozambique's wealth after independence.[133] Harrison witnessed this kind of corruption and exploitation in Nigeria and this is reflected in the African poems discussed in the next chapter.

'*Dichtung und Wahrheit*' ['Poetry and Truth'] was also written in 1971 and is dedicated to '*Frelimo's* fluent propagandist', Marcelino Dos Santos.[134] The poem expresses the hope that cultural tools like translation and propaganda will always outweigh reliance on Kalashnikovs. The poem alludes to the Kalashnikov because it was *Frelimo's* main weaponry in its successful war of independence, which cost a million lives, and is very important to the national consciousness. *Frelimo* soldiers often named their sons 'Kalash' after the gun, which also appears in Mozambique's national flag, coat of arms and currency.[135] The dedications of 'On Not Being Milton' and '*Dichtung und Wahrheit*' to *Frelimo* members suggest the radicalism of Harrison's politics because he accepts armed guerrilla struggle against colonialism. Elsewhere, his poetry consistently expresses an anti-war stance. He has written many poems against militarism by states, including the 'Sonnets for August 1945', 'A Cold Coming' and 'The Krieg Anthology.' 'On Not Being Milton' and '*Dichtung und Wahrheit*' reflect Harrison's enthusiasm for cultural struggle against 'the cloven tongues of four colonial powers' through translation, education and poetry.[136] The *négritude* literary movement the *Frelimo* guerrilla's rejected is particularly important to Harrison's poetic expression of an anti-colonial humanist sensibility, which is accompanied by an implicit hope of influencing ways of thinking about the world.

---

[133]Barry Munslow, *Mozambique: The Revolution and Its Origins* (London and New York: Longman, 1983), 133-4.
[134] '*Dichtung und Wahrheit*', *CP*, 195.
[135] Larry Kahaner, *AK-47: The Weapon That Changed the Face of the War* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 100.
[136] '*Dichtung und Wahrheit*', *CP*, 195.

Harrison imbibed *négritude* in Nigeria. In 1962 Harrison, who is fluent in French, was reading through back copies of *Présence Africaine*, a highly influential French speaking journal of Negro culture and the main voice of the *négritude* movement. Harrison had great regard for *Présence Africaine*,[137] which published creative writing and political essays and appears to be where he first read *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, where it was republished in 1956, 1960 and later in 1971. The *négritude* debate was particularly prominent amongst francophone intellectuals in the 1950s.[138] *Présence Africaine* was founded by leading black diaspora intellectuals including Césaire and Senghor and had eminent French writers on its editorial board including Sartre and André Gide, all writers of particular interest to Harrison.

Harrison read the *négritude* manifestos and was inspired by the efforts of Negro intellectuals 'to de-westernise humanism and culture in order not to Africanize it but to universalize it':

> The African or negro intellectual has a sharp picture of the severe limitations of Europe. The great thing, as yet only aspiration … the plea of a persecuted race not for themselves but for ALL men.[139]

Senghor explained the historical purpose of *Présence Africaine* as to be the forum for Africa's 'great dialogue, so long awaited, with the West': '*Présence Africaine*, that has tried to elucidate the serious colonial misunderstanding; *Présence Africaine*, that, by way of the black man, has never ceased to defend Man.'[140] The commitment to defend the universal 'Man' through the historical and cultural specificity of the black man is

---

[137] Letter to Silkin (28 February 1963).
[138] Robert Fraser, *West African Poetry: A Critical History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 69
[139] Letter to Silkin (28 February 1963).
[140] Léopold Senghor, quoted in Salah D. Hassan, 'Inaugural Issues: The Cultural Politics of the Early *Présence Africaine*, 1947-55', *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 30, no. 2 (Summer 1999), 194-221, 195.

characteristic of Senghor and Césaire's wider stance,[141] and is 'the plea of a persecuted race ... for ALL men' that Harrison is especially moved by.

The *négritude* debates about Marxism contribute to Harrison's 'awakening solidarity with the oppressed of the Empire together, "the internal and external proletariat,"'[142] a politics that is important to *Loiners* and *The School of Eloquence*. Césaire argued that 'the problem of the proletariat and the colonial problem' are produced by the barbarism of European capitalism.[143] Harrison is very likely to have read Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, perhaps in *Présence Africaine* where it was published in 1950. Harrison also found the view of the continuities between class and colonial servitude in Senghor's 'Nationhood and the African Road to Socialism.'[144] However, Harrison observes that Senghor also 'probes the fallacy of the solidarity between the European proletariat and the African colonised.'[145] In *Black Orpheus* for example, which as noted Harrison taught, Sartre calls for Africans to transcend *négritude* and join the universal proletariat.[146] This glaringly assimilationist argument may be the source of Harrison's unspecified reservations about *Black Orpheus*.[147] Key concepts of *négritude*, its insistence on cultural specificity and universality,[148] its cosmopolitan dialogue between cultures, and its anti-colonial humanism are implicit influences upon Harrison's poetic.

---

[141] Abiola Irele, '*Négritude* or Black Cultural Nationalism', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1965), 321-348.
[142] 'Fiction of Empire', 94.
[143] Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 1.
[144] 'All Out', 88.
[145] 'All Out', 87-88.
[146] Sartre, *Black Orpheus*, 47.
[147] Letter to Silkin (28 February 1963).
[148] See also Léopold Senghor, 'What is "*Négritude*"?', in *The Idea of Race*, ed. by Robert Bernasconi and Tommy Lee Lot (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2000), 136-8.

IV

The discussion will now address other poems in *Loiners* that illustrate Harrison's ambivalent and complex use of *négritude*, and that reflect his interest in African-Spanish poetry. I will also discuss a prose piece which elucidates his interest in African cultural movements, colonial history and racism, and how this influences his politics and poetry about England. Harrison holds onto the empowering aspects of *négritude* in 'On Not being Milton.' By contrast, '*Zeg-Zeg Postcard*, XVIII' satirically suggests *négritude* has been transformed into a sexualized commodity for the European and Europeanized intelligentsia. 'from *The Zeg-Zeg Postcards*' is a sequence of short poems whose main explicit subject is European lust for Africans.[149] The '*Postcard*' sequence is mainly discussed in the next chapter but this '*Postcard*' is discussed here because it considers *négritude*, and does so in the context of European ideological and sexual projections and impositions on Africa.

'*Postcard*, XVIII' suggests *négritude* was colored by a lascivious European fascination with sexualized African bodies, recalling André Gide's role as both a member of the editorial board of *Présence Africaine* and a homosexual tourist in Algeria. The fictional author of the '*Postcard*', the White Queen, salivates about a set of black buttocks:

> Buttocks. Buttocks.
> You pronounce it as though
> the syllables rhymed: *loo*; *cocks*.
> I murmur over and over:
> buttocks ... buttocks ... BUTOX,
> marketable essence of beef -
> *négritude* - dilute to taste![150]

---

[149] As discussed in the next chapter, the 'from *The Zeg-Zeg Postcards*' poem sequence forms part 5 of 'The White Queen.' In the original publication of *Loiners* the title 'from *The Zeg-Zeg Postcards*' is italicized except for 'from' and the roman numerals that designate individual poems. The abbreviated references '*Zeg-Zeg Postcard*' or simply '*Postcard*' are mainly used in the thesis in order to simplify presentation.
[150] 'The White Queen 5: from *The Zeg-Zeg Postcards*, XVIII', *Loiners*, 43-44.

These lines suggest *négritude* was a literary and ideological export commodity. Huk, with reference to 'BUTOX' or reduced soup, observes in this '*Postcard*' 'a single, isolated cartoon in words which packages in a familiar, memorable image the product of imperialism: reduced humanity.'[151] The '*Postcard*' is also specifically saying that *négritude* can be diluted to suit a racist European sensibility.

'*Postcard*, XVIII' comes out of Harrison's familiarity with the *négritude* debate and shares the skepticism of the 'anti-negritudinists.' His friend Akinwande Oluwole 'Wole' Soyinka regarded *négritude* as an exaggerated rhetorical claim by francophone intellectuals, particularly the African-born, Western-educated elite often living outside their homelands for extended periods. By contrast, ideas of black consciousness and empowerment were not an intellectual fashion but a revolutionary tradition for Africans living in Africa. Soyinka did though, like his fellow skeptic Achebe, acknowledge *négritude's* idealization of black culture as an enabling transitional myth to counter colonial degradation. Soyinka explained his criticisms of *négritude*:

> But for the francophone intellectuals in Africa, it was an exaggeration. It is not surprising that it was taken up by such intellectuals as Jean Paul Sartre because for them it was yet another branch of European philosophy. *Négritude* gave birth to magazines like *Black Orpheus*, the title of which takes its reference point from European mythology. It's a title which I find very embarrassing even though it was a very good magazine … I do not say that there is no meeting point, no correlation, possible between European culture and African, no. I merely say … the reference points should not be European."[152]

Like his skepticism about *négritude* in '*Postcard*, XVIII', Harrison questions whether an Afro-Spanish parallel to *négritude*,[153] *negrista*, has been reduced to an 'Africa in the

---

[151] Huk, 'The "Leeds Renaissance"', 82.
[152] Wole Soyinka, *Conversations with Wole Soyinka*, ed. by Biodun Jeyifo (Jackson: University Press of Missouri, 2001), 10.
[153] 'Interview with Aimé Césaire', 27.

head',[154] a facile rehashing of stereotypes, in 'Shango.' The short prose piece 'Shango' was written in 1969 when Harrison and his family went to Cuba as part of his UNESCO Fellowship in poetry.[155] In 'Shango' his search 'for that Africa I came to know and love' moved to Cuba and focused on its African heritage and Afro-Spanish culture.

'Shango' centers symbolically, as its title signals, on Shango, the thunder-god or *orisha* of the Nigerian Yoruba. Harrison explains that the Yoruba were shipped to the Spanish Catholic colony of Cuba in their thousands as slaves 'after the extermination of the gentle Taino and Siboney Indians.'[156] He imagines Shango accompanying the Yoruba 'in the dark hold of the slaver, and in the slave barracks of the sugar plantations.'[157] Shango symbolizes the poet's concern with slavery, exile and genocide, preoccupations of the African poems.

In 'Shango' Harrison describes *negrista*, a sub-cultural movement at its height between 1930 and 1940,[158] as 'like many similar movements, [such as] "gaucho" poetry in South America ... basically white, cultivated, urban and primitivistic. Its verses chime with rumba dancers.'[159] He also found the stereotyping of *negrista* persisted in a contemporary performance of Césaire's *Une Saison au Congo* [*A Season in the Congo*]. The title of Césaire's work alludes to Rimbaud's *Une saison en enfer* [*A Season in Hell*] to convey the state of the Congo under Belgian rule. *A Season in the Congo* is about the 'hair-raising betrayal' of the assassinated Congolese nationalist leader and poet Patrice Lumumba. Harrison explains the performance: 'Lumumba did sexual athletics as he delivered his principle orations ... rumba Lumumba, rumba, the jungle jangle of the congo bongo.'[160]

---

[154] 'Shango', 91.
[155] 'Shango', 88.
[156] 'Shango', 89.
[157] 'Shango', 89.
[158] 'Interview with Aimé Césaire', 27.
[159] 'Shango', 90-91.
[160] 'Shango', 96.

His 'embarrassment' at 'gaucho' reductions of Africans to clichés for a European cultural market also recalls Césaire's wider protest against colonialism's reduction of humanity to a monologue.

Despite Harrison's criticisms of *negrista* he translates from the Spanish two *negrista* poems with themes of interest to him in '*Travesties*, II, III'. '*Travesties*, I, II, II' are his translations of poetry in *Loiners* and the title humorously disparages them as inadvertent 'travesties', debased imitations of serious literature.[161] 'Travesties' also refers in the etymological sense to dressing in the attire of the opposite sex or cross-dressing.[162] '*Travesties*, II, III' are homosexual variations of Afro-Spanish heterosexual poems, while '*Travesties*, I' is a translation of a Latin epic. The fictional author of the translations is the homosexual White Queen, the eponymous protagonist in 'The White Queen' poem sequence that '*Travesties*, I, II, III' are part of. The 'Note' in the original publication of *Loiners* advises that the '*Travesties*' sequence contains many more unpublished translations of poems from different languages and which were often homosexual variations on heterosexual love poems in English.

'*Travesties*, II, III' were dropped from *Selected* and *Collected* editions of Harrison's poems, perhaps because he thought that *negrista* poetry was often marred by a 'facile onomatopoeia', its drawing heavily on Afro-Spanish musical rhythms.[163] '*Travesties*, II, III' and the dropped 'Note' show his interest, as do other poems in 'The White Queen' sequence, in cultural, sexual and ideological dimensions of the relationship between Africa and Europe. '*Travesties*, II, III' have a particular preoccupation with cross-fertilization and

---

[161] 'travesty', *OED Online*, meaning *n.* 1.
[162] 'travesty', *OED Online*, meaning *n.* 2.
[163] 'Shango', 91.

transgression as it is manifest at the level of gender through homosexuality and cross-dressing, at the level of race through miscegenation, and at the level of culture through the act of translation.

'*Travesties*, II', '*The Ancestor*', is after '*Balada de los dos Abuelos*' ['Ballad of the Two Grandfathers'], a poem by 'a Yoruba from Cuba', the mulatto Nicolás Guillén.[164] In his poem Guillén 'calls together his white Spanish ancestor and his black slave ancestor and presents them in a synthesis of anguish and celebration.'[165] In Harrison's '*Ancestor*' a Negro watches his white lover dancing to cold English rhythms, deaf to the earthy rhythms of African music, but discerns beneath the initial physical appearance of difference their shared ancestry and points of connection between their divided civilizations.[166] '*Travesties*, III', '*Rumba*,' is after the poem '*Rumba*' by the Cuban poet Emilio Ballagas.[167] In 'Shango' Harrison refers to *negrista* poems about black women dancing the rumba as 'mildly sexotic' and in the poem changes Ballagas' dancing Negress to a black man, whose swirling skirt of straw and status as the desired object of a white man's gaze signifies his feminized gender position. However, '*Rumba*' mainly drew Harrison's attention because of its reference to Shango, who rarely appears in *negrista* poetry. The main focus of '*Rumba*' is the black dancer's devotion to Shango. The Negro's navel is the still point in the hurricane of his dance and an eye 'utterly transfixed, devoted utterly, / trained on Shango in his shrine.'[168]

---

[164] 'Shango', 90. Nicolás Guillén (1902-1990) was regarded as the laureate of the Cuban Revolution and a significant 'exponent of Black poetry in the Spanish-speaking world.' See editorial note to 'Shango', 90.
[165] 'Shango', 92.
[166] 'The White Queen 3: *Travesties*, II: *The Ancestor*', *Loiners*, 33.
[167] 'The White Queen 3: *Travesties*, III: *Rumba*', *Loiners*, 33-4.
[168] *Loiners*, 34.

Harrison names himself as 'a son of Shango', the god of the enslaved Yoruba. He invokes the thunder god's powers to avenge the wronged. Shango struck dead a tyrant and became a hybrid patron saint of military power.[169] It is 'questions of punishment and love' that Harrison is 'worried to the point of madness by.'[170] His search to avenge the silenced of history finds its most sustained voice in *The School of Eloquence*. The humanist love of the citizen for his fellow man and the desire for atonement ripples through the intimations of revolution in *Loiners*. Retribution for Europe's bloody conquests is also prophesied in '*Travesties*, I.' Like the thunder god, the poet has 'double axes to grind' on behalf of 'the dead, the living, and the yet to be.'[171]

'*Travesties*, I', '*Distant Ophir*', is a parable of the terrible destructions wrought by colonial conquests. The *terza rima* evokes the powers of Apollo, the Greek and Roman god of poetry and prophesy, to avenge Africa, Cuba and Peru for the sufferings brought to their shores by the 'Westerners' addressed in the poem.[172] '*Travesties*, I' has a mythological quality which speaks across ages and territories and unifies the sufferings of colonized peoples everywhere. '*Travesties*, I' is Harrison's translation of a section of Book III of the sixteenth-century Latin epic *Syphilis* by Hieronymus Fracastorius. The passage translated from *Syphilis* depicts the first days of Columbus and his crew in Ophyre (Haiti), and the Spaniard's massacre of the island's parrots, who in the epic are the sacred birds of Apollo. In *Syphilis* a 'feather'd Prophet' escaped the massacre and 'with humane voice (O dire portent)' foretells that civil war and obscene disease will befall the murderous Spaniards: 'Nor end your sufferings here, a strange Disease, / And most obscene shall on

---

[169] 'Shango', 89-90.
[170] 'Shango', 88.
[171] 'Shango', 103.
[172] 'The White Queen 3: *Travesties*, I', *Loiners*, 31.

your Bodies seize;'[173] In '*Travesties*, I' the prophetic poetic voice is figured in 'the dark bird', 'one of 'the flocks of Apollo':

> your crimes abroad brought home as civil war.
>
> And also *Syphilis*: sores, foul sores[174]

In '*Travesties*, I', but not in *Syphilis*, the conquerors 'rape' the New World and other lands and will carry the sexually transmitted syphilis infection back to Europe. As Colin Nicholson notes, Fracastorius rejects 'the notion that syphilis was brought to Europe from the New World by Columbus', but Harrison does not.[175] In '*Travesties*, I' the metaphor of syphilis as retribution for conquest has its historical origins in the late fifteenth century when, according to some accounts, Columbus's crews did set off a syphilis pandemic in Europe upon their return from the Americas.[176]

'*Travesties*, I' and *Syphilis* are part of the literary history of syphilis and the wider literature of disease. '*Travesties*, I' establishes the metaphor of syphilis for the disease of imperialism, a metaphor which links the different parts of *Loiners*. '*Travesties*, I' begins the third of five parts in 'The White Queen' and, although it is the only part not set in the twentieth century, it can be regarded as its literal and thematic centerpiece. Harrison's translation of *Syphilis* encompasses Fracastorius' focus on the Spanish in Ophyre but explicitly widens its address to 'Westerners' in Africa, Cuba and Peru:

> You'll only find the Old World in the New,
> and you'll rue your *discubrimiento*, rue

---

[173] *Syphilis: Or, A Poetical History of the French Disease*, written in Latin by Fracastorius, and now attempted in English by N.Tate (London: J. Tonson, 1686), 68. Harrison borrowed N.Tate's translation of *Syphilis* from the Robinson library at Newcastle University.
[174] *Loiners*, 32.
[175] Colin Nicholson, '"Reciprocal recognitions": race, class and subjectivity in Tony Harrison's *The Loiners*', *Race & Class*, vol. 51, no. 4 (2010) 59-78, 69.
[176] Woodrow Borah, 'Introduction', in *'Secret Judgements of God: Old World Disease in Colonial Spanish America* ed. by David Cook Noble and George W. Lovell (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 3-19, 11. See also David Cook Noble, 'Sickness, Starvation, and Death in Early Hispaniola ', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 32, no. 3 (Winter 2002), 349-386, 353.

it, rue Africa, rue Cuba, rue Peru![177]

The subtitle of '*Travesties*', '*Distant Ophir*', is also referred to in the *terza rima* : 'This land, where you are now, is that Ophir / your flashy maps show off like jewellery.'[178] Unlike Fracastorius, Harrison refers not to 'Ophyre', Haiti, but to 'Ophir', fine gold, whose meaning is derived from the fabled land of Ophir, from which King Solomon took gold in the Old Testament.[179] Harrison's pun on 'Ophir' registers the focus on Ophyre in *Syphilis*, but is also a sign of all the plundering of gold in foreign lands since Old Testament times. The poem implicitly parallels the timelessness of myth with the historical repetition of conquest.

The translation of *Syphilis* in '*Travesties*, I' incorporates but also significantly changes Fracastorius' depiction of the Spanish *discubrimiento* of Ophyre. In *Syphilis* Harrison has chosen to translate a poem which, unlike other Latin accounts of Columbus' voyage to the New World, does not attack the Indians or their religion.[180] However, in *Syphilis* it is the island's birds who are massacred by the Spanish, not its peoples, and it is for the massacre of Apollo's birds that the Spaniards will be reduced to a 'Wretched' state. The passage from Fracastorius might be regarded as a parable for the Spanish massacres of the Indians and hope for divine retribution. There are only two lines in *Syphilis* in which Spain's foreseen subjugation of Ophyre is definitely addressed: 'The Natives of long liberty deprive, / Found cities and a new Religion give.'[181] By contrast, '*Travesties*, I' is an explicit and powerful dramatization of the conquerors 'porphyry and rape' and 'destructions greater than the siege of Troy.' In '*Travesties*, I' it is for their 'crimes'

---

[177] *Loiners*, 32.
[178] *Loiners*, 31.
[179] *The Book of Chronicles* II, 9: 10-22.
[180] Heinz Hofman, '*Adveniat tandem Typhis qui detegat orbes*: Columbus in Neo-Latin Epic Poetry', in *The Classical Tradition and the Americas*, ed. by Wolfgang Haase, Meyer Reinhold, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Berlin and New York: W. de Gruyter, 1994), 420-656, 492.
[181] Fracastorius, *Syphilis*, 68.

against 'quiet peoples, until now quite free' that the Spanish will be visited with 'dreadful sufferings.'[182] Like *Syphilis*, '*Travesties*, I' registers Catholic Spain's notion of Christian conquest.[183] However, in *Syphilis* the Spanish 'give' their religion to the Indians whereas in '*Travesties*, I' the Spanish 'impose' 'new sacraments' on 'the strangers' they destroy.

The contrast between Fracastorius' original poem and Harrison's translation reflects the different purposes of the two poets. In *Syphilis* Columbus' voyage to the new world is narrated 'in order to provide an historical setting for the myth of the origin of syphilis.'[184] By contrast, in '*Travesties*, I' syphilis is employed as a metaphor for the purpose of creating a mythology of retribution for conquest. Harrison has spoken of 'the relativity of translation', the way it can be 'used as a prop to the *status quo*.'[185] Given the allusion to translation in the title, and also in the epigraph, and the colonial contexts of the poem, his comment recalls the view that translation or its absence was often used as a rhetorical tool of imperialism.[186] In '*Travesties*, I' translation is instead a tool of poetic reckoning with conquest. Through translation, Fracastorius' more innocent representation of Columbus' conquest of Ophyre becomes a powerful damnation of all conquest. '*Travesties*, I' also reflects Harrison's simultaneous foci on colonialism and class. The poem addresses the foot-soldiers of the invasion, the 'pilgrims of San Lazaro.' San Lazaro, or Saint Lazarus, is the Catholic patron saint of the poor and diseased. In conquest poor Christian 'pilgrims' pillage and rape. San Lazaro was also the name given by the explorer Ferdinand Magellan

---

[182] *Loiners*, 31-2.
[183] José Rabasa, *Writing Violence on the Northern Frontier: the Historiography of Sixteenth-Century New Mexico and Florida and the Legacy of Conquest* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 142.
[184] Hofman, '*Adveniat tandem Typhis* ', 426.
[185] 'Interview', 245.
[186] See Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism*.

to an archipelago in the Philippines, which he named after Philip II of Spain when claiming it for the Spanish Crown.[187]

The epigraph to '*Travesties*' is a quotation from 'A Defence of Poetry' by the nineteenth- century English Romantic and republican poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822). In a humorous register, Harrison ironically disparages his translation of *Syphilis* by quoting Shelley's view of 'the vanity of translation.'[188] The epigraph reinforces the title 'Travesties' which, as noted, here means a grotesque imitation of literature. In a recent poem, 'Piazza Sannazaro', Harrison also disparages his translation of *Syphilis* after 'almost half a century's gone by.'[189] 'Piazza Sannazaro', a major poem, is the first time Harrison has used the *terza rima* since 'Travesties': 'I gave *terza rima* my first feeble try / translating Fracastorius' *Syphilis.*' However, taking the epigraph for '*Travesties*' from the 'Defence' allows Harrison to speak through Shelley and to locate himself in the English republican literary lineage of Shelley and Milton, whose refusal to write poetry worshipping 'the triumph of kingly power over liberty' is praised in the 'Defence.'[190]

'*Travesties*, I' is a parable of Harrison's republican commitments, as a poet, to justice and liberty for oppressed nations and peoples. '*Travesties*, I' implicitly echoes Shelley's affirmation of poets in earlier epochs as secular prophets and as the people's 'unacknowledged legislators.'[191] The prophesy of rue for the invaders in '*Travesties*, I' also unites the sufferings of a broader humanity and recalls the revolutionary Shelley of 'The Mask of Anarchy', written on the occasion of the Peterloo massacre at Manchester,

---

[187] John Denison Champlin, 'The Discoverer of the Philippines', *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society*, vol. 43, no. 8 (1911), 587-597, 587 and 591.
[188] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in *Shelley's Prose, or The Trumpet of a Prophecy*, ed. with an Introduction and Notes by D.L. Clark (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1988 [1955]), 275-97, 280.
[189] 'Piazza Sannazaro', *London Review of Books*, vol. 32, no. 20 (21 October 2010), 27.
[190] Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', 285.
[191] Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', 297.

1819. Harrison invokes Shelley's clarion call for the English working class and other oppressed peoples to 'Rise, like lions after slumber.'[192] The 'Defence' mediates Harrison's own alignment of poetry with republican 'national struggle for civil and religious liberty.'[193] '*Travesties*, I' is a unifying republican parable of class and colonial oppression from Africa to Peru to Northern England.

'*Travesties*, I' uses literary allusion to mediate parallel republican visions of the Spanish Empire's rape of foreign lands, and the exploitation of the internal colony of Newcastle-upon-Tyne by the British Empire. The subtitle of '*Travesties*, I', '*Distant Ophir*', is also a quotation from the nautical poem 'Cargoes' by the English poet-laureate John Masefield. The allusion to 'Cargoes' mediates Harrison's vision of Newcastle in the age of industrial capitalism. In three five-line stanzas Masefield consecutively depicts three ships of three different empires carrying home foreign treasures. Masefield romanticizes the Roman's quinquireme 'rowing home' with exotic goods 'from distant Ophir', and a Spanish galleon carrying jewels from distant Isthmus home to the Spanish monarchy. As Spencer notes, '*Travesties*' counters the romance of imperial trade found in Masefield's poem.[194] However, the third stanza of 'Cargoes' presents an unromantic vision of a 'dirty British coaster' carrying 'a cargo of Tyne coal, /Road-rails, pig-lead' away from Newcastle.[195] Masefield accepts the despoliation of 'dirty' Newcastle as the price of industrialization. However Harrison, through his combined allusions to 'Cargoes' and *Syphilis*, conveys that the British state and capitalist class shipping out the Ophir of the internal colony of Newcastle are among the 'travesties' of imperial plundering. Because '*Travesties*, I' is

---

[192] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. with and Introduction and Notes by K.N. Cameron (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1951), l. 151, 40.
[193] Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', 296-7.
[194] *Poetry TH*, 30.
[195] John Masefield, 'Cargoes', *The Collected Poems of John Masefield* (London: William Heinemann, 1927 [1923]), l. 11 and ll. 13-14, 56.

about colonialism, and links oppression in Africa and Latin America and Northern England, the poem also exemplifies Harrison's *négritude*.

In '*Travesties*, I' a larger significance of the phrase 'the Old World in the New' is to suggest the continuation of the old barbarism in the new colonialism. The barbarism of neocolonialism is a theme of the other poems in 'The White Queen' and of the other African poems of Part Two of *Loiners*, examined in the next chapter. Harrison replaces enlightenment notions of historical progress with historical cycles of repetition. The phrase from '*Travesties*', I', 'the Old World in the New', is reversed in the title of 'New Worlds for Old' (1970), Harrison's review of new English translations of Latin American poetry.[196] The reversed phrase reflects the shared preoccupation in review and poem with continuities between old and new empires in Latin America and Africa.

In 'New Worlds for Old' Harrison clearly suggests multinationals are the new conquistadors in the lineage of Francisco Pizarro, destroyer of Peru. Pizarro is a key historical figure in the poetic rendering of the Spanish conquest in 'The Conquistadors', from *Canto General* which is the main focus of Harrison's literature review. *Canto General*, first published in 1943, is an epic about Latin America's history and people by the Chilean communist politician and 'people's poet' Pablo Neruda. Harrison admired Neruda's addressing the public theme of multinationals 'rechristening' countries as their dominion. Harrison writes that 'Naming is also claiming. From Pizarro to United Fruit there has been the naming of parts, the signing of papers.'[197] He quotes from Neruda's 'United Fruit Co', where 'Coco Cola, Inc., Anaconda / Ford Motors and other entities'

[196] 'New Worlds for Old,' review of four collections of Latin-American poetry, *London Magazine*, new series, vol. 10, no. 6 (September 1970), 81-5, 83.
[197] 'New Worlds for Old', 83.

'rechristened' Latin American countries '"Banana Republics."'[198] He observes that 'English has names like Gold Coast, Slave Coast, Ivory Coast!'[199] 'Banana Republics' are the modern equivalent of mercantile colonialism's renaming portions of Africa according to their trade interests. In 'The White Queen', as we shall see at the beginning of the next chapter, Harrison, like Neruda, exercises the political agency of the poet as *nomenclature* and bears ironic witness to multinationals stamping their brand names over West African countries. Harrison accepts Neruda's cultural intervention against Capital as a politico-ethical expression of 'brotherhood towards / men I do not know.'[200]

Harrison has recently affirmed that where 'the sufferer and the sympathizer are distinctly unrelated is the very essence of the idea of shared humanity and mortality.'[201] This humanist fraternity is consistent with his identification with the humanism of *négritude*. Harrison's humanism is also signaled through the allusion in the title 'New worlds for old' to Joyce's *Ulysses*, one of Harrison's favorite works. The character Leopold Bloom declares his political vision: 'New worlds for old. Union of all, jew, moslem and gentile. Three acres and a cow for all children of nature.'[202] Bloom was a Jew in Ireland and an iconic outsider but he prophesizes 'the new Bloomusalem.'[203] He calls for a 'universal brotherhood' in which all will prosper regardless of religion or race.[204] The Mob soon call for Bloom to be lynched and roasted[205] but Harrison seconds his, and Joyce's, rejection of

---

[198] 'New Worlds for Old', 83. See also Pablo Neruda, 'The United Fruit Co.', *Canto General: 50th Anniversary Edition*, trans. by Jack Schmitt with an Introduction by Roberto González Echevarria, Latin American Literature and Culture, vol. 7 (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000 [1991]), 179.
[199] 'New Worlds for Old', 83.
[200] 'All Out', 89. The line is from Neruda's 'To My Party' but in the translation of *Canto General* by Jack Schmitt the line is: 'You have given me fraternity towards the / unknown man.' Neruda, *Canto General*, 398.
[201] 'The Tears and the Trumpets', *Arion*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2001), 1-22, 18.
[202] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, A critical and synoptic edition prepared by Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior (New York: Garland, 1984), 1061.
[203] Joyce, *Ulysses*, 1049.
[204] Joyce, *Ulysses*, 1061.
[205] Joyce, *Ulysses*, 1066-7.

racial, sectarian and national hatreds, and their love of the citizen for the city and for men. Harrison's anti-colonial humanism and cosmopolitan republicanism profoundly inform the political, historical and literary dimensions of the poems which have been examined in this chapter. The next chapter offers a sequence of contextual readings of the African poems of Part Two of *Loiners*.

Chapter 4

African Poems of 'Sex and History'

Part Two of *Loiners* contains Harrison's African poems of 'sex and history.'[1] These poems 'enact dramatically the confrontation of Europe and Africa' through the sexual lives of expatriate loiners in West Africa.[2] Many of the poems contain satirical exposés of European sexual exploits and their negation of the safety and dignity of the Africans. Sexual predatoriness and disease are used as metaphors for wider colonial and neocolonial power relations. The poems are preoccupied with the colonial history and neocolonial dilemmas of Nigeria and wider West Africa, and the 'complicated social and historical reasons' which Harrison has said are important to his poetry are particularly challenging in these poems.[3] Understanding the African poems of place and their politics requires an examination of their African contexts. However, the dense allusive fields of these poems have hitherto been largely unremarked in the scholarship. This chapter presents contextual information necessary for understanding the political references in the poetry.

Harrison's witness of what he called the 'great mess' in Africa,[4] particularly Nigeria, is critical to understanding the African poems of Part Two of *Loiners*. There are explicit and metaphorical signs of genocide and of the looming Nigerian-Biafran War (1967-70) in the poems. The British colonial administration had divided Nigeria into three regions at Federation in 1954, each led by a governing party that centered on the major ethnic group in the region: Hausa-Fulani Muslims in the North, the Christian Igbo in the South and the

---

[1] 'Interview', 231.
[2] *THP*, uncatalogued and unnumbered.
[3] *Tony Harrison: Poets and People*, a Freeway Films Production for Channel 4 (1984).
[4] Letter to Silkin (25 August 1967).

animist Yoruba in the West.[5] Colonial rule and cartography 'created the conditions for conflict by sharpening class, ethnic and regional divisions in Nigeria.'[6] The establishment of the secessionist state of Biafra as a homeland for the Igbo in 1967 on an oil-rich region of the Niger Delta was also an important factor in the war.[7] The politico-economic importance of oil is registered in several poems, with implicit reference to the war. The oil giant British Petroleum Shell, whose exploitation in the Niger Delta is now well documented is also among the many multinationals named in the poems.[8]

The African poems allude to capitalist 'sharks' as signs of the replacement of the old imperialism with the reign of multinationals, as the basic units of neo-colonialism in Nigeria.[9] The poems reflect Harrison's observations in a letter that foreign investors were scrambling for Nigeria's wealth in her first decade of independence.[10] The rampant corruption and two military coups in Nigeria in the 1960s are also referred to in the African poems and in letters.[11] Historical events such as genocide, coups and imminent war may have contributed to Harrison's decision to leave Nigeria in 1966 and were among his reasons for not taking another academic post in Africa in 1967.[12]

---

[5] Larry Diamond, 'Class, Ethnicity, and the Democratic State: Nigeria, 1950-1966', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 25, no. 3 (1983), 457-489, 457-59. For a more detailed discussion of

[6] Barbara Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919-1945* (London: Routledge, 1999), 125.

[7] Chibuike Uche, 'Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War', *Journal of African History*, vol. 49, no. 1 (2008), 111-135. See also Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea* (Columbia University Press, 2007), 179-80.

[8] J.I. Dibua, 'Citizenship and Resource Control in Nigeria: The Case of Minority Communities in the Niger Delta', *Africa Spectrum*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2005), 5-28, 14-20.

[9] Bade Onimode, 'Imperialism and Multinational Corporations: A Case Study of Nigeria', *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1978), 207-232, 207.

[10] Letter to Silkin (8 November 1964).

[11] Letter to Silkin (4 December 1962 and 28 February 1963). For a discussion of the political situation in Nigeria in the period leading to the civil war see S.K. Panter-Brick, ed., *Nigerian Politics and Military Rule: Prelude to the Civil War* (London: Athlone Press, 1970).

[12] Letter to Jon Silkin (25 August 1967).

The epigraph to Part Two of *Loiners* usefully introduces the African poems, although it was dropped from the later *Selected* and *Collected* editions of Harrison's poems. The epigraph is a quotation from *Religio Medici* by Sir Thomas Browne: '*There is all Africa and her prodigies in us; we are that bold and adventurous piece of Nature*.'[13] Browne's elevated literary conception of self exploration is implicitly contrasted to the lived ignoble adventures in Africa of the European expatriates in these poems. The epigraph's suggestion of myriad potentialities within one entity has particular application to the divided form of the poem that immediately follows it. 'The White Queen' is a sequence of five poems that are each divided into three or more further parts. In the original publication of *Loiners* '*Satyrae*', the first poem in 'The White Queen', has five parts; '*The Railroad Heroides*' has four parts; '*Travesties*' and '*Manica*' have three parts; and 'from *The Zeg-Zeg Postcards*' has twenty-seven parts.[14] Of the other three poems in Part Two, 'The Songs of the PWD Man' and 'The Death of the PWD Man' each have two parts. 'The Heart of Darkness' is the only poem in Part Two that is not internally divided in its form but it dramatizes European psychic fragmentation in Africa, as the allusion to Conrad's famous novella signals. The epigraph uses Africa as a metaphor for the exotically foreign and is an excited evocation of the potentialities of the self. The poems that follow are preoccupied with the 'infinite possibilities for crimes committed in the spirit of play' by colonial adventurers,[15] and the Conradian theme of human 'darkness' and tales of horror perpetrated in Africa.

---

[13] Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*, ed. by Jean-Jacques Denonain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953) i. 15, 24.

[14] As noted in the previous chapter, in the original publication of *Loiners* the title 'from *The Zeg-Zeg Postcards*' is italicized except for 'from' and for the roman numerals that designate individual poems. The abbreviated references '*Zeg-Zeg Postcard*' or simply '*Postcard*' are primarily used in the thesis in order to simplify presentation.

[15] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), 191.

I

The title 'The White Queen' refers primarily to the central character and the fictional author of the poems in this sequence, a homosexual poet and professor from Northern England, an expatriate academic in Africa who is partly satirically identified with Harrison.[16] The title 'The White Queen' also alludes to Queen Victoria, figurehead of the golden age of the British Empire. Harrison refers to Victoria as 'the great White Queen' of Africa, India and Northern England in a subsequent literature review.[17] In the poems Victoria still roams post-colonial Africa as a predatory ghost,[18] incarnate in the character of the White Queen. The White 'Queen', a homosexual predator, is a scatological alter-ego for the puritanical Victoria. The White Queen is also a representative expatriate figure. The poems draw on Harrison's observations of expatriates, whose insular privilege is presented against the backdrop of African poverty and violence. The title expresses Harrison's republican contempt at the way the expatriate community (of which he was a highly disaffected member)[19] was treated like white royalty in black Africa.

The title '*Satyrae*' alludes to the Roman satirist Juvenal's *Satyrae* and signals that some of these poems take up Juvenal's strident satiric stance, moral indignation and use of demotic and obscene language in classical forms.[20] The title '*Satyrae*' also puns on the satyr-like behaviour of the White Queen, the speaker of the poem. In '*Satyrae*, I' the White Queen introduces himself as a 'Professor! Poet! Provincial Dadaist!',[21] a member of

---

[16] The titles of the poems that make up 'The White Queen' are italicized in the original publication of *Loiners* (whereas the main title 'The White Queen' and most other titles in *Loiners* are not italicized), and this might be to typographically distinguish the poems in the 'The White Queen' sequence because the eponymous character the White Queen is their fictional author.
[17] 'Black and white and red all over: the fiction of Empire', *London Magazine*, new series, vol. 12, no. 3 (August / September 1972), 90-103, 94.
[18] *THP*, uncatalogued and unnumbered.
[19] Letter to Silkin (28 February 1963)
[20] Juvenal, *Satyrae*, trans. by John Ferguson (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979).
[21] 'The White Queen 1: *Satyrae*, I', *Loiners*, 20.

Europe's cultural elite. However, he spends his time molesting 'ugly, frightened, black' boys.[22] For a few shillings the regal White Queen, and implicitly other expatriate paedophiles, can command 'ill-fed' boys: '*One masta want / One boy – one boy for bed ...*'. Colonial rape, particularly sodomy, symbolizes the rapacity of Europe's treatment of Africa in the poems. *Vaseline Petroleum Jelly* is favoured by the White Queen as an aid in sodomizing African boys. *Vaseline*, an oil by-product, and its sexual uses symbolize the oil industry's part in what Harrison described as 'the pitiful lot of the general people'[23] in oil-rich Nigeria.

'The White Queen' bears witness to global Capital dominating African urban landscapes and defining nations as merely economic markets. Harrison exercises the political agency of the poet as an ironic *nomenclature* by implicitly questioning whether Africa should be stamped with the brand names of multinationals. Western commercial commodities are omnipresent: *Vaseline,*[24] *Coca-Cola,*[25] Dunlop,[26] VW,[27] *Raleigh,*[28] *Guinness,*[29] *Stars,*[30] *Black & White,*[31] *White Horse,*[32] *Peugeot,*[33] *Light Ale,*[34] Bitter,[35] *Somalgins,*[36] BUTOX,[37] *Phenobarbitone,*[38] *Dettol,*[39] *Od-o-ro-no,*[40] *Players,*[41] *Turkish Delight,*[42] *Shelltox,*[43] *Volks*[44]

---

[22] *Loiners*, 21.
[23] Letter to Silkin (28 February 1963).
[24] *Satyrae*, I', *Loiners*, 21.
[25] 'The White Queen 5: from *The Zeg-Zeg Postcards,*XVI', *Loiners*, 43.
[26] '*Postcard*, XV', *Loiners*, 43. 'Dunlop' is one of several brand names that are not italicized in *Loiners*.
[27] '*Postcard*, XXII, *Loiners*, 44.
[28] '*Postcard*, XV', *Loiners*, 43.
[29] 'The White Queen 4: *Manica*, I: *The Origin of the Beery Way*, *Loiners*, 36.
[30] '*The Origin of the Beery Way*', *Loiners*, 36.
[31] '*The Origin of the Beery Way*', *Loiners*, 35.
[32] '*Postcard*, XI', *Loiners*, 42; and '*Satyrae*, III', *Loiners*, 23.
[33] '*Satyrae*, IV', *Loiners*, 26.
[34] 'The Death of the PWD Man, II', *Loiners*, 55.
[35] 'The Death of the PWD Man, II', *Loiners*, 56.
[36] 'The Death of the PWD Man, II', *Loiners*, 56.
[37] '*Postcard*, XVIII', *Loiners*, 44.
[38] 'The Death of the PWD Man, II', *Loiners*, 56.
[39] '*The Origin of the Beery Way*', *Loiners*, 35.
[40] '*The Origin of the Beery Way*', *Loiners*, 35.
[41] '*Postcard*, XI', *Loiners*, 41.

VW[45] and Chevie.[46] Harrison had observed that foreign investment in Nigeria was grievously exploitative and did not benefit the people: 'And the "great" powers pour in the money. Russians come, Americans, British, Arabs from the U.A.R, Germans come, all wanting a pull of the string. And only a few seem to benefit from it all.'[47] The recurring poetic image in the African poems of 'a sharpened piece of Chevie'[48] and 'flashy Chevie fins / Honed up for knife blades'[49] puns upon the colloquial term 'capitalist shark' and suggests multinationals are powerful economic predators in politically and economically weak countries.

'*Satyrae*, III' alludes to the notorious political corruption in Nigeria and the related military coups in January and July, 1966. The poem displays an oppressive military presence in civil society, with armoured trucks on the streets, curfews, patrols, shells and shots. A 'new anthem' blares and a voice over a megaphone 'promises corruption's dead and lies / Riddled with bullets in three mortuaries.'[50] The killing of corruption and the bullet-riddled bodies refer to the motivations and methods of the coup conspirators. Harrison had observed the 'cloak and dagger' character of Nigerian politics and that the native elite were as flagrantly willing to rob the people as the old colonial masters.[51] The government ranks were 'often living on appropriated funds' and 'there are Ministerial swindles as a matter of course.'[52] Chinua Achebe (whom Harrison was reading at this

---

[42] '*Postcard*, XVII', *Loiners*, 43.
[43] 'The White Queen 2: *The Railroad Heroides*, II', *Loiners*, 29.
[44] '*Satyrae*, I', *Loiners*, 20.
[45] '*Postcard*, XXII', *Loiners*, 44.
[46] '*Postcard*, XV', *Loiners*, 43.
[47] Letter to Silkin (28 January 1963).
[48] '*Postcard*, XV', *Loiners*, 43.
[49] 'The Songs of the PWD Man, II', *Loiners,* 52.
[50] '*Satyrae*, III', *Loiners*, 24.
[51] Letter to Silkin (28 February 1963).
[52] Letter to Silkin (28 February 1963). The appropriated funds Harrison refers to include the substantial bribes paid by private business interests to government officials in return for lucrative contracts and licenses

time) called the civil administration a 'cesspool of corruption and misrule' and 'kleptocracy' that prompted the coup and assassinations.[53] The poem's rhyming pun on 'lies' / 'mortuaries' associates deceitful propaganda and murder with the new regime, suggesting grave doubts about their methods and potential. '*Satyrae*, IV', which satirically projects the thoughts of a respectable English teacher, spinster and alcoholic condemning the drinking and sexuality and chaos of 'black creatures', includes the observation that '*coups* / Can throw the whole white quarter on the booze.'[54] The January military coup in Nigeria forced the civilian government to cede power to the military. The July military coup and pogroms against the Igbo led to calls for the secession of the Republic of Biafra, which was followed by the Nigerian-Biafran war.

'*Satyrae*, I' and '*Satyrae*, III' are also preoccupied with the persecution of homosexuals in Muslim Northern Nigeria. The Nigerian state regards homosexuality as a grievous crime, on par with murder and rape. The shaky White Queen listens to the proclamation of the '*death!*' sentence for homosexuality.[55] '*Satyrae*, I' sympathetically presents the fearless sexuality of the Negro in a Nigerian bar who was 'not scared.'[56] His hooker's cowboy suit doubles as sartorial code for out and proud. The White Queen eludes the police checking the gay bars and, upon entering the relative safety of the university, defiantly declares his homosexuality:

> I come back raddled to the campus bar
> And shout out how I laid a big, brute
> Negro in a tight, white cowboy suit.[57]

---

and the diversion of vast amounts of public money, mainly oil profits, into private accounts. See Diamond, 'Class, Ethnicity, and the Democratic State', 462.

[53] Chinua Achebe, 'The African Writer and the Biafran Cause', in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1975), 78-84.

[54] '*Satyrae*, IV', *Loiners*, 26.

[55] '*Satyrae*, III', *Loiners*, 24.

[56] '*Satyrae*, I', *Loiners*, 21.

[57] '*Satyrae*, I', *Loiners*, 22.

The two last stanzas of '*Satyrae*, III' also allude to the medical incarceration and torture of homosexuals in 1960s Christian Britain. The White Queen imagines himself back in London as one of the 'queers' and 'erotomaniacs' who are 'locked away', 'trussed' and screaming, suggesting the administering of electric shocks and other standard 'aversion therapies' in 1960s Britain. The White Queen describes himself as 'pathetic' because he is 'pathic',[58] recalling the view that the 'sexual invert' was morally and intellectually deformed.[59] The White Queen reflects on the capital punishment proclaimed in Nigeria and juxtaposes the treatment of homosexuals back home.

'*Satyrae*, I', 'The Songs of the PWD Man, I' and entries in 'from *The Zeg-Zeg Postcards*' are also preoccupied with what sexual liberty and violence mean in the context of colonial power relations. The White 'Queen' is 'Pathic, pathetic, half-blind and half-pissed / Most of these tours in Africa. A Corydon ...'.[60] '*Satyrae*, I' is a fictional entry in the autobiographical genre of homosexual tourism, which is explicitly preoccupied with homoeroticism, sexual politics and colonial exploitation.[61] The White Queen describes how 'I sometimes cruise / For boys the blackness of a two-day bruise.'[62] The end-line rhyme on 'cruise' / 'bruise' underlines the violence of European homosexual tourism and paedophilia. However, in '*Satyrae*, I' the persecuted homosexual and his young prey are both allowed the concern due to victims. The poem moves between the terrain of homosexual oppression and homosexual liberty in the colonies.

---

[58] '*Satyrae*, I', *Loiners*, 20.
[59] See for example André Gide, *Corydon* (New York: Octagon Books, 1977 [1950]), 22.
[60] '*Satyrae*, I', *Loiners*, 20.
[61] Judith Still, 'Not Really Prostitution: The Political Economy of Sexual Tourism in Gide's *Si Le Grain Ne Meurt*', *French Studies*, vol. 54, no. 1 (2000), 17-34. Famous authors in the autobiographical genre of homosexual tourism include Gide, Wilde, Flaubert, Barthes, Foucault and Orton.
[62] '*Satyrae*, I', *Loiners*, 20.

'The White Queen' examines European homosexual liberation in Africa in the context of the oppression of the colonial other through *la lutte*. The poem reflects Harrison's interest in the struggle of opposite perspectives and needs conceived by André Gide, the French man of letters, critic of colonialism and, the poem suggests, an apologist for homosexual tourists in North Africa. The White Queen is 'a Corydon',[63] an allusion to Virgil's pastoral in the second *Eclogue* but also to Gide's *Corydon*, an early defence of homosexuality in the aftermath of scandals in England, France and Germany in the late nineteenth century which involved such writers as Verlaine and Rimbaud, and Oscar Wilde whom Gide knew. Wilde is described as a victim in *Corydon* and sympathetically portrayed in Gide's novel *The Immoralist*.[64] The allusion to Gide links the persecution of the White Queen to an earlier chapter in the British and European persecution of homosexual men. The allusion to Gide in '*Satyrae*, I', a poem about European homosexual tourism, refers to *The Immoralist* and the second part of *If it Die*, which both discuss Europeans' sexual encounters with Arab boys in the then French colony of Algeria.[65] Harrison invokes Gide's defence of homosexuality but contrapuntally suggests that the classical apologia for pederasty in *Corydon* is a sophisticated justification for the White Queen's 'taste in little boys.'[66]

Gide's *la lutte* is also significant for Harrison's wider sense of responsibility as an artist to give sincere rather than received accounts of the various voices in his work, but equally to be true to his historical criticisms of their viewpoints:

---

[63] *Loiners*, 20.
[64] André Gide, *The Immoralist*, trans. by Dorothy Bussy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948 [1930]). The character of Menalque is based on Wilde and has been the subject of a scandal and lawsuit.
[65] André Gide, *If it Die: An Autobiography*, trans. by Dorothy Bussy (New York: Vintage Books, 2001 [1935]), 287-88.
[66] 'Interview', 245.

> It's a struggle and dialectic, what Gide called "*La Lutte*." There are so many ironies in my work ... because I keep all the responsibilities and wounds open: keeping them open is to refuse a compromise.[67]

Gide's influence upon the intellectual structure of struggle and opposites in Harrison's poetry is implicitly presented in *The School of Eloquence* sonnet 'A Good Read.'

'A Good Read' begins by naming Gide, Marx and Ibsen as formative intellectual influences for Harrison and then unfolds a Gidean dialogue between him and his working-class father. Mr Harrison '*nivver 'ad much time for a good read.*'[68] His resentment at his 'stuck-up bugger' son conveys that 'the arts' belong to those with the time for meaningful literacy. The father's experience defines his son's Marxist recognition that the arts are the domain of the bourgeoisie, a preoccupation of *The School of Eloquence*. The poet addresses his father in the sonnet: 'I've come round to your position on "'the Arts" / but put it down in poems, that's the bind.'[69] Harrison's polyphony and structure of opposites has been discussed mainly in relation to *v.* but the poetry is widely informed by a Gidean dialectic of struggle and irreconcilable tensions.

Tensions between European sexual freedom, existential crises and colonial oppression in Africa are also dramatized in heterosexual, working-class terms in 'The Songs of the PWD Man' and 'The Death of the PWD Man.' These dramatic monologues in rhyming couplets are narrated by a loiner who is working in Africa as a Public Works Department man. The Northern machismo of the PWD Man contrasts with the refined sensibility of the gay poet and professor, the White Queen, but conflicts between the liberation of self and the oppression of the colonial other is dramatized in both characters. The Public Works Department man is escaping the Death-in-life 'for old men back in Leeds,' and is instead

---

[67] 'Interview', 245-246.
[68] 'A Good Read', *CP*, 152.
[69] *CP*, 152.

cruising for sex 'from Kano to the coast.'[70] In the satire of *Loiners* class has no correlation to the decency associated with Harrison's parents' generation of Northerners in *School*. In Africa all a white man needs is 'Just a bit of money and a pair of young, black hands.'[71] Peter Porter and Colin Nicholson have observed that the energetic rhythms of 'The Songs of the PWD Man' derive from Kipling, and in turn from the music-hall songs and recitations that are also an important cultural influence upon Harrison.[72] The poem's energetic rhythms match the PWD Man's eager pursuit of the sexual opportunities afforded by his role reversal from oppressed proletarian in England to white oppressor in Africa.

However, the PWD Man's intense anxiety and fear of death lends him *gravitas* and renders him a more sympathetic figure. He anticipates dying in a car accident:

> That sudden, skating backwheel skid across the laterite,
> Or a lorry without headlights, GOD IS LOVE up on the cab,
> Might impale me on my pistons like a raw *kebab*.
> Smash turned into landscape, ambulance, that's that,
> A white corpse starkers like a suddenly skinned cat.[73]

The imagined car accident in the poem may derive from Harrison's experience of a near-accident in Africa. He writes: 'I skidded in a car, went off the road into the bush, and bounced over about three times ...Very near. It's started me off on poetry again.'[74] In a manuscript version of 'The Death of the PWD Man' he sees his reflection in the train

---

[70] 'The Songs of the PWD Man, I', *Loiners*, 52.
[71] *Loiners*, 52.
[72] Colin Nicholson, '"Reciprocal recognitions": race, class and subjectivity in Tony Harrison's *The Loiners*', *Race & Class*, vol. 51, no. 4 (2010) 59-78, 75. See also Peter Porter, 'In the Bosom of Family', *London Magazine*, new series, vol. 10, no. 5 (1970), 72-8, 75. See also Rudyard Kipling, *Complete Verse* (New York: Anchor Press, 1989 [1940]).
[73] *Loiners*, 53.
[74] Letter to Silkin (10 May 1964).

window: 'me, the anxious ghost.'[75] Harrison allows the reader to empathize with the interior struggles of the PWD man but also unsparingly satirizes him.

Like Harrison and the White Queen, the PWD man has circled from Africa back to England and in 'The Death of the PWD Man' he takes the train North. The PWD man's medicated diseases include an anxiety whose accelerating intensity is likened to the hurtling rhythm of the train, and similarly threatens to derail its frightened passenger. The rhythmic repetition of the word '*anxious*' evokes the sound of the train:

> *Anxious, anxious, anxious, anxious, perhaps the train'll crash.*
> *Anxious, anxious, anxious, Doctor Adgie, there's a rash*
> *The shape of bloody Britain and it's starting to spread.*
> *My belly's like a blow-up globe all blotched with Empire red.*
> *Chancres, chancres, Shetlands, spots, boils, Hebrides,*
> *Atlasitis, Atlasitis, British Isles Disease!*[76]

The PWD Man's anxiety is also the vehicle for Harrison's dramatization of 'The Imperial Dream, a dream that turned into a sort of psychosomatic disorder',[77] which is playfully called 'Atlasitis, British Isles disease' in the poem. 'Atlasitis', as Bruce Woodcock observes, can be construed as 'an obsession with dominating the Atlas.'[78] The PWD Man and the White Queen 'are both in their different ways haunted by the ghosts of imperialism, existentially and psychosomatically.'[79]

The PWD Man and the White Queen are characters in which Harrison dramatizes 'the sexual exploits of expatriate Englishmen doing things in Africa they wouldn't get an opportunity to do in a country where their own moral restraints were still in operation.'[80]

---

[75] 'The Death of The PWD Man', Northern Arts Ms. Collection Vol. 6, 'Tony Harrison', The Literary and Philosophical Society, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
[76] 'The Death of the PWD Man, II', *Loiners*, 55.
[77] 'Fiction of Empire', 92.
[78] Bruce Woodcock '"Internal Colonialism": Is Tony Harrison a post-colonial poet?', *New Literatures Review*, no. 35, summer 1998, pp. 76-94, 82.
[79] *THP*, uncatalogued and unnumbered.
[80] *Them & [uz]: A Portrait of Tony Harrison*, *Arena*, BBC TV (15 April 1985).

Harrison found a fictional prototype of the PWD Man in 'Josephus Taedium Vitae', a character in *The Seductive Coast: Poems Lyrical and Seductive from Western Africa* (1909) by J.M. Stewart Young.[81] In a letter Harrison reproduces a few lines from *The Seductive Coast*: 'Withal he has a wife at home: three black ones also here / While two have earned him "black and tans", and a fourth may appear.'[82] In West Africa Young was labeled 'the West African Kipling', [83] though in Europe he has always been regarded as a minor poet. Harrison admiration for Young's 'Kiplingesque but subversively randy lyrics'[84] reflects the bawdy style and interest in colonials 'Shacking with natives'[85] in the African poems in *Loiners*. Harrison found Young's 'beautiful book' in Manchester,[86] where Young was a low-paid clerk with social ambitions beyond his position, and a forger and 'jailbird.'[87] Young settled in Nigeria, where he became a wealthy businessman and established a partly fraudulent identity as a literary gentleman. His stature was enhanced by his false claims of friendship with 'Cousin Ruddy' Kipling.[88] Young is a nineteenth century version of the PWD man in that he was a lower-class Englishman finding wealth and sexual freedoms in Africa. Young was a homosexual, like the White Queen, and other Europeans in Africa regarded him 'as one of the many "queer fellows" to find a home in the British Empire.'[89] Harrison's interest in Young and his character Josephus Taedium Vitae reflects his focus in

---

[81] Letter to Ross (16 February 1970). *The Seductive Coast: Poems Lyrical and Seductive from Western Africa* was published under the name O. Dazi Oka but the author is generally thought to be J.M. Stewart-Young and this is who Harrison refers to as the author. See also George Lang, 'Ghana and Nigeria', in *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*, vol. 1, ed. by Albert S. Gérard (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiado, 1986), 108-115, 108.
[82] Letter to Ross (16 February 1970).
[83] Stephanie Newell, *The Forger's Tale: The Search for Odeziaku* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 139.
[84] Letter to Ross (16 February 1970).
[85] 'The White Queen 4: *Manica*, I: *The Origin of the Beery Way*', *Loiners*, 35.
[86] Letter to Ross (16 February 1970).
[87] Newell, *The Forger's Tale*, 29-30.
[88] Newell, *The Forger's Tale*, 140.
[89] Newell, *The Forger's Tale*, 3.

Loiners on Europeans escaping their class and sexual repression in Victorian and 1960s England, but also abusing their liberty in colonial Africa.

'from *The Zeg-Zeg Postcards*' is a sequence of short poems whose subject is often the White Queen's illicit lusts for Africans and, subtextually, the relationship between Europe and Africa, and it is these '*Postcards*' that have been selected for special examination in this chapter. There are twenty-seven poems and a Note in '*Zeg-Zeg Postcards*' in the original publication of *Loiners*. Only fifteen '*Postcards*' are retained in the later *Selected Poems* and *Collected Poems* and they are accordingly renumbered in later *Selected* and *Collected* editions. The White Queen is the fictional author of '*Zeg-Zeg Postcards*', a selection from the collection of short poems the White Queen wrote on the back of postcards. That these poems about Africa were written on postcards of or from Europe emphasizes their preoccupation with the relationship between these civilizations. The '*Postcards*' were addressed to an illiterate lover and this symbolizes vast inequities between Europe and Africa and the exclusion of the colonial subject from a discourse about them.

The title '*Zeg-Zeg Postcards*' signals Harrison's awareness of the history of Nigeria and wider West Africa that informs Part Two of *Loiners*. Zeg Zeg was the name historians and geographers of the middle ages gave to the region now known as Zaria, the state in Northern Nigeria where Harrison was based. The title also suggests Zeg Zeg or Zaria was where the White Queen too, as the fictional author of the '*Postcards*', was based. Harrison's attribution of authorship to the White Queen is an aspect of the 'autobiographical fallacy' he observed with reference to this Queer character and 'the

wrong sort of propositions'[90] from the poet's admirers. Like the White Queen, Harrison was a highly ambivalent member of the expatriate enclave summarized in '*Postcard*, III' (it was dropped from the *Selected Poems* and *Collected Poems*): 'Hypocrites! / Excleopatriates!'[91] The merging of 'expatriate' and the Egyptian Queen 'Cleopatra' recalls '*Satyrae*, I', where the White Queen's lifestyle in Africa is also akin to royalty: 'In sub-Saharan scrub, I hold my court / On expat pay, my courtiers all bought.'[92] The expat's 'inane round of boozy parties'[93] is also satirized in the scene of 'rowdy booze-ups' infused with desperation in '*Satyrae*, II.'[94]

'*Postcard*, I' charts the White Queen's geographical and sexual journeying between Europe and Africa: 'Africa - London - Africa- / to get it away.'[95] In Africa a white man can get away with statutory rape and killing: 'What begins in honest lust can end / with innocent blood on its hands.'[96] The White Queen regularly gets 'a stand'[97] from 'a lean Fulani boy/ or girl.'[98] His English 'sense of ceremonial' requires having 'buttons on my flies'[99] but doesn't regulate a savagery that is alternately Dionysian and an effect of European power in Africa.

In three consecutive poems, '*Postcards* XVI, XVII and XVIII', the White Queen envisions black bodies as pornographic consumer products. He likens a black man showering 'to cool *Coca-Cola*;'[100] a black lover to 'licked back bright' '*Turkish Delight*',[101]

---

[90] Letter to Ross (16 February 1970).
[91] '*Postcard*, III', *Loiners*, 40.
[92] '*Loiners*, 20.
[93] Letter to Silkin (28 February 1963).
[94] '*Satyrae*, II', *Loiners*, 22-23.
[95] '*Postcard*, I', *Loiners*, 40.
[96] '*Postcard*, IX', *Loiners*, 41. This '*Postcard*' was dropped from the *Selected Poems* and *Collected Poems*.
[97] '*Postcard*, XIII', *Loiners*, 42.
[98] '*Postcard*, II', *Loiners*, 40.
[99] '*Postcard*, V', *Loiners*, 40 .
[100] '*Postcard*, XVI', *Loiners*, 43.

and black buttocks are pronounced as '*loo*; *cocks*' to create the rhyme with 'BUTOX.'[102] Conversely, '*Postcard*, XVII' is a seductive though ideologically tainted sketch of inter-racial homosexual intimacy. The lover's 'shake baby powder over each other' and laugh like 'childish ghosts of ourselves.'[103] Some '*Postcards*' are simply bawdy puns upon 'useful' Hausa words and phrases, most succinctly in '*Postcard*, X': 'I'd like to / *sukuru* / you' ('screw').[104] Other '*Postcards*' portray self-gratifying aesthetic and sentimental elements of the White Queen's always libidinous interests in Africans.[105]

In '*Postcard*, XX' the White Queen uses erotic and political wit in a metaphorical appeal to a lover, an appeal which depends on knowledge of the map of Senegambia. In 1891 the British protectorate of Gambia was marked as a spindly, awkward intrusion into French Senegal, making it one of the few examples of one country being almost entirely enveloped by another.[106] The Donne-like conceit of identifying sexual with colonial conquest alludes with pornographic humour to the cartographic image of a phallic Gambia inside the feminized Senegal:

> *Mon égal*!
> Let me be the Gambia
> in your Senegal.[107]

The pornographic use of the map has a political point to make about European redrawing of the map of Africa and the invasive colonial enterprise. The address in French to '*Mon égal*' ['my equal'] ironically registers the French Revolution's foundational ideals of

---

[101] '*Postcard*, XVII', *Loiners*, 43
[102] '*Postcard*, XVIII', *Loiners*, 44.
[103] '*Postcard*, XVII', *Loiners*, 43.
[104] '*Postcard*, XIX', *Loiners*, 44. The footnote explains: '*sukuru*: Hausa> English screw, as *sukurudireba* > English screwdriver. A useful portmanteau word.' See *Loiners*, 46. See also '*Postcard*, X', *Loiners*, 41.
[105] '*Postcards* VI, VII, VIII', *Loiners*, 41. '*Postcard*, VI' was dropped from later *Selected* and *Collected* editions of the poems.
[106] Arnold Hughes and David Perfect, eds., *Historical Dictionary of the Gambia* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), xxiii. See also Ewan W. Anderson, *International Boundaries: A Geopolitical Atlas* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 306-08.
[107] '*Postcard*, XX', *Loiners*, 44.

liberté, égalité, fraternité[108] in the context of colonial partition and slave trading in the former Senegambia. '*Postcard*, XX' is a comic epigram concerned with colonial partition and the most tragic *inégalité*, slavery.

'*Postcard*, XXVI' (dropped from later *Selected* and *Collected* editions of the poems) wittily expresses Harrison's view that Christian missionaries were in no position to enlighten Africans spiritually or 'to talk about "liberalising Islam."'[109] The White Queen watches African boys with an indigenous icon of Christ:

> They had a thing with scaly skin and devil's head
> bristling with antlers: *Jesus Christ*, they said.
> I stuck notes on their forehead and sent
> them hotfoot with my blessings to the Reverend's.[110]

African religious rituals have typically been viewed as primitive by Westerners. The counteracting atheist sentiment here is that the primitivism of Christianity is rendered transparent by child's play. The poem delights in the boy's translation of the colonizer's religion into African cultural terms and gives its blessing to their inadvertent subversion of colonial cultural power.

The immediate subject of '*Postcard*, XV' is genocide as an activity of ordinary people. To expatriate spectators like the White Queen genocide appears to be a disturbing recreational activity of the natives. The White Queen is woken from his nap by 'the flap of Dunlop sandals, drums, / terrifying cries' outside.[111] The Queen's thoughts return to tea and his bothersome 'clap' because he is safely ensconced in a building surrounded by

---

[108] See for example the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789)*, in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: a Brief Documentary History*, ed. and trans. with an Introduction by Lyn Hunt (Boston: Bedford Books, 1996), 77-9.
[109] Letters to Silkin (4 December 1962).
[110] '*Postcard*, XXVI', *Loiners*, 45.
[111] '*Postcard*, XV', *Loiners*, 43.

security mesh, like the speaker in 'The Heart of Darkness' whose residence is encased by 'weldmesh / thief-bars.'[112] The White Queen finally registers the horrifying reality outside:

> I stagger up and see
> through mesh and acacia sharp metal flash,
> my steward, still in white uniform and sash,
> waving a sharpened piece of Chevie, ride
> his old *Raleigh* to the genocide.[113]

The poem synthesizes different historical chapters of genocide, African and European, with a brilliant pun. *Raleigh* is both the brand name of an English motorcycle and bicycle and the English poet and voyager Sir Walter Raleigh (1552-1618), who wrote an account of 'The Discovery of the Large, Rich and Beautiful Empire of Guiana',[114] and is one of the knight-errants at the start of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Unlike Chevie or Chevrolet, the car referred to in the poem, *Raleigh* is italicized to draw attention to it as a proper noun. The detail of Africans riding Western bikes like *Raleighs* and wearing 'Dunlop sandals' to massacres also iconically links capitalist modernity, ethno-political competition for resources and ethnic violence, and implies Western capitalism's and imperialism's ultimate responsibility for the killing.[115]

The contemporary historical moment of '*Postcard*, XV' is the slaughter of Igbos living in enclaves in Northern Nigeria, following the January 1966 coup led by Igbo members of the Nigerian army. The massacres were followed by a mass exodus of the Igbo to Eastern Nigeria, which became the secessionist Republic of Biafra and the homeland of the Igbo. The subsequent genocide in Biafra suffuses *Loiners* and is an historical atrocity imprinted in

---

[112] 'The Heart of Darkness', *Loiners*, 49.
[113] '*Postcard*, XV', *Loiners*, 43.
[114] Sir Walter Raleigh, 'The Discovery of the Large, Rich and Beautiful Empire of Guiana, With a relation of the Great and Golden City of Manoa (which the Spaniards call El Dorado) And the provinces of Emeria, Arromaia, Amapaia and other Countries, with their rivers, adjoining.' This is the Epistle Dedicatory preceding 'The Discovery of Guiana', in *Sir Walter Raleigh: Selected Writings*, ed. by Gerald Hammond (Manchester: Carcanet, 1984), 76-123.
[115] For an analysis of the violent ethno-political competition for the resources of modernization in Nigeria in the 1960s see Diamond, 'Class, Ethnicity, and the Democratic State ', 460.

Harrison's poetry that has not been recognized in the extant scholarship. Rowland excavates holocaust as a category of analysis for Harrison's poetry but restricts it largely to the Jewish Holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and a projected nuclear holocaust, and makes no reference to Nigeria or Biafra.[116] *Loiners* was published the same year the besieged Republic of Biafra collapsed, with over a million dead from war and the famine.

'*Postcard*, XI' prophesizes war and famine through biblical allusions and is an alcoholic's parable of the end of the world:

> My *White Horse* plastic horses carousel
> whirls round an empty and my hell,
> when the last neat whisky passes my cracked lips,
> is a riderless Apocalypse.[117]

The alcoholic regards the bottom of his *White Horse* whisky bottle as 'my hell.' He also locates hell on earth with a further religious allusion to 'My *White Horse* plastic horses carousel' as 'a riderless Apocalypse.' The *White Horse* whisky carousel refers to the 'merry go round of the little plastic horses that used to be on the seal of *White Horse* whisky and they are balanced on an empty White Horse bottle.'[118] The *White Horse* is also an allusion to the white horse in the *Book of Revelations*. The 'riderless Apocalypse' is an allusion to the biblical Apocalypse, another name for the *Book of Revelations*, which contains Saint John's vision of the Four Horsemen. In Saint John's vision the first horse is white and symbolizes conquest, the second horse is red and symbolizes war, the third is black and symbolizes famine, and the fourth is pale, ridden by Death and followed by

---

[116] *TH Holocaust*.
[117] '*Postcard*, XI', *Loiners*, 42.
[118] Letter to Vivienne Lewis (15 March 1970), BC MS 20c London Magazine, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

Hell.[119] Harrison refers to the white horse: 'And I saw, and behold, a white horse, and hee that sate on him had a bowe, and a crowne was giuen vnto him, and hee went foorth conquering, and to conquere.'[120] The white horse of the Apocalypse is a powerful symbol of war and Harrison's omen of portent for the hell of the Nigerian-Biafran War.

'*Postcard*, XI' plays upon the meaning of Apocalypse, a synonym for catastrophe and the literary form in which the revelations of a supernatural being are communicated by a witness. Harrison is a secular 'Saint John' whose revelations are straight from the bottle not God. Whisky becomes the means by which a man becomes a seer. Alcohol reveals to this pissed prophet a 'riderless' society racing uncontrollably towards a secular Armageddon. In '*The Elephant and the Kangaroo*' too a drunken speaker repeatedly and ominously observes that the world 'goes on spinning',[121] like that *White Horse* carousel, but it is implicit that the place he is in is about to stop and be radically altered by war. Harrison's familiarity with Saint John of Patmos, traditionally identified as the author of the *Book of Revelations*, and with Christian Apocalypse mythology in social and political thinking is explicit in the later poem 'The Pomegranates of Patmos.' The title alludes to Saint John of Patmos, whose frightening doomsday visions are dispelled by the poem's defiantly secular and sensual narrator.[122] '*Postcard*, XI' evokes the history of the symbolism in the *Book of Revelations* being utilized to inspire the slaughter of the demonized.

II

In '*The Elephant and the Kangaroo*' and 'The Heart of Darkness' Harrison draws on the rhetoric and mythology of the *Book of Genesis* and also adapts Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

---

[119] *Revelations*, 6: 2-8.
[120] *Revelations*, 6: 2.
[121] 'The White Queen, 4: *Manica*, II: *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*', *Loiners*, 37.
[122] 'The Pomegranates of Patmos', *CP*, 291-99.

as literary lenses through which to dramatize Biafra's tragedy. Both poems refer to Nigeria in the period Harrison lived there until the publication of *Loiners* and the end of the Nigerian-Biafran War in 1970. Harrison is a poet who follows currents affairs and public events intermingle with other elements of his poetry. In 'The Heart of Darkness' the wireless set provides the European speakers only news of the world. He describes his home in Samaru as an 'aquarium' and a 'glass-house',[123] suggesting a privileged insularity. He seems to live in an expatriate compound or university residence. Samaru is the quarter of Zaria in which Ahmadu Bello University is located. Like the speaker in 'The Heart of Darkness', Harrison seems to have lived on or near the University grounds, and gave the University as his postal address in letters. The description of his house being 'guarded at night by two heavily veiled Tuaregs of Beau Geste vintage, passing by the window every hour with long curved swords'[124] resembles the scene in 'The Heart of Darkness' of the house being patrolled by 'Tuareg guards' 'with their rusty swords.'[125] The unnerving protection of expatriate compounds or University grounds indicates the violence in the society outside.

In 'The Heart of Darkness' the insulated European listens for news of war on the radio but a heavy storm has interfered with transmission:

> This means
> no news from England, no new war
> to heighten the familiar:
> Nigeria's Niger is not yet
> harnessed to our wireless set.[126]

The reference to 'no new war' implicitly registers wars already underway like the Vietnam War, which many politicized Western writers focused on in this period. However,

---

[123] 'The Heart of Darkness', *Loiners*, 49.
[124] Letter to Silkin (8 November 1964).
[125] *Loiners*, 49.
[126] *Loiners*, 49.

Harrison's main concern is 'Nigeria's Niger', the Nigerian region of the Niger Delta. The implicit association of 'Nigeria's Niger' with war refers to the Nigerian Federal Government waging war against Biafra partly because it was established on the oil-rich Niger Delta.[127] The poem associates the Nigerian state's war against Biafra with Belgian atrocities in the Congo as presented by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.[128] What the Nigerians did in Biafra is presented to the reader as another 'heart of darkness', a tale of horror in Africa.

In 'The Heart of Darkness' and '*The Elephant and the Kangaroo*' Harrison turns to the first book of the Bible and renders the Deluge in the *Book of Genesis* a secular parable for the man-made catastrophe unfolding in Nigeria. Both poems convey mounting fear as war loomed and use dangerous waters as their dominant metaphorical element to evoke the Deluge. The last stanza of 'The Heart of Darkness' begins by using heavy rains and nightfall as metaphors for the descending 'darkness.' The second last line refers ominously to the waters of 'Nigeria's Niger', the previously noted allusion to the Nigerian-Biafran War. The speaker forecasts that humanly wrought disaster is now as inevitable as tidal waters: 'It seems a whole sea must pour through / our all-glass house at Samaru.'[129] Recalling the Deluge, the speaker fears that the rains will wash away the fragile civilization signified by a glass-house, without sparing even the European escapees imagined in '*The Elephant and the Kangaroo*.'

---

[127] Ann Genova, 'Nigeria's Biafran War: State, Oil Companies, and Confusion,' *XIV International Economic History Congress*, Helsinki, 2006.
[128] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness: Background and Criticisms*, ed. by Leonard F. Dean (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1960). See also Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830 – 1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 255-74.
[129] *Loiners*, 49.

A European sits drinking brandy on his verandah and watches the heavy rains. He likens the downpour to the Deluge, an archetype of mass-catastrophe, anticipating that the waters will engulf the entire country. The speaker imagines that he will escape the apocalyptic destruction, like one of the animals on Noah's Ark:

> A clean green everywhere and it still pours.
> This is Noah's weather. All will drown –
>
> But I'll escape by crawling on all fours.[130]

The last line alludes to Marlow's witness, in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, of Kurtz 'crawling on all-fours' back to the African encampment to escape being returned to Europe.[131] The poem is associating the humiliation of the once great colonialist Kurtz with the British Empire's fall in Nigeria. It also suggests that the British were ignominiously 'crawling' away from collective historical responsibility for the terrible colonial legacy in Nigeria. Harrison's own departure in 1966 perhaps heightened his awareness that Europeans could escape the mounting violence where Nigerians could not, and this is another significance of the title. '*The Elephant and the Kangaroo*' refers to a pair of each species being saved from the Deluge by boarding Noah's Ark, in keeping with the allusion to 'Noah's weather' in the body of the poem. The incongruous pairing of a kangaroo and an elephant, an iconic Australian and African species, metaphorically suggests that foreigners could bounce away like the kangaroo while the earth-bound native elephant is trapped in its drowning homeland. The title also refers to the bawdy bar-room song 'We're off the see the wild west show', which is appropriate for the speaker's 'drunkenness' and typically European tendency to view Africa as an exotic circus.

---

[130] '*The Elephant and the Kangaroo*', *Loiners*, 37.
[131] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 54.

The shared allusions in '*The Elephant and the Kangaroo*' and 'The Heart of Darkness' to the Deluge and Conrad's novella also evoke a collapse of the ethical, legal and technological foundations of civilization. Harrison places his speakers in the long imaginative shadow cast by Kurtz, the imperial idealist and ivory trader who dealt in mass murder. In both poems the Kurtzian figure's isolation in the Dark Continent is heightened by a blackout during great rains. The prolonged power failures create a sense that the technology a safe society depends upon has failed. The power failures may also register the 1964 general strike and the 195 strikes in Nigeria from 1964-65, some disrupting essential services like electricity.[132] Metaphorically the 'darkness' becomes the setting for the breakdown of legal and civic constraints and of any inner ethical sense, recalling Conrad's tale of unconstrained imperial violence and excess.

In 'The Heart of Darkness' the speaker is, like Kurtz, in the dark with a candle that gives no light.[133] The speaker's spider-like searching for a snuffed candle conveys a creepy inner disorientation and an inkling of Kurtzian metaphysical darkness, horror and madness of the soul:[134]

> The wind's up and our last weak light
> dithers and lets in the night.
>
> Shadowless, one dark hand flits
> spiderwise for crusted bits
> of Christmas candle, German-*art*
> *creation* wax with plastic Chartres
> Cathedral windows, coloured light
> evoking Europe till Twelfth Night
> and aspirations from our dust
> with no repository but lust.[135]

---

[132] Abubakar Momoh, 'Popular Struggles in Nigeria 1960-1982', *African Journal of Political Science*, vol. 1, no.2 (1996), 154-175, 164.
[133] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 58.
[134] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 56-8.
[135] 'Heart of Darkness', *Loiners*, 47.

The speaker tries to reconnect with European high culture, signified by Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and emphasized by italicizing '*art*' and placing it at the end of a line, and with European Christianity and its greatest art and architecture, signified by the French Gothic Chartres Cathedral and its famous stained glass windows.

However, like Kurtz, Harrison's cultured Christian European atavistically responds to African drums beating barbarous primal rhythms that draw out regressive bestial urges in man. Harrison's speaker conceives of Africa as the 'dark continent of fallen sex. / Harrowing Christ!'[136] There is also a fundamentally misogynistic equation of women with an inherently sinful, animalistic lust that is parallel to the equation of Africans with sex and primitivism. The poem presents heterosexual penetration as a man's bestial choice to 'hog it in squelched ooze.'[137] Drawn to the African drums as he is drawn to adultery, the tormented Christian cries: 'Sounds! / Women! It's the same.' Harrison presents the European vision of Africa found in *Heart of Darkness*, the Dark Continent as the location of moral darkness where the debased carnal appetites of fallen man are unleashed.

Both writers consciously subvert the white presence in Africa. Harrison, like Conrad, uses contrasting imagery of light and dark, and emphatically links the white man's light with the African night, as in an end line rhyme on 'light' / 'Night.'[138] Both writers consciously take the conventional binaries of dark / light and body / soul in which light and soul are associated with Christian Europe and darkness and body with primitive Africa and subvert them. Harrison, as Conrad did, regards Christianity as dangerous and he exposes the hypocritical religious justification for European imperialism, that Europe is bringing

---

[136] *Loiners*, 49.
[137] *Loiners*, 48.
[138] *Loiners*, 47.

light and Christianity to the moral darkness of Black Africa.[139] In *Heart of Darkness* white is associated with evil: it is the colour of ivory. Kurtz is a white figure of death in the heart of darkness. In the heart of the Belgian Congo there is a white fog and Kurtz, a white man who deals in murder.

Like Conrad, Harrison also uses the binary of white and black and ironizes it. The white man is a shadow, his light is blurred, he is in a blackout, there is no electricity and the candle goes out. As in Conrad, so in Harrison, Africa is a place of atavism. In Harrison, as in Conrad, the white European becomes bestial in Africa. Conrad in his critique of imperialism exposes the complicity of Christianity in the horrors that he describes. Harrison is also concerned with Christianity as a sacrificial religion. He writes: 'Harrowing Christ! O Superlamb, / grown lupine, luminous – *Shazam*!'[140] The light of Christ is likened to the illusions of a magician: '*Shazam*!' Christ, the sacrificial Lamb of God, has become a lupine predator and is likened to a wolf preying on the 'lamb' of Africa. Christ has come to harrow, rob and plunder Africa in the name of God. The focus on religion is relevant because the Nigerian – Biafran War was also a religious war between Christianity and Islam.

'The Heart of Darkness' also takes up the Conradian theme of the capacity of human beings, shaped by circumstance and acting individually or as agents of the state, to commit atrocities. The European observes that his black shadow or alter ego changes shape according to the light and resembles a baobab. The baobab tree has an upside down appearance because its branches resemble a root system, a symbol of myriad potentialities.

---

[139] Michael Lackey, 'The Moral Conditions for Genocide in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', *College Literature*, vol. 32, no. 1 (Winter 2005), 20-41, 29-35.
[140] *Loiners*, 49.

The tree's strange shadow symbolically suggests the frightening malleability of identity and civilized man's potential for savagery.

'The Heart of Darkness' and '*The Elephant and the Kangaroo*' refer to ethnic 'cleansing' in Nigeria through allusions to the purification wrought by the Deluge, the Biblical archetype of mass-extermination. In '*The Elephant and the Kangaroo*' 'Noah's weather' made the earth 'clean' by killing all who can't 'escape.'[141] In 'The Heart of Darkness' 'a whole sea must pour through' a home,[142] a metonym for a civilization. In both poems the Deluge is a secular parable for the ethnic cleansing of Igbo enclaves in Northern Nigeria and later of the Biafrans. The poems draw on a biblical mythology of terrible vengeance to speak of the pogroms against the Igbo, whom Achebe thought were targeted because of jealousy at their achievements in education and business.[143] Achebe writes that these were 'carefully planned' 'mass killings which the Government - the Army, the Police, the people who were there to protect life and property – brought against the people they were supposed to protect.'[144] The biblical rhetoric of mass extermination in the poems and the allusions to Kurtz, whose famous call was to 'exterminate all the brutes', have historical application to the attacks on the Igbo and the genocide in Biafra.

The purpose of the allusions to the Deluge in 'The Heart of Darkness' and '*The Elephant and the Kangaroo*' can be understood through Claude Rawson's observation that the destruction of the cities of the Plain in the *Book of Genesis* stand behind the subsequent history of genocide and imperial conquest. Rawson observes that the mass-catastrophes in Genesis have 'a grim and quizzical relation to the mass-slaughters of human history,

---

[141] *Loiners,* 37.
[142] *Loiners,* 49.
[143] Achebe, 'The African Writer and the Biafran Cause', 83.
[144] Achebe, 'The African Writer and the Biafran Cause', 83.

culminating in the Second World War.'[145] The allusions to the Deluge in both poems imply the role of religion and religious mythologies in a human lineage of mass-slaughter, with particular reference to the pogroms and the Nigerian-Biafran war.

The allusions in 'The Heart of Darkness' and '*The Elephant and the Kangaroo*' to Christian mythologies of catastrophe and also to Islamic *jihad* (in '*The Origin of the Beery Way*') have provenance in the violent antagonism between the two major religions in Nigeria.[146] A pivotal figure in these conflicts is Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of Northern Nigeria and Chancellor of the University where Harrison worked. Bello's campaign for Northern Nigeria to gain national dominance had the character of a religious crusade and promoted a militant expansionist Islam.[147] He 'constantly stressed the relationship between his brand of nationalism and his role as a crusader for Islam.'[148] Bello's Islamization program was stopped by the January 1966 coup led by Christian Igbos, but in the wake of retribution Christianity became the Igbo's rallying point for Biafra.[149] The Biafrans understood the war as a religious struggle and their self-identification with the Israelites,[150] who flee enslavement and seek a homeland in the *Book of Exodus*, is consonant with the Old Testament allusions in the African poems.

'The Excursion', another poem dropped from the *Selected Poems* and *Collected Poems*, suggests the transience of Christian Britain's concern for the Biafrans. Dedicated to friends

---

[145]Claude Rawson, *God, Gulliver and Genocide: Barbarism and the European Imagination, 1492 – 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), viii. The period Rawson concentrates upon is from the fifteenth century to WWII but his argument extends to conquest and genocide in post-war history.

[146] For an examination of the relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria see Chima J. Korieh and G. Ugo Nwokeji, eds., *Religion, History and Politics in Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Ogbu U. Kalu* (Maryland: University Press of America, 2005).

[147]Gabriel Palmer-Fernandez, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and War* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 329-30.

[148] Patrick J. Furlong, 'Azikiwe and the National Church of Nigeria and the Cameroons: A Case Study of the Political Use of Religion in African Nationalism', *African Affairs*, vol. 91, no. 364 (1992), 433-452, 433.

[149] Afe Adogame, 'Politicization of Religion and Religionization of Politics in Nigeria', in *Religion, History and Politics in Nigeria*, 125-39, 127.

[150]Palmer-Fernandez, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and War*, 329-30.

in Prague and written after Harrison's return to England, the poem records a visit to Hexham Cathedral in Northumberland, which has temporarily marked the donations box with *Biafra*, the cause of the day,[151] and considers Biafra in the context of 'empire we can't get away from'[152] and the historical succession of conquests abroad and at home. 'The Excursion' refers to Roman rule in Britain and begins with a reference to Hadrian's Wall. In the poem Harrison also recalls seeing a European man buying sex from poor 'Ibo whores.'[153] The consistent trope in *Loiners* of sexual disease for colonial relations is punningly introduced by having the European and his erection 'scared stiff of syphilis.'[154] The allusion in the title to Wordsworth's 'The Excursion' and its sublime spiritual pilgrimage is a bathetic measure of the sordid character of European sexual excursions or tourism.

Harrison's humanist poetry articulates the more enduring relevance of current affairs like the Biafran tragedy by making connections with other historical, political and literary contexts, and his poetry is clearly informed by his reading of newspapers, history and literature. The Christian rhetoric through which Biafra expressed its struggle to the world is picked up by Harrison and he depicts the genocide through age-old biblical mythologies in several of the African poems discussed. His awareness of the role of Islam in contemporary Nigerian politics and in the war is also a subtextual preoccupation of a significant and neglected poem, '*The Origin of the Beery Way*.' A subject of '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' is a chapter in the history of Islamic wars of conquest in West Africa and in this poem Harrison implicitly holds up historical mirrors to the present. 'The Heart of

---

[151] 'The Excursion', *Loiners*, 71.
[152] *Loiners*, 71.
[153] *Loiners*, 71.
[154] *Loiners*, 72.

Darkness' and '*The Elephant and the Kangaroo*' were set in Nigeria and 'The Excursion' refers to Nigeria, West Africa. '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' is set in the Senegambian region, later divided into French Senegal and British Gambia, in West Africa.

III

'*The Origin of the Beery Way*' is a good example of the complex history that informs Harrison's poetry. The subjects of the poem include Islamic empire-building, Islamic confrontation with British and French imperialism and the relationship between the *colon* and the Africans. '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' is the first of three poems grouped under the main title '*Manica*', the fourth part of 'The White Queen.' The second poem from '*Manica*' is '*The Elephant and the Kangaroo*', which has a parallel thematic concern with the role of Christianity in wars of empire. The third poem in '*Manica*', '*The Foreign Body*', is not preoccupied with religion but does graphically equate imperial invasion with the invasion of the human body by parasites, with several diseases and with mania. The title '*Manica*' clearly invites wordplays like manic(a) and mani(c)a, with reference to the psycho-pathology of empire and the crazed behaviour of the colonial class. Manica is also the name of a province in Mozambique and one of many references in *Loiners* to different African locations.[155] However, the three poems in the '*Manica*' sequence are not set in Mozambique but in other African locations. The main title '*Manica*' also indicates that a subject of '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' is slavery. A meaning of the classical Latin word '*manica*' is 'handcuffs, manacles.'[156] The madness signaled by the title '*Manica*' also puns upon the 'mad' Islamic *jihadists* in the '*The Origin of the Beery Way*.'[157]

---

[155] See now also Nicholson, '"Reciprocal recognitions"', 69.
[156] '*manica*', *OED Online*.
[157] 'The White Queen 4: *Manica*, I: *The Origin of the Beery Way*, *Loiners*, 36.

The title '*Manica*' also signals Harrison's interest in the history of alcohol. A '*Manica Hippocrates*' was a white cotton bag used in a seventeenth-century distillation process for alcohol.[158] The title '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' also humorously hints at the poem's interest in the history and effects of alcohol. The consumption of alcohol by the French and British colonial class and the Islamic prohibition against alcohol are subjects of '*The Origin of the Beery Way*.' Harrison's interest in Islam's prohibition against alcohol is also reflected in the epigraph to the preface for *Aikin Mata*. The disjointed surface of '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' creates a manic effect that is appropriate to its preoccupation with madness and drunkenness, but the effect is partly created by dense allusions whose connections are not obvious. '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' is an ambitious poem that cannot be plausibly explained without some critical account of the complex history that its dense allusions open up from title to closing couplet.

The setting of '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' shifts between the mid- nineteenth and twentieth centuries and suggests fundamental continuities in this period. The time slippage in the poem is first signaled by the combination of the epigraph to '*Manica*' and the first line of '*The Origin of the Beery Way*.' 1960 is the publication date provided for the medical science book from which the epigraph is drawn and the year is emphasized by placing it on a separate line. The epigraph is:

> 'An experienced doctor has said that he has never seen tropical neurasthenia develop in a man with a sound philosophy of life.'
>
> - *Notes on the Preservation of Personal Health in Warm Climates*
> The Ross Institute of Tropical Hygiene, London, 3rd ed.

---

[158] John French, *The Art of Distillation. Or, A Treatise of the Choicest Spagyrical Preparations Performed by Way of Distillation, Being Partly Taken Out of the Most Select Chemical Authors of the Diverse languages and Partly Out of the Author's Manual Experience together with, The Description of the Chiefest Furnaces and Vessels Used by Ancient and Modern Chemists, also A Discourse on Diverse Spagyrical Experiments and Curiosities, and of the Anatomy of Gold and Silver, with The Chiefest Preparations and Curiosities Thereof, and Virtues of Them All.* London. Printed by Richard Cotes, 1651.

1960.[159]

Then the first line of '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' tells us that the scene is 'The Coast, the Coast, a hundred years ago!'[160] The speaker is implicitly the White Queen in the 1960s and the poem begins with him imagining the arrival of British merchants in 'Victorian hearse-plumes' on 'the Coast' a hundred years ago. The poem refers to 'the Coast' off St Louis, a large town in colonial Senegal. In the mid-nineteenth century British and French trading centres were located along the Senegal River or near the Coast off St Louis.[161]

The first of the two stanzas in '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' recreates with historical accuracy the scene of British and French merchant communities on the Senegambian coast in the mid-nineteenth century. The first stanza is preoccupied with the experience of the *colon*, particularly their use of alcohol and their sexual and economic relations with the Africans. The poem refers to 'reports' that 'put down' boozing and 'Shacking with natives.' Harrison is drawing on reports and memoirs that historians have also used to reconstruct the lives of the merchants on the coast. Directors of the *Compagnie des Indes* reported that the merchants 'lived in extravagance and drunkenness' and when not working were 'drinking and womanizing.'[162] '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' refers ambiguously to 'Boozers with riff-raff in their *British* arms',[163] Englishmen in Africa freed from the strict moral codes of Victorian England. In the poem the colonials 'murmur *beau, beau, beau* / Like some daft baby at your Mandingo.' The white man is a 'daft baby' sucking the breast of a Mandingo, a major ethnic group in the region. The phrase 'your Mandingo' suggests

---

[159] *Loiners*, 35.
[160] *Loiners*, 35.
[161] David Robinson, 'French "Islamic" Policy and Practice in Late Nineteenth-Century Senegal', *Journal of African History*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1988), 415-435, 418.
[162] James F. Searing, *West African Slavery and Atlantic Commerce: The Senegal River Valley, 1700 – 1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 66.
[163] *Loiners*, 35.

that some local women became the playthings of European men. The poem performs a purposefully riotous staging of drunkenness and lechery to satirize the 'big *colon*:'. Harrison uses '*colon*', the French word for 'colonialist', for purposes of explicit wordplay. A colon follows the word '*colon*:'. The *colons* are punningly presented as colons, rectums, sodomites and complete arses.

The epigraph, quoted above, reproduces a medical view of tropical neurasthenia, neurotic disorders developed by Europeans living in tropical climates, as a medical condition made possible by the absence of 'a sound philosophy of life.' In the poem the colonialists are not ill but actively exploiting their distance from the moral expectations of their own societies. Harrison wryly implies tropical neurasthenia is an excuse or euphemism for the lack of moral restraint among Europeans in Africa. The poem does though also indicate that the Coast was no paradise for the Europeans when it refers to *El Vomito*, evocative Spanish for yellow fever, which killed large numbers of Europeans in the Senegambian region.[164] Alcohol abuse and sexual relations with local women were also among the reasons given for the high mortality rate among the Europeans.[165]

In the first stanza of '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' the colonials give *cadeau* to their Mandingo *beaus*. There are line end rhymes on *beau* / Mandingo /*cadeau* which emphasize overlapping economic and sexual relations between Europeans and Africans.
The poem seems to refer particularly to the alliances between European merchants and *signares*, local women merchants. The *signares* who had sexual relations with European merchants were regarded by company officials in Paris as smugglers using their sexual

---

[164] The epidemic of yellow fever in 1788, for example, killed over 80 per cent of the European inhabitants in Gorée. See Philip Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975), 5.
[165] Searing, *West African Slavery*, 97.

charms to obtain goods by corrupting Frenchmen, but smuggling was the economic basis of a mutually profitable alliance between the European merchants and *signares*.[166] In the poem the White Queen, drinking whisky and sleeping with Africans in the 1960s, imagines that he is a nineteenth-century pirate, a profession associated with smuggling, describing himself as: 'A real beaubarian and buckaneer, that's me, Yo Ho, / Bottles of *Black & White* do me for rum.'[167] A buccaneer is a pirate[168] and 'Yo Ho' is a colloquial exclamation with a nautical provenance[169] associated with sailors and pirates and rum, a trade commodity.[170] Harrison spells 'buccaneer' as 'buckaneer' to link the White Queen's piracy to his sexual relations with the Africans. 'Buckaneer' integrates the word 'buck' into the word 'buccaneer.' In the poem 'Buck' is a word the White Queen uses for having sex with Africans. Harrison's term 'buckaneer' merges sexual and economic piracy. *Black & White* is the brand name of a blended Scotch whisky and in the poem is also a pun on black and white racial relations and miscegenation. The entwined sexual and economic relations between the colonial class and the Africans is a preoccupation of the first stanza, and of most of the poems in 'The White Queen' sequence.

In the first stanza of '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' the White Queen also describes himself as 'A real beaubarian' who needs to 'forage among francophones.'[171] 'Beaubarian' is Harrison's pun upon 'Rhubarbarians', a term he coins in *The School of Eloquence* sonnet 'Rhubarbarians, I' to describe a 'barbarian' from Leeds, as examined in chapter 7. In *The Origin of the Beery Way*' the White Queen, Harrison's fictional alter-ego, is a barbarian from Leeds playing at being a French *beau* in Africa. He is a *beau* in the sense of being a

---

[166] Searing, *West African Slavery*, 98-99 and 164.
[167] *Loiners*, 35.
[168] 'buccaneer', *OED Online*.
[169] 'yoho', *OED Online*.
[170] Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa*, 59 and 68.
[171] *Loiners*, 35.

cultivated dandy and also in the sense of courting beautiful black boys. The beaubarian employs 'a bit of the old Francais finesse' in his seduction of Africans. He does 'Not work at your ballocks like a kid's yo-yo, / then buck you off them like a rodeo.' The beaubarian's sex-life is 'manic like a bad rondeau.'[172] This reference to the rondeau, a French poetic form dating from the fourteenth century, associates French culture past and present with radical disrespect for Africans. The poem satirizes the sexual and cultural arrogance of the French in Africa. The poem's references to the French language and culture also signal that the White Queen is now in French as well as British colonial Africa.

The English White Queen is adopting a French personality and also an *African Personality* in '*The Origin of the Beery Way*.' The White Queen is 'Armed with my *Dettol*, my *Od-o-ro-no*, / My *African Personality*.'[173] *African Personality* was the name of a locally traded talcum powder. The *African Personality* was also an anti-colonial African political concept whose cultural parallel was *négritude*.[174] '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' implies Europeans' and African's commodification of the concept of the *African Personality* by referring to the commodity of that name. Similarly, as noted in the previous chapter, '*Zeg-Zeg Postcard*, XVIII' suggests European's commodification of *négritude*. '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' also suggests the continuing sexual and intellectual commodification of Africans by Europeans despite the successes of the African anti-colonial movements. In the poem the epigraph highlights the date 1960 partly because it was the year Independence was declared in Senegal and Gambia.

---

[172] *Loiners*, 35.
[173] *Loiners*, 36.
[174] Abiola Irele, '*Négritude* or Black Cultural Nationalism', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1965), 321-348, 321.

In the second stanza of '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' the White Queen imagines the historical confrontation between Islamic forces and the French and British in the Senegambian region, and also raises the history of Islamic dynasty and empire building. The first line of the second stanza refers to an historical figure, the Muslim Marabout El Hadj Omar Tall: 'Omar, not Khayam, the Gambia's mad Marabout.'[175] Omar waged a *jihad* of the sword from 1852-60 to establish Islamic states and to resist French and British commercial control of the region.[176] Omar Tall is an ancestor of Ahmadu Bello and the son of Usman dan Fodio. The poem alludes to Omar's Islamic and ethnic empire building and implies its resurfacing in Bello's Nigeria. The movement in the poem between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also invites the reader to compare these two figures from the same Islamic dynasty. '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' implicitly and irreverently traces the 'origins' of Ahmadu Bello's 'way', his Islamic crusade for religious and racial supremacy during the First Republic, to the political and historical context of nineteenth century *jihad*.

The 'off the page' background to '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' includes Bello's pronouncements that ancestral lineage and Allah legitimized his political agenda for a greater Islamic state. Harrison too emphasizes the historico-cultural past in the present, but to satirize rather than sanction Bello's Holy War. In his autobiography *My Life* (1962) Bello writes: 'My ancestor was chosen to lead the Holy War which set up his empire. I have been chosen by a free electorate to help build a modern state.'[177] Bello constantly reminded his audience 'that he had been entrusted, by Allah, with the responsibility for

---

[175] *Loiners*, 36.
[176] Robinson, 'French "Islamic" Policy', 419-20. El Hadj Omar Tall is alternately known as Al Hajj Umar. *The Epic of El Hadj Omar* is the most famous religious epic in West African literature. See Samba Diop, 'The Wolof Epic: From Spoken Word to Written Text', *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 37, no. 3 (2006), 120-132, 4.
[177] Ahmadu Bello, *My Life* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962), viii.

maintaining the well-being of the Sokoto caliphate established in 1804 by his noble ancestor of revered name, Usman dan Fodio.'[178] Usman dan Fodio led a *jihad* which established a politico-religious hegemony in much of what became Northern Nigeria, including Zaria.[179]

The use of Zaria's ancient name Zeg-Zeg in the title '*Zeg-Zeg Postcards*' indicates that the African poems have a focus on Northern Nigeria's history, a history characterized by conquests in which dan Fodio and Omar were leaders. From 1852 Omar led a series of *jihads* in what is today Mali against the predominantly non-Muslim Bambara and Mandingo, the ethnic group referred to in the first stanza of '*The Origin of the Beery Way*.'[180] Omar also inspired the Marabout-Soninke Wars (1850-1901) which resulted in the Islamic conversion of many of the Mandingo.[181] The Mandingo Kingdoms were mainly located on the Gambia River, which is one reason Omar is 'The Gambia's mad Marabout' in '*The Origin of the Beery Way*.'

The poem is also preoccupied with Omar's militant resistance to European empires. The second stanza alludes to a legend of Omar, a Sufi mystic, opposing the British with his mystical powers: 'Omar, not Khayam, the Gambia's mad Marabout / Changed the Commissioners' bullets into water;'[182] There was a popular belief that Marabouts had magical powers.[183] Nicholson, the only critic to have discussed this poem, observes that Omar reportedly cultivated the belief that he could turn bullets into water in order to

---

[178] A.H.M. Kirke-Greene, 'His Eternity, His Eccentricity, or His Exemplarity? A Further Contribution to the Study of H.E. the African Head of State', *African Affairs* (1991), vol. 90, 163-187, 174.
[179] Kirke-Greene, 'His Eternity, His Eccentricity, or His Exemplarity?', 174.
[180] Robinson, 'French "Islamic" Policy', 419.
[181] Omar A. Touray, *The Gambia and the World: A History of the Foreign Policy of Africa's Smallest State, 1965-1995* (Hamburg: Institute of African Affairs, 2000), 15.
[182] *Loiners*, 36.
[183] Lucy Behrman, 'The Political Significance of the Wolof Adherence to Muslim Brotherhoods in the Nineteenth Century', *African Historical Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1968), 60-78, 62.

enhance his reputation.[184] Omar's act of transubstantiation is clearly regarded as apocryphal in this irreverently atheist poem. However, the poem is referring to Omar's military attack on British settlements in Gambia in 1855,[185] and this is another reason Omar is dubbed 'The Gambia's mad Marabout' in the poem. The beaubarian, assuming the role of the French *colon*, also imagines doing battle with Omar's scimitar-wielding warriors in order to 'put Islam to rout' and this, as well as the many allusions to the French in the poem, refers to the historical conflict between Omar and the French.

The allusions in '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' to Omar's conflicts with the British, the French and the Mandingo implicitly raises the history of the rise and fall and re-emergence of religious and mercantilist empires in West Africa. It was Omar's ephemeral empire that was being divided into European spheres of influence but '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' also points to the ephemerality of European Empires in the region. The beaubarian 'buckaneer, that's me, Yo Ho,' takes a brief interlude from his economic and sexual piracy to do an ironic 'soft-shoe shuffle on the white man's bones/ Windborne or brittle as a popadum.'[186] The allusive range of 'the white man's bones' includes the recent demise of a number of French and British colonies in Africa, notably countries Harrison visited or lived in during the 1960s when he was writing *Loiners*, such as Gambia, Senegal and Nigeria. However, Harrison's reminder that Empires will fall, an important theme of *Loiners*, comes in the wake of re-emerging Islamic empires, implicitly represented by Omar's descendant Bello, and neocolonial economic empires, whose modern colonial class is represented by the beaubarian 'buckaneer.'

---

[184] See now also Nicholson, '"Reciprocal recognitions"', 70. See also J.M. Gray, *History of the Gambia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 391. Quoted in Nicholson, 70.
[185] See now also Nicholson, '"Reciprocal recognitions"', 70. See also Gray, *History of the Gambia*, 391. Quoted in Nicholson, 70.
[186] *Loiners*, 36.

In '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' Omar is most immediately presented as a mad Islamic warrior-mystic who magically combats the French army and their bullets.[187] This satirical poem has a serious interest in Omar's Holy War against nineteenth-century colonial expansion, an historical period of the utmost importance to *Loiners*. However, the allusive presence of Omar also registers several historical angles upon his campaigns and legacy. Omar is, by some accounts, a great Islamic leader and a hero of anti-colonial resistance or an invader who forced Islam on non-Muslims or upon Muslims who practiced a different form of Islam.[188] The poem registers Omar as a Janus-faced figure of empire, a leader of failed Islamic opposition to the expanding French commercial and military presence, but who successfully forced Islam on indigenous animist tribes like the Mandingo and a wider culturally diverse region.[189]

The poem's description of Omar as 'the Gambia's mad Marabout' also refers to the massive destruction his *jihads* wrought in the region. Omar's armies of *taalibe* and *sofa* ('slave warriors') devastated the middle Niger.[190] The poem is informed by the history of Islamic political revolutions in Senegambia, from which Omar emerges in the nineteenth century as a great warrior for the establishment of new Islamic states and empire in the region.[191] In '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' Omar is an icon of the regional history and lineage of *jihad* and the Islamic state. Most historical accounts present Omar's *jihads* as attempts to establish new Islamic states in the tradition of the Fulbe state's empire building and, under Omar's leadership, especially the Tokolor who shared the same language with

---

[187] *Loiners*, 36.
[188] Martin A. Klein, 'Social and Economic Factors in the Muslim Revolution in Senegambia', *Journal of African History*, vol. 13, no. 3 (1972), 419-41, 431. See also B. Olatunji Oloruntimehin, 'Resistance Movements in the Tukulor Empire', *Cahier d'Études Africaines*, vol. 8, *Cahier* 29 (1968), 123-43, 126.
[189] Robinson, 'French "Islamic" Policy', 41.
[190] Searing, *West African Slavery*, 162.
[191] Searing, *West African Slavery*, 88-89.

the Fulbe.[192] It has alternately been argued that Omar was most concerned to promote Fulbe ethnic privilege and colonization in an ethnically diverse region, rather than being dedicated to the institutions of Islamization and attendant political and social objectives.[193] However, in the poem Omar is identified by his religious vocation as a Marabout, and his battles to enforce the Muslim prohibition against alcohol consumption, which was very important in Omar's *jihads* against black infidels. Omar's holy war against alcohol consumption is alluded to in a poem with a polyvalent historical interest in alcohol. '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' is a poem saturated in *Star* beer, *Black & White* rum, *Guinness* and other explicit references to alcohol and its effects, and more subtly to its place in the history of the region.

In the first stanza Harrison refers to 'your Mandingo' as the possession of 'pissed' and lecherous colonials. However, behind the show of European hedonism unleashed in the colonies the poem also more subtly draws on the important relationship of alcohol to *jihad* in nineteenth century Senegambia. Alcohol consumption was not only a line of demarcation between European and Islamic cultures but a point of confrontation between the Marabouts and the Mandingos, the Soninke and their kings.[194] The Mandingo and the Soninke, the royal courts and the majority of commoners, incurred the wrath of Islam because of their alcohol consumption. Omar's warriors fought the monarchy's *ceddo*, 'plundering warriors who drank alcohol.'[195] When Omar's Muslim armies adopted the ways of the warrior they 'even imitated the ritual drinking bouts of the *ceddo* before battle

---

[192] Robinson, 'French "Islamic" Policy', 419.
[193] Robinson, 'French "Islamic" Policy', 419.
[194] Elizabeth Allo Isichei, *A History of African Societies to 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 308.
[195] Searing, *West African Slavery*, 24.

but replaced the cursed alcoholic libations of the *ceddo* with tamarind juice.'[196] This history is a subtext and inspiration behind Harrison's imaginative angle upon alcohol, Islam and empire in '*The Origin of the Beery Way*.'

In the drunken visions of the twentieth century beaubarian Omar's holy wars against the French Empire and alcohol are merged. The beaubarian imagines that his alcohol consumption has incurred Omar's wrath and, in a scatological scene, imagines himself as an infidel warrior vanquishing Omar's *mujahidin* with urination and masturbation:

> Omar, not Khayam, the Gambia's mad Marabout
> Changed the Commissioners' bullets into water;
> Into water being Moslem. I, being atheist,
> Am full of more potent potions when I'm pissed.
> A century later, full of *Guinnesses* and *Stars*,
> I'm God's own Heaven, and as I slash I shout:
> *The white man's water turns back into fire!*
> Braving castration at their scimitars,
> And single-handed put Islam to rout,
> And vanquish the missions with my bent desire,
> Spouting a semen capable of slaughter.[197]

The alcohol-charged urine and semen of the very 'pissed' atheist are weapons that 'slash' and 'vanquish' Islam and also the Christian missions. The beaubarian's macho performance is mocked and his masculinity satirically encoded as militarism. However, the poem's caricature of the sloshed and sexually 'foraging' colonial macho simultaneously celebrates skinhead-like libertinism in a boisterously energetic language which enthralls the reader in its wild affront to Allah and God. The atheist beaubarian is at one level the barbarian poet scatologically masturbating and urinating over religion, and anarchically embracing sexual license and alcohol in defiance of religious prohibitions.

---

[196] Searing, *West African Slavery*, 162.
[197] *Loiners*, 36.

Harrison's argument with a repressive Islam stands alongside his regard for an alternative tradition of liberalism and secularism within Islamic societies. The poem specifies the Marabout Omar Tall by ostensibly directing our attention away from the Persian poet Omar Khayam: 'Omar, not Khayam.' Khayam was made famous in Europe through Edward Fitzgerald's free translation of his *Rubaiyyat* (1859).[198] The oriental poet who celebrated wine as the water of life and an antidote to sorrow is juxtaposed with an Omar prepared to slaughter wine-drinkers, an Omar less palatable and lesser-known in Europe.

The sensual secular humanist vision expressed in Khayam's translated verse is implicitly celebrated in '*The Origin of the Beery Way*.' Later, in *The Blasphemer's Banquet*, Harrison would explicitly celebrate the work. In both poems Khayam, who lived in an Islamic society but was viewed with suspicion by Orthodox Muslims, represents an alternative tradition of liberalism within Islamic society. The scholar and poet Khayam is contrasted to lifeless Victorians and a violently oppressive Islam in 'The Origin of the Beery Way' and he is still an important figure in Harrison's later polemical poetry, where Khayam is contrasted to Muslim bigots burning Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in *The Blasphemers' Banquet*. In Harrison's poetry drinking wine often represents, Khayam-like, a secular philosophical commitment to the pleasures of 'this fleeting life.'

In '*The Origin of the Beery Way*' the celebration of alcohol is a symbolic refusal of the repressions of Islam, Christianity and the Victorians that is in tension with the place of alcohol in the *colons*' exploitative relations with Africans. The first stanza presents the colonial 'Boozers' 'Shacking with natives' in the nineteenth century and in the second

---

[198]Omar Khayyam, *Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayyam*, trans. by Edward Fitzgerald (London: Bernard Quaritate, 1859).

stanza, 'A century later', the beaubarian is 'full of *Guinnesses* and *Stars*.' By the closing couplet he is 'Flat on my back, beneath the Galaxy, I fear / This burning in my groin is gonorrhoea.'[199] Harrison's lyric theatre of inebriation associates alcohol and sexual disease with colonization.

In a poem concerned with colonialism there is also an important ideological significance in the pun upon 'firewater', a colloquial Native American term for the alcohol given to them by the colonists. The beaubarian drinks so much alcohol that he imagines a miracle occurs as he urinates: '*The white man's water turns back into fire!*' This line puns on firewater, or alcohol. The punning on 'fire' also suggests the atheist beaubarian, in imaginary battle with the *mujahidin*, has transubstantiated 'water' into 'fire-power', or bullets, a miraculous reversal of Omar's transubstantiation of French bullets into water. The references to 'fire-water' and gonorrhoea recall that alcohol and sexually transmitted diseases were elements of the colonial degradation of Indigenous peoples. The diseased beaubarian's boozing and murderous sexuality, slaughtering with his semen, signals the role of alcohol and disease, as well as bullets, in the white man's decimation of many colonised peoples.

'*The Origin of the Beery Way*' mocks Omar's holy war against alcohol but the anti-colonial politics evident in *Loiners* suggest Harrison would not be entirely unsympathetic to Omar's *jihad* against 'free trade.'[200] Harrison intends to be historically specific when he signals the date 1860 at the start of the poem. As noted, the epigraph for 'Manica' is dated 1960 and the first line of the poem is 'The Coast, the Coast, a hundred years ago!' 1860 was also the year that Omar Tall ceased his fight with the French and this marks the triumph

---

[199] *Loiners*, 36.
[200] Robinson, 'French "Islamic" Policy', 419-420.

of the French commercial empire.[201] The poem's ostensible dismissal of Omar as 'mad' is tempered because it issues from the speaker taking on the role of the *colon*. The French in Saint Louis dismissed Omar and his followers as 'fanatics' because they were *jihadists* committed to the Islamic state,[202] and because they resisted French commercial control of the region.[203] 1860 is also a key date because it marks the end of the old eighteenth-century system, the beginnings of the new commercial empire, and the point of movement towards greater French territorial empire later in the 1860s.

The eighteenth-century system had been based on slavery and this is, as noted, signaled in the title '*Manica*', whose meanings include manacles and shackles. Another meaning of manica is the garment of a sleeve, and by association the cloth that was used for the garments. It was Senegambian slaves who wove the cotton to make the cloth, the women spinning cotton fiber into thread and the men weaving the thread into cloth.[204] Cloth was also used as a form of money that could be traded easily, so that in a poem concerned with systems of commerce 'manica' also stands for money.[205] The poem's allusions to manacles, owned Mandingos and 'the Coast, a hundred years ago' also evokes the slave pens on the coastal islands of St Louis and Gorée, where Africans were held before being exported as slaves to American sugar plantations.[206]

Harrison was focused on the issue of slavery when he was composing *Loiners*. He was interested in writing a slave novel and he also wrote an unpublished review of *The Biography of a Runaway Slave*, a testimonial narrative about slavery in a Latin American

---

[201] Robinson, 'French "Islamic" Policy', 418.
[202] David Robinson, 'France as a Muslim Power in West Africa', *Africa Today*, vol. 46, no. 3 (1999), 105-127, 108.
[203] Robinson, 'French "Islamic" Policy', 418-19.
[204] Searing, *West African Slavery*, 176.
[205] Searing, *West African Slavery*, 69.
[206] Searing, *West African Slavery*, ix.

context.[207] Histories of slavery are alluded to several times in *Loiners*, most lightly and with satirical humour in 'The Death of the PWD Man, I.' The PWD man wandering in a graveyard in Bathurst, Gambia, observes the headstone of a commissioner whose dying chant, the local people said, was: '*A coffle of fourteen asses bound for Sansanding*!'[208] This chant is in fact an abbreviated quotation from the nineteenth-century Scottish explorer and surgeon Mungo Park's '*moral* and *physical*' geography of Africa.[209] In his *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* Park describes setting off 'accompanied by a coffle of fourteen asses, loaded with salt, bound for Sansanding,' in Mali.[210] In *Travels* he refers to coffles of both asses and slaves, both beasts of burden, and discusses how slaves were traded and exported from Gambia. Park laments that the slaves (like the asses) are chained together and that 'the poor wretches are kept constantly fettered'.[211]

'*The Origin of the Beery Way*' was set in Senegambia. '*The Railroad Heroides*', the second poem in 'The White Queen', is set in the former French colony of Gabon in West Africa and the Canary Islands, a Spanish colonial possession off the West African coast.[212] It too is preoccupied with slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism and the colonial class. In '*The Railroad Heroides*' the republican ideals of the French Revolution, its promise of human liberty, equality and fraternity, are alluded to as a framework of political beliefs from which to assess French and Spanish colonialism, historical and contemporary. The poem alludes to France and Spain's historical crimes against humanity, particularly participation and complicity in the slave trade in these regions and Spain's extermination of

---

[207] Letter to Vivienne Lewis (19 September 1970), in BC MS 20c London Magazine, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.
[208] 'The Death of the PWD Man, I', *Loiners*, 47.
[209] Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa,* vol. 1, with an Appendix and illustrations by Major Rennell (London: W. Bulmer & Co., 1799), iii.
[210] Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa,* 54.
[211] Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa,* 26.
[212] 'The White Queen 2: *The Railroad Heroides*', *Loiners*, 28-30.

the Indigenous people of the Canary Islands, the Gaunches. The poem also makes a polemical attack against what it presents as the continuing servitude and economic and military domination of Africans in Gabon and the Canary Islands by the French and Spanish states and capital. The poem very much reflects the poet's anti-militarist, anti-colonialist and republican stance.

The French are the ostensible polemical target in this poem, evident in ironic allusions to French republicanism, the Revolution, French soldiers, French francs and use of the French language by the narrator, who is representative of the *colon*. But the Spanish are an important subtextual target in the poem. The strategic occlusion of the contemporary Spanish colonial presence is part of Harrison's presentation of the Canary Islands as essentially African, a position which resonates with contemporary African calls for the Independence of the Islands. What the poem makes explicit is the racist and arrogant sensibility of the contemporary French military and colonial class, which it presents in the context of France's claims to be a republican civilization founded in the 1789 Revolution. '*The Railroad Heroides*' suggests that the Motherland of *Liberté* has exported not Freedom and Reason but capitalist economics, militarism and modernity,[213] which has served its interests while destroying or dispossessing the African societies and peoples alluded to in the poem.

The title '*The Railroad Heroides*' uses the 'railroad' as a symbol of the modernity brought by colonialism and its disruption or dissolution of traditional cultures and economies, and its displacement of Africans. The immediate setting for the poem is an ocean-side resort in the tourist island of Tenerife, capital of the Canary Islands, in the

[213] Christopher L., Miller, 'Unfinished Business: Colonialism in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Ideals of the French Revolution', in *The Global Ramifications of the French Revolution*, eds. Joseph Klaits and Michael H. Haltzel (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 105-126.

1960s. Affluent Europeans are served and serviced by an African underclass. The poem's speaker is holidaying at the resort and he feels crowded by the begging, 'nude / Slack-breasted, tattooed' black prostitutes.[214] French soldiers at a costume party on ships 'Off Teneriffe' have 'blackamoors cut cakes.' Harrison's self-conscious use of the anachronistic term 'blackamoor' emphasizes that Africans on the Canary Islands carry the enslavement of their ancestry.

The term blackamoor is used with etymological and historical exactness in the poem. 'Blackamoor' refers both to the stylized Negro servants who wait on the French soldiers, and to the black Moors caught in Spain's massive manhunts on the West African coast between 1476 and 1593 and taken in large numbers to the Canary Islands.[215] Many captured Moors worked in the cities and when slavery ended around 1800 they settled in large numbers in La Laguna and Santa Cruz de la Palma on the island of Tenerife, where they remained an underclass.[216] In the poem the freed slaves' ancestors are the blackamoors and prostitutes who survive by serving and whoring themselves to the French soldiers and *colon*. The poem suggests that this marginalization of the Africans at the lowest level of a society turned into a European playground is another form of enslavement.

The title '*The Railroad Heroides*' also alludes to the history of exile to and from the Canary Islands by blackamoors. In the poem and historically, the Canary Islands are a place of African exile and enslavement. For Africans Tenerife is a place of grief, conveyed too through a line end rhyme identification of 'grief' with 'Teneriffe' in the second stanza.[217] The Islands are also known as a stepping-stone from the poverty of Africa to Europe and

---

[214] *Loiners*, 28.
[215] John Mercer, 'The Canary Islanders in Western Mediterranean Politics', *African Affairs*, vol. 78, no. 311 (1979), 159-76, 161.
[216] Mercer, 'The Canary Islanders', 167.
[217] *Loiners*, 29.

still today Africans, designated 'illegal aliens' by political parties and media, make often fatal bids to leave. The lowly black street sweeper in Leeds, in the poem's closing couplet, represents the African lineage of servitude, displacement, migration and flight to the metropoles of colonial power like England, where their experience of exile is characterized by the overlaid oppressions of race and class. The literary allusion in the title '*The Railroad Heroides*' is to *The Heroides* by an iconic poet of exile, the ancient Roman Ovid, and also registers his poems of exile, *Tristia*, *The Black Sea letters* and *Ibis*.

'*The Railroad Heroides*' also adapts aspects of the formal poetic and thematic elements of Ovid's *The Heroides*; these epistolary poems of elegiac love are written mainly by classical heroines to the men who abandoned them and several of these figures are exiles, like Ulysses and Aeneas. In *The Heroides* it is love-torn heroines who speak of or do take their own lives, and their despair is accorded dignity by Ovid. In '*The Railroad Heroides*' Harrison adapts Ovid's elegiac couplet but gender roles are reversed and a man abandoned by a woman writes verse about his undignified bid for a lover's death: 'From the bannisters I swung off. Suicide - / The noose's love-bites and a bruised backside.'[218] The poem's speaker, the White Queen, can also be considered the fictional author of the poem because Harrison is writing an epistolary narrative or Ovidian 'heroid.' '*The Railroad Heroides*', like '*Zeg-Zeg Postcards*', show Harrison's interest in epistolary poetry in *Loiners*.

The title's allusion to Ovid as a poet of exile is also relevant to the speaker of '*The Railroad Heroides*' and in turn to Harrison's own imaginary exile. By the third stanza the speaker is clearly identified with 'Tony Harrison' journeying by ship and train, or 'railroad', from Africa to Leeds. His voluntary, relatively privileged travel and socio-economic status is implicitly paralleled with the displacement of the blackamoors and street

[218] *Loiners*, 28.

sweeper. Harrison characterized his travel in the 1960s as an exile of the imagination and intellect, with reference to the Irish exile James Joyce and the character Stephen Daedalus in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. With reference to the travels which became the basis of many poems in *Loiners* Harrison, quoting Joyce's Stephen, used 'silence, exile and cunning.'[219] In '*The Railroad Heroides*' the speaker's implicit sense of his exile is contrasted to the blackamoors' experience of exile as enslavement or forced flight. The allusion to Ovid, covert literary adversary of his nemesis the Emperor Augustus, also associates Harrison with an oppositional republican literary lineage and '*The Railroad Heroides*' with polemical republican poetry.

'*The Railway Heroides*' suggests European and particularly French exploitation or 'milking' of African resources, and the *colon's* reduction of the African female community in Tenerife to a brothel. The poem's speaker, titillated most by his economic power, watches the black women make 'Lascivious gestures, their bald groins / Studded with wet francs, for my loose coins.'[220] The outrageously apt rhyme on 'groins' / 'coins' clearly suggests that the women survive through the overlapping trades of sexual tourism and begging. Frustrated with the Negresses' economic urgency, the tourist flings francs, blows and racist curses: '*Tu, vache noire*!' ['You, black cow!'].

> I'm on my fifth warm beer. I need my cash.
> I crunch her knuckles hard, and yell out: *Vache*!
> Then as she pulls my sandals: *Tu, vache noire!*[221]

Harrison rhymes the French for 'cow', '*vache*', with the English 'cash.' The tourist thinks he is being exploited, made a 'cash cow' for the locals. His repulsion of the African's begging hand also metaphorically extends to the view that foreign aid to developing

---

[219] 'Inkwell', 32-3.
[220] *Loiners*, 28.
[221] *Loiners*, 28.

countries is a 'handout.' The poem strongly implies that instead it is Africa's resources that have been 'milked' by European interests, leaving Africans with only debasing sources of meager income.

In '*The Railroad Heroides*' the explicitly racist, misogynistic, cashed-up white tourist abuses black women marginalized by the impacts of colonialism and modernization. The poem is informed by Harrison observing European's racially abusive attitudes towards Africans who were not seen to have responded well to Europe's economic investments and wider presence in Africa:

> It's amazing how the old clichés pour out of the white man when he is frustrated here, 's he so often is. 'Get back up the fucking trees.' 'Bloody ignorant monkeys' etc. etc. etc. Strange too that these remarks come from the most Simian of Europeans.[222]

The Europeans are the apes. Harrison's linking of political economy and racism may also reflect his reading of Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon. The poem ironically focuses on the servitude of Africans and the Darwinian arrogance of the French against the historical backdrops of African independence and the French Revolution.

In '*The Railroad Heroides*' the speaker observes a celebration of the French Republic and of its origins in the French Revolution. *La Marseillaise*, the Republic's national anthem and the soundtrack of the Revolution plays. Cakes 'Iced thick with tricolours' are served to the French soldiers on 'festooned' naval or cruise ships off Tenerife. The tricoloured cakes are iced, implicitly, with the blue, white and red that came to symbolize liberty, equality and fraternity on the flag inaugurated by the Revolution and retained to this day by the French Republic. Ironically, this culinary symbol of liberty, equality and fraternity is served to French soldiers by blackamoors:

---

[222] Letter to Silkin (28 January 1963). The spelling used in Harrison's letter is reproduced here, including the 's instead of 'as'.

Off Teneriffe
French soldiers from Gabon dressed up as sheiks
Waltzed amidships and blackamoors cut cakes
Iced thick with tricolours. The *Marseillaise*
Boomed from the tannoy and the easy lays
Beamed at the officers.[223]

France's revolutionary anthem, flag and rhetorical egalitarianism have been reduced to nationalist and tourist paraphernalia in a situation which travesties any notion of equality or fraternity between the French and Africans. With bitter historical irony, *La Marsellaise* booms its passionate republican rejection of the enslavement of Frenchmen by the conspiratorial kings of the *Ancien Regime* while French soldiers role-play as royalty attended by enslaved Africans. The theatrical scene at this costume party dramatizes what is implicitly presented as a master-servant relationship between France and Africa and the charade of French republicanism.

By having *La Marseillaise* play when French soldiers are on ships anchored off Tenerife in the 1960s Harrison is recalling the Battle of Santa Cruz de Tenerife (1797), one of the early French Revolutionary Wars, in which the Canary Islands became an important battleground between imperialist European powers. Harrison is implicitly drawing attention to France's shift from defending the Revolution at home to colonial and neo-colonial wars abroad, which are understood in the poem as a betrayal of the French Revolution.

Harrison is versed in the utopian hopes of the French Revolution and the first and second generation of the Romantic poets shaped by it, particularly Blake, Wordsworth and Shelley. The republican Blake's millenarian hopes of a 'New Jerusalem' are alluded to in 'Thomas Campey and the Copernican System' and in *The School of Eloquence* sonnet 'Dark Times.' In these poems about Northern England, and in Harrison's African poems, Blake's vision in

[223] *Loiners*, 29. In '*The Railroad Heroides*' as it appears in *Loiners* the spelling used is 'Teneriffe', but in *CP* and more typically Tenerife is spelt with one 'f'.

A Song of Liberty that 'Empire is no more!' has not been realized.[224] The early Wordsworth advocated the Revolution exporting Enlightenment ideals of Reason to 'Not favored spots alone, but the whole Earth.'[225] The ideals of the Revolution became the *mission civilisatrice* of French imperialism. The National Convention had also declared 'the abolition of Negro slavery in all the colonies.'[226] '*The Railroad Heroides*' again points to critical ideological fault-lines between the Revolution's rhetoric of liberty, its toleration of slavery and its maintenance and expansion of its colonies when it alludes to France's history in Gabon. The historical dimension of the poem's allusion to the French Republic's military presence in Gabon is its imposition of a colonial protectorate and toleration of the slave trade, despite its abolitionist rhetoric. The slave trade in Gabon is another political history tapped into by the symbolism of the blackamoors in the poem.

The immediate context of '*The Railroad Heroides*' is France's military intervention in the Gabonese Republic in 1964 to reinstate the Francophile M'Ba's dictatorship and to ensure Gabon remained within the French sphere of influence. Gabon had declared independence from France in 1960 but it was widely regarded as 'an extreme case, verging on caricature, of neo-colonialism.'[227] The authoritarian French President Charles de Gaulle ordered paratroopers to overturn the popular and bloodless domestic *coup d' etat* of M'Ba.[228] De Gaulle's regime is an important offstage political presence in Harrison's

---

[224] William Blake, 'Song of Liberty', *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman, commentary by Harold Bloom, newly rev. edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982 [1965]), l. 21, 45.
[225] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: the Four Texts, 1798-99*, ed. by Jonathon Wordsworth (London: Penguin, 1995), Book XI, l. 117, 441.
[226] 'Decree of the National Convention of 4 February 1794, Abolishing Slavery in all the Colonies', in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: a Brief Documentary History*, ed. by Lyn Hunt (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996), 115-16, 116.
[227] Michael C. Reed, 'Gabon: a Neo-Colonial Enclave of Enduring French Interest', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2 (1987), 283-320, 283.
[228] Reed, 'Gabon: a Neo-Colonial Enclave', 297.

adaptation of Molière's *The Misanthrope* to the context of Paris, 1966.[229] Harrison is unlikely not to have seen media coverage of the French *counter-coup*, international criticism and the ensuing months of demonstrations in Gabon in 1964, the year he began writing *Loiners*. In the context of Gabon, the poem's ironic allusion to *La Marseillaises*' call for patriots to defend the fatherland signals republican condemnation of France's military intervention in domestic African politics and its restoration of the Gabonese dictator.

The reference in '*The Railroad Heroides*' to French soldiers in oil-rich Gabon is also one of several 'off the page' references to multinational oil giants in Africa and to an alliance between military and Capital, the allied soldier and the merchant that Harrison regards the poet as an adversary of.[230] Gabon 'was the jewel in the crown' for state-owned French oil companies like Elf-Aquitaine.[231] Elf became 'a political actor' in local African politics 'and occasionally aided in the disposal of unhelpful leaders.'[232] Another state-owned French oil company with a base in Gabon, U.G.P., was involved in supplying intelligence to the French state during the 1964 coup.[233] In the poem the allusion to the French soldiers occurs three lines after two sequential references in the second stanza to the 'greasiness' of water contaminated by oil. There is also a reference to '*Shelltox*', a product of and, in the poem, a metonym for British Petroleum Shell, which was another major oil company in Gabon in the 1960s.[234] Shell's presence in Gabon and also its operation in the Niger Delta dating

---

[229] 'Interview', 238.
[230] 'Inkwell', 33.
[231] Oliveira, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea,* 178.
[232] Oliveira, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea,* 175-76.
[233] Reed, 'Gabon: a Neo-Colonial Enclave', 297.
[234] Oliveira, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea,* 176.

from 1956 and its alliance with the Nigerian military dictatorship,[235] the relationship between the French state and Elf and U.G.P. in Gabon, and the involvement of oil companies in local African politics are significant 'off the page' contexts for the references to oil, multinationals and soldiers in '*The Railroad Heroides*.'

In '*The Railroad Heroides*' the suicidal narrator's hanging belt breaks and afterwards he contemplates how the immensity of the ocean makes 'sadness shoreless.' His romantic sense of the existential abyss is in contrast with his prosaic observation of the 'greasiness' or oiliness of a saltwater pool: 'The swashing, greasy pool, the spindrift fine / As *Shelltox* seasoning my lips with brine.'[236] *Shelltox* is packaged in an aerosol spray container and Harrison likens its spray of lethal toxins to the spray of sea water contaminated by oil and other toxic wastes. The poem's association of Shell with 'greasy' water points to oil refineries and petrochemical production plants contaminating public water reserves and operating with impunity in 'third world' locations. The unmistakable allusion to Shell, with particular reference to its Nigerian operation, also renders more visible an easily overlooked allusion to the Spanish oil industry in Tenerife.

The first words of '*The Railroad Heroides*' signal Harrison's interest in the oil industry and environmental contamination in a colonial context: 'A lake like lead.' References to lakes and pools contaminated by lead, grease, oil and industrial toxins, and to ocean-side tourist bars suggest the immediate setting for the poem is based on the resorts in the coastline capital Santa Cruz de Tenerife, which have salt water lakes and pools. Tenerife is also the site for a major oil refinery and petrochemical production plant, owned by the Spanish oil giant *Compañía Española de Petróleos, S.A.* (CEPSA). CEPSA has been

[235] Dibua, 'Citizenship and Resource Control in Nigeria', 14-20. See also Oliveira, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea,* 171-72.
[236] *Loiners*, 28-9.

located in Tenerife since the 1930s but locating petroleum operations near urban centers is a well known environmental and health hazard. However, in a colony safely distant from the Spanish mainland, the poem suggests the environmental impacts caused by CEPSA, the major supplier of Spain's oil and which was ultimately under the control of the Spanish government.

The history of Spanish colonialism in the Canary Islands and West Africa is an important subtextual preoccupation of '*The Railroad Heroides*.' It was Ferdinand of Aragon who ordered Spain's military conquest of the Canaries and the Islands have been claimed by Spain since the late fifteenth century to the present day. The history of Spanish colonialism is threaded through *Loiners*. The allusive inclusion of the Canary Islands in the ambitious imperial terrain charted in *Loiners* reflects their paradigmatic status as 'the kindergarten for European imperialism.'[237] Ironically, the Canaries were known as 'the fortunate isles' and their Indigenous people the Gaunches were the first to be destroyed by 'the railroad' of European colonization.[238] The Gaunches waged determined guerilla warfare against the Spanish and on Tenerife, the immediate setting for the poem, never surrendered. Tenerife's fifteen thousand Gaunches were all but wiped out by disease.[239] The brave Gaunches are a chapter in the history of genocide permeating *Loiners*.

In '*The Railroad Heroides*' the blackamoors represent the Canary Island's first slaves of African origins, the Indigenous Gaunches, as well as those Africans forcibly brought from the continent, and their descendants. The Gaunches were of African origin and their language was Berber, an African language group, though they had lost contact with the mainland. It was because the Spanish enslaved and exterminated or deported all but a

---

[237] Sven Lindqvist, *"Exterminate All the Brutes"*, trans. by Joan Tate (New York: New Press, 1996), 111.
[238] Lindqvist, *"Exterminate All the Brutes"*, 110.
[239] Lindqvist, *"Exterminate All the Brutes"*, 110.

handful of the original fifteen thousand Gaunches that man-hunts for new blackamoors began on the adjacent West African coast in the fifteenth century.

The poem's vision of an African lineage of slavery and modern servitude to transient Europeans resonates politically with the African anti-colonial movement's view of the Canary Islands as an outlying African territory still under Spanish rule. In the 1960s the Canary Islands were two divided provinces of Spain and pro-independence groups were outlawed by the fascist Franco dictatorship.[240] Many African states and organizations in the 1960s advocated the decolonization of the Canary Islands and recognition of it as part of Africa not Europe.[241] In 1968 the Organization of African Unity recognized the Movement for the Autonomy and Independence of the Canary Archipelago (MPAIAC) as a legitimate African liberation movement and the Canary Islands as an African country under Spanish occupation.[242]

Harrison's depiction of Tenerife is making an anti-colonial political point. The poem presents Tenerife as essentially African, with transient French soldiers and tourists whose language is not understood by the local African women. It strikingly erases six centuries of Spanish colonialism's cultural and racial influences and occludes the fact that Spanish is the major language. The African presence is stressed in the poem by sequentially focusing on the black 'tattooed girls', the blackamoors and African cultural artefacts, the 'Tuareg ring and the red, goat-leather bag' that the love-torn tourist hurls into the sea.[243] The allusion to the Tuaregs, signified in the poem by their culturally distinctive jewellery and leatherwork, emphasizes African cultural influences from nearby Northern Africa.

---

[240] James Minahan, *Encyclopaedia of Stateless Nations: Ethnic and National Groups Around the World* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 377.
[241] Minahan, *Encyclopaedia of Stateless Nations*, 377.
[242] Minahan, *Encyclopaedia of Stateless Nations*, 377.
[243] *Loiners*, 29.

'*The Railroad Heroides*' contrasts the servitude of the blackamoors and prostitutes of Tenerife with the freedom of the Tuaregs, who were slave traders rather than slaves, who were fierce fighters and known as a proud people, and who nomadically roamed the Sahara. The reference to the Tuaregs also reflects on colonialism because they are another African people whose land and trade was taken over and who were militarily defeated by the French in the early twentieth century. It is also significant to the poem's political perspective that the Tuaregs are Berbers, like the Gaunches, because this asserts the Canary Islands heterogeneous African racial identity.

The emphasis in '*The Railroad Heroides*' upon the African cultural and racial identity of a Spanish colony sixty miles off the African coast has political implications in the context of 1960s African anti-colonial movement. The question of whether the African ancestral lineage of the Gaunches had been completely destroyed by six centuries of Spanish racial influences and mixed immigration, and partly on this basis whether the Canary Islands should be recognized as part of Africa was politically contested by advocates and opponents of independence.[244] The MPAIAC argued that the ancestral lineage of the Gaunches persisted, while opponents of independence argued that post-conquest immigration had eradicated any genetic traces.[245] In '*The Railroad Heroides*', emphasis on the African presence, ancestry and culture of the Canary Islands is consonant with contemporaneous pro-independence arguments for recognition of the Canary Islands as part of Africa not Europe.

Harrison's strong interest in African anti-colonialism, study of the cultures he travelled in and alertness to current affairs also suggest he may have been aware of the political

---

[244] Mercer, 'The Canary Islanders', 159, 161and 176; and A. Oyowe, 'The Canary Islands Sing out for Freedom', *New African* (May 1978), 45-6. Quoted in Mercer, 'The Canary Islanders', 161.
[245] Mercer, 'The Canary Islanders', 159-176, 169-171.

situation in the Canary Islands. In a second semantic layer that tri-colored cake served by blackamoors to Europeans is the national and nationalist flag of the Canary Islands, which originally had three stripes of white, pale blue and yellow, to which a coat of arms was later added. The national flag was based on the popular nationalist flag of CIM. Serving the tricolored cake to Europeans in the poem may register national servitude and attendant calls for national independence. In '*The Railroad Heroides*' the begging African women shake the platform the European tourist, representative of the *colon*, lounges on till he flees 'blushing' and humiliated. The European then likens himself to 'a corpse Valhalla bound' and dreams that 'the sun / Blackens my bare balls to bitumen.'[246] The poem contains an allegory of humiliated Africans defeating a colonial class, likened to the warriors killed in battle and conducted to Valhalla in Old Northern mythology. The poet wishes for or anticipates a leveling of power between 'blackened' Europe and black Africa in a decade of victory for the African nationalist movement, though the Canary Islands have remained under Spanish rule.

In '*The Railroad Heroides*' the concern with colonialism, war and genocide in Africa is also articulated through an allusion to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the novel Harrison was so moved by:[247] 'After the bloodshed, if your tribe survives, / Pounding a big man's yams among young wives.'[248] This line concisely alludes to the measures of a man in the traditional Igbo society recreated in Achebe's novel: bloodshed, paternity and yams. A man's possession of fertile wives depended on his reputation as a warrior and his wealth, measured primarily by yams: 'Yam, the king of crops, was a man's crop.'[249] The allusion to warring Igbo men, like Achebe's tragic warrior Okonkwo, suggests cultural constructions

---

[246] *Loiners*, 28.
[247] Letter to Silkin (28 February 1963).
[248] *Loiners*, 30.
[249] Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational, 1996 [1964]), 16.

of masculinity are bound up in the psychology of war, an analysis widely evident in *Loiners* and Harrison's later pacifist poetry. The allusion to *Things Fall Apart* also reflects Harrison's interest in the culture and history of the Igbo. Harrison is poetically addressing the Igbo and Biafran Achebe and rhetorically questions whether his people will survive Nigeria's genocidal war against Biafra: 'After the bloodshed, if your tribe survives.' The African poems show a deep engagement with the colonial history and neocolonial dilemmas of West Africa, and especially with the tragic contemporary events in Nigeria. After 'exploring' Africa Harrison returned to England and settled in the Northern city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, which is the setting for the most autobiographical poem in *Loiners*, 'Ghosts: Some Words before Breakfast.' In the next chapter 'Ghosts' is interpreted by making visible the haunting of Harrison by the late Rimbaud.

Chapter 5

'Ghosts: Some Words before Breakfast'

'Ghosts: Some Words before Breakfast' is the last poem in *Loiners*. The poem is dedicated to Harrison's daughter Jane and contains two epigraphs:

> *These rooms have been furnished by the League of Friends*
> *For your comfort and rest while illness portends.*
> *Take care of the things which from us you borrow*
> *For others are certain to need them tomorrow.*
>
> Inscribed in *The League of Friends* rest room, Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
>
> '*C'est mon unique soutien au monde, à présent!*'
>
> - Arthur Rimbaud, 2nd July, 1891 (*Oeuvres*, p. 528)[1]

Harrison described 'Ghosts: Some Words before Breakfast' as 'a bitter, ironic affirmation of the need for poetry on many levels, a grudging autobiographical credo, the need for love, a celebration, an art, however difficult.'[2] The irony of Harrison's affirmation of poetry and love is illuminated through the life and letters of Rimbaud whose importance for 'Ghosts' is signalled by the poem's second epigraph, a quotation from one of Rimbaud's last letters, addressed to his sister. Harrison has read Rimbaud's letters and knows his biography.[3] Rimbaud famously abandoned poetry and left France for Africa. It is Rimbaud's struggle to survive as a poet, his poetic silence, his escapes and the manner of his dying that haunts Harrison in 'Ghosts.' The epigraph to 'Ghosts' taken from Rimbaud's letter has been mentioned by a critic[4] but there has been no explanation offered of its significance. The combined epigraphs signpost Harrison's underlying concerns in 'Ghosts.' These include

---

[1] Ghosts: Some Words before Breakfast', *Loiners*, 96.
[2] *THP*, uncatalogued and unnumbered.
[3] Harrison also refers to Rimbaud's life in 'Inkwell' and quotes from one of Rimbaud's early letters in *v.* and these references are explored in Chapter 6 and Chapter 8 respectively.
[4] *H, v. & O*, 12-13.

private fears and ambivalence, and political anger at the warping of private relationships by corrupt public ideologies. The personal preoccupations of this enigmatic and haunting poem are also clarified by Harrison's letters during the 1960s and early 1970s to Alan Ross, the editor of London Magazine which published *Loiners*, and Jon Silkin, editor of *Stand* and fellow Leeds poet.

The title 'Ghosts' alludes to the play *Ghosts* by Henrik Ibsen, the nineteenth-century Norwegian dramatist and poet. The allusion to Ibsen's *Ghosts* in the title identifies Harrison's poem as being like Ibsen's play: a modern tragedy with features of the fatalistic Greek tragedy. The narrator of 'Ghosts' is a young man, implicitly the dramatic persona 'Tony Harrison', belatedly recognizing the forces determining his life and being a powerless bystander at pivotal early events. In 'Ghosts' an unplanned pregnancy, a stillbirth, the maiming of his child, and the retributive puritanism of his mother symbolically suggest the cycle of tragedy in which the young are destroyed by their parents. Harrison's poem and Ibsen's play share a preoccupation with the power of heredity and the dramatization of inherited ideas as destructive 'ghosts.' Harrison's 'Ghosts', like Ibsen's play, attacks a repressive morality and the authority of the church and family and does so partly by dramatizing the disintegration of a son: in the play it is the dying Oswald and more subtly in the poem it is an anguished 'Tony Harrison.' A very different version of 'Ghosts' was published in 1961[5] but one phrase is retained in 'Ghosts' as it appears in *Loiners*, Harrison's fear of 'the next descent of night',[6] which echoes the doomed Oswald being 'haunted by this ghastly fear' in Ibsen's play.[7]

---

[5] *Poetry and Audience*, vol. 7, no. 22 (20 May 1960), 6-7.
[6] *Loiners*, 96.
[7] Henrik Ibsen, *Ghosts*; *A Public Enemy; When We Dead Awake*, trans. by Peter Watts (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), 98.

The epigraph to the first version of 'Ghosts' is 'I gave you life' and it is taken from Ibsen's play. Oswald tells his mother Mrs Alving that he has hereditary syphilis, his father's legacy, and asks her to kill him, but she suggests that this would pervert a natural moral order: 'But I gave you your life.'[8] Harrison slightly alters the line and uses it as the epigraph to signal the poem's preoccupation with his mother's moral claim of control over his life, manifest in her bitter opposition to his love affair. Although the epigraph from Ibsen is dropped these preoccupations persist into the expanded version of the poem as it appears in *Loiners*, where the lover has become his wife and the mother of his children.[9] In the *Loiners*' version of 'Ghosts' he attributes responsibility for his mother's view that a stillbirth was divine retribution for conception outside of wedlock to Queen Victoria's public professions of a puritan morality. He addresses a statue of the 'Empress, Queen':

> your clean-
> living family image drove
> my mother venomously anti love,
> and made her think the stillbirth just
> retribution for our filthy lust;
> our first (the one we married for)
> red splashes on a LADIES floor …
> *inter urinam et faeces nasc-*
> *imur* … issues of blood.[10]

The narrator recalls the birth scene of his stillborn child and he remembers the Latin words of Saint Augustine that we are born between urine and faeces. The Church Father's words, and the reference to 'issues of blood' on the floor of the 'LADIES' toilet seems to reprise his mother's 'venomous' view of the indecent filthiness of his poetry. In 'Ghosts' his mother's virulent puritanism is a metaphorical 'disease' and a matrilineal version of the

---

[8] Ibsen, *Ghosts*, 100.
[9] For a more detailed account of the first version of 'Ghosts' see *H, v & O*, 12.
[10] *Loiners*, 91.

patrilineal syphilis in Ibsen's play.[11] Ibsen's *Ghosts* is also part of the literature of syphilis alluded to in *Loiners*. Harrison's poem implicitly takes up the metaphorical dimension of Ibsen's use of 'disease', and of 'ghosts' as metaphors for 'dead beliefs' that are passed from generation to generation and cause great suffering.

'Ghosts' is dedicated to Jane, Harrison's first surviving child. The tragedy that is the catalyst for this poem is expressed in a letter to Ross. Harrison writes that on the day he posted Ross the manuscripts of *Loiners*, 5 April 1968, 'my daughter, who is rare and beautiful, had both legs crushed under a ten ton lorry on the Great North Road.'[12] A month later he writes that 'the threat of amputation is still not removed.' [13] Harrison's poem for Jane recalls Rimbaud because the French poet had a comparable experience. Rimbaud's leg was surgically amputated on 27 May, 1891. Little more than a month later, 2 July, 1891, Rimbaud writes the line that becomes Harrison's epigraph in a poem occasioned by his child's accident: '*C'est mon unique soutien au monde,* à *présent!*' ['It's the only support I have in the world right now!'].[14] Rimbaud was literally referring to his left leg as his only physical support because his right leg had been surgically amputated a few weeks before. Rimbaud also wrote that he would advise anyone to die rather than allow a limb to be amputated.[15] In 'Ghosts', Harrison anticipates for his small daughter 'almost a lifetime's crippledom' and wonders if he should 'cut off / your breathing with a last wet

---

[11] Luke Spencer also observes that 'As in Ibsen's play, there is a transgenerational legacy of sexual "disease" (his mother's life-denying puritanism).' See *Poetry TH*, 39.
[12] Letter to Ross (4 May 1968).
[13] Letter to Silkin (16 June 1968).
[14] Letter to Isabelle (2 July 1891), *I Promise to be Good: The Letters of Arthur Rimbaud*, trans., ed. and with an Introduction by Wyatt Mason (New York and Toronto: Modern Library, 2004), 347.
[15] Letter to Isabelle (15 July 1891), *I Promise to be Good*, 354.

cough.'[16] 'Ghosts', like its narrator's subjectivity, is composed of a melancholy layering of significant biographical experiences.

The main place settings for 'Ghosts' are the Royal Victoria Infirmary where Jane was hospitalized; Leazes Park, which is directly across the road from the RVI; and the wider city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Harrison wrote that 'I've spent day and night practically at the hospital this last month.'[17] The poem's nocturnal narrator walks in the Park when 'daylights gone.'[18] He walks the streets 'while Newcastle sleeps.'[19] The primarily night-time setting of the poem is a metaphor for his state of mind, 'his element, the dark.' The tranquility of the park lake swans is in dream-like contrast to the narrator's internal torment.

The surreal elements of the imagery in 'Ghosts' evokes the half-waking exhaustion of its narrator, who is mentally drowning in alcohol and images of the accident:

> O caravanserais! I too could drown
> this newest sorrow in *Newcastle Brown*.
> I thrash round desperately. I flail
> my arms at sharks in seas of ale.
> Organs. Head/-lights /-lines. Black. White.
> The on /off sirening blue light;
> heart / lungs like a grappled squid;
> BLIND PARAPLEGIC'S CHANNEL BID.
> Blood; piss; oceans; taste of salt.
> Halt! Halt! Halt! Halt![20]

Harrison wrote that 'I am living in a strange state of tiredness … keeping up Jane's spirits.'[21] He adds: 'I am morale-booster in chief (though having seen me I don't suppose you can imagine my boosting anyone's morale).'[22] Despite this self-deprecating grim

---

[16] *Loiners*, 94.
[17] Letter to Ross (4 May 1968).
[18] *Loiners*, 91.
[19] *Loiners*, 94.
[20] *Loiners*, 95.
[21] Letter to Silkin (16 June 1968).
[22] Letter to Ross (22 May 1969).

humour, Harrison's wrestle with dark spirits and anxiety is evident in several *Loiners* poems and letters to Ross, who was an early support in the literary world.

The poet is one of the ghosts haunting 'Ghosts.' 'I' 'float past' the hospital wards and am 'Weightless.'[23] He is a shade of himself: 'a shadow man.' The tragedy has left him 'with two of my dimensions gone.' Harrison once described Jane as 'my only solace.'[24] Expressing the impact of her accident upon him he wrote that 'No-one could have devised anything more horrible to tear me apart.'[25] His expression of sorrow in the poem contends with that 'stiff upper lip'[26] English stoicism and his contemplativeness and wariness. The darkness he strides through is also a metaphorical 'cover' for his guarded interiority. The ghostly figure retains an appropriately enigmatic quality and is often viewed from a distance. Harrison's sense of himself as an anxious and ghostly figure in the agonizing time 'Ghosts' is about also recalls Rimbaud's sense of himself as a walking ghost in *Une saison en enfer* [*A Season in Hell*]: '*Au matin j'avais le regard si perdu et la contenance si morte, que ceux que j'ai rencontrés ne m'ont peut-* être *pas vu*' ['In the morning I had so vacant a look and so dead an expression, that those I met *perhaps did not see me*'].[27]

The lyrical cry of 'Ghosts' is refracted through Rimbaud's letters. In the letter Harrison quotes for his epigraph, Rimbaud expresses the suffering that possesses him: '*Pour moi, je ne fais que pleurer jour et nuit, je suis un homme mort, je suis estropié pour toute ma vie*' ['All I do is weep day and night. I have ceased living. I am crippled for the rest of my

---

[23] *Loiners*, 93.
[24] Letter to Silkin (28 February 1963).
[25] Letter to Ross (4 May 1968).
[26] *Loiners*, 95.
[27] '*Mauvais Sang*' ['Bad Blood'], *Une saison en enfer* [*A Season in Hell*], *RCWSL*, 270-1.

life'].[28] In 'A Kumquat for John Keats' (1981) Harrison remembers the time 'Ghosts' is about:

> days, when the very sunlight made me weep,
> days, spent like the nights in deep, drugged sleep,
> days in Newcastle by my daughter's bed,
> wondering if she, or I, weren't better dead,[29]

The significance of Rimbaud's letters for 'Ghosts' includes Harrison's identification with his fear and sleeplessness. Rimbaud wrote that 'I am very afraid' and 'I sleep no more than two hours per night.'[30] Harrison also suggests a kindredness of sorrows between Rimbaud, his daughter and himself through his metaphorical identification with the maiming of their bodies.

The narrator of 'Ghosts' eases his spirit by walking at night but implicitly suggests that his daughter's accident renders her body an objective correlative of his wounded interiority. Harrison also suggests that the reclusiveness of the writer's life bears resemblance to the marginality of the vulnerable: 'You'll live, / like your father, a contemplative.'[31] In 'Shango' he more humorously presents a kindredship between his mind and his daughter's body: 'The unbalanced poet and the lame daughter.'[32] In 'Shango' Harrison also described how Jane and an injured friend 'compared sufferings and became immediately close.'[33] In 'Ghosts' Harrison finds comfort by comparing his daughter's suffering and his own with Rimbaud's. He also wrote that 'I seek cures elsewhere than booze and blue pills (I mean

---

[28] Letter to Isabelle (23 June 1891), *RCWSL*, 446-7.
[29] 'A Kumquat for John Keats', *CP*, 222.
[30] Letter to Isabelle (2 July 1891), *I Promise to be Good*, 347.
[31] Loiners, 96.
[32] 'Shango', 89.
[33] 'Shango', 99.

work).'[34] Poetry and Rimbaud's late letters are Harrison's support through the tragedy that is the occasion for the poem, and in the tragic vision of life implicit in 'Ghosts.'

Harrison described 'poetry as the laying of ghosts'[35] and in this poem wishes to allay his fears and the difficult memories and legacies of his relationships with the three generations of women addressed in the poem: 'Mother, wife and daughter, ghost - / I've laid, laid, laid, laid / you, but I'm still afraid.'[36] The 'ghost' here is also Harrison. In a letter from 1973 he describes 'a life of quiet despair, as before', alluding to Thoreau,[37] and has said that poetry should help us.[38] 'Ghosts' implicitly suggests that poetry helps his spirit survive his life, and reflects the poet's humanist view that art, particularly tragedy, can give greater form and solace to the human spirit than religion.[39]

Harrison's tempered and ironic affirmation of poetry is signalled by the poem's epigraphs. The two epigraphs contrast the form of poetry with prose and together associate solace in times of need with poetry, and its loss with the absence of support. The first epigraph is in the form of metered verse, whose rhythms Harrison elsewhere describes as being 'like a life support system',[40] and 'like the pulse'.[41] In 'Ghosts' poetry is metaphorically comparable to the blood transfusions keeping his daughter alive in the RVI:

Blood transfusion, saline drip,
'this fiddle' and 'stiff upper lip'

---

[34] Letter to Ross (5 April 1968).
[35] *THP*, uncatalogued and unnumbered.
[36] *Loiners*, 96.
[37] Letter to Ross (21 July 1973). Harrison is alluding to Thoreau's well known statement from *Walden*: 'The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.' See Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Other Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, ed. by Brooks Atkinson (New York: Modern Library, 1937), 7.
[38] Tony Harrison quoted in 'Robert Winder meets Tony Harrison', *The Independent Weekend* (5th August 1995), 3.
[39] Tony Harrison quoted in Michael Glover, 'Tony Harrison: Not to be read quietly', *The Independent* (1April 2007). At: <http://news.independent.co.uk/people/profiles/article2411634.ece>, [accessed 2 June 2010].
[40] 'Interview', 43.
[41] 'Interview', 43.

Have seen us so far.[42]

'This fiddle' refers to 'Poetry', appropriating the words of the American modernist poet Marianne Moore.[43] The 'us' Harrison refers to is his family. The content of the first epigraph is the concept of supportive human community. It includes familial and civic community, whose obligations include hospitals to care for its ill. Harrison read the statement that became the first epigraph in 'Ghosts' in *The League of Friend's* rest room at the RVI, where his family went to support his daughter.

The League of Friends symbolism also evokes a wider fraternity based on shared human vulnerability and goodwill. It is comparable to the 'precious idea' Harrison contemplates in 'Inkwell', quoting from Pablo Neruda: 'that affection that comes from those unknown to us who are watching over our sleep and solitude … widens out the boundaries of our being and unites all living things!'[44] The unseen friends Harrison invokes in both 'Inkwell' and 'Ghosts' implicitly includes the invisible community of readers and kindred spirits from the world of literature. Rimbaud is an intimate and distant fellow traveller. A 'league' is a measure of distance in a traveller's itinerary and recalls the importance of travel to Harrison, and to Rimbaud.[45] The word 'league' also often occurs 'in poetical or rhetorical statement of distance.'[46] The *League of Friends* reflects Harrison's meditation upon friendship across spatial and temporal distances.

The epigraph in verse associates poetry with 'life support' and 'friendship.' By contrast, the second epigraph is in prose and taken from Rimbaud's life after poetry. It is a grief-stricken cry of being without support, emotional and physical: '*C'est mon unique soutien*

---

[42] *Loiners*, 95.
[43] Marianne Moore, 'Poetry', *The Complete Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 36.
[44] 'Inkwell', 32.
[45] Letter to his Family (15 January 1885), *RCWSL*, 430-31.
[46] 'league', *OED online*.

au monde, à présent! ['It's the only support I have in the world right now!'].[47] Rimbaud was terrified that his remaining leg would be amputated.[48] Graham Robb writes: 'For Rimbaud, amputation was the worst thing that could have happened' because 'his size-41 feet had always been … a means of escape … '.[49] Much of Rimbaud's travel involved walking extraordinary distances and many of his early verses are associated with his walking adventures: 'Like verse or music, walking was a rhythmical skill, a combination of trance and productive activity.'[50] Rimbaud's loss of the ability to walk and lost connection to poetry haunts Harrison's meditation in this poem, where the relationship between walking and poetry is important to the narrator. He walks the darkened city streets to outstrip his fears and this correlates with the internal journey involved in writing 'Ghosts' to allay the ghosts that still walk.

Like the circular character of his journey through the city, the poem ends with the resurfacing of his fear 'about the next descent of night.'[51] Harrison has said that 'It's an existential need, the metrical form, for me',[52] and 'Ghosts' depicts poetry and walking as what is sustaining for him. He instinctively associates poetic meter 'with the heart beat, with the sexual instinct, with all those physical rhythms which go on despite the moments when you feel suicidal.'[53] This physicality and momentum of verse brings it closer to walking. Rimbaud's travels by foot, train and ship were an aspect of his wish to become 'somebody else': '*Je est un autre*' ['I is someone else'],[54] a concept which includes

---

[47] Letter to Isabelle (2 July 1891), *I Promise to be* Good, 347.
[48] Letter to Isabelle (2 July 1891), *I Promise to be Good*, 347.
[49] Graham Robb, *Rimbaud* (London: Picador, 2000), 426.
[50] Robb, *Rimbaud*, 277.
[51] *Loiners*, 96.
[52] 'Conversation', 43.
[53] 'Interview', 236.
[54] Letter to Georges Izambard (13 May 1871), *RCWSL*, 370-1.

escaping his own personality and his life in Europe.[55] The narrator of 'Ghosts' is also walking away from his constitutive 'darkness' and, in nocturnal interludes, the troubles in his life.

Rimbaud wrote the line that appears as the epigraph to 'Ghosts' when he was alone in the *Hospital of the Immaculate Conception* in Marseille. 'Ghosts' suggests that Rimbaud was also profoundly alone because he bade poetry '*Adieu*' ['Farewell'].[56] An irony implicit in 'Ghosts' is that one of the greatest poets in Harrison's and world literature's canon was without poetry in a time of 'desperate need.'[57] However, 'Ghosts' also foregrounds the powerlessness of love and poetry, and their roots in the tragedy of the human condition, which is exposed by our mortality. Harrison's poetry and his love cannot make the wounded beloved any 'less / the helpless prey of Nothingness -.'[58] Rimbaud's loneliness and his poetic silence is the disturbing example that haunts Harrison,[59] but ironically it is alluded to in a poem about the grave limitations of poetry and about struggling to survive 'issues of blood', the tragedies, conflicts and legacies of familial love.

In 'Ghosts' Harrison subtly uses Rimbaud's life and letters as a ghost text. In a sense Rimbaud is the ghost writer of 'Ghosts.' By making Rimbaud's letters the subtext of his poem Harrison releases a more open emotional voice. The poem's narrator sustains a guardedness of tone as he expresses the autobiographical sorrows and ambivalences that mark his relationships with his mother, wife and daughter. The loneliness of Rimbaud is an

---

[55] As emphasized, for example, in Charles Nicholl, *Somebody Else: Arthur Rimbaud in Africa 1880-91* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997). See also Enid Starkie, *Arthur Rimbaud in Abyssinia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), 131.
[56] '*Adieu*' ['Farewell'], *Une Saison en enfer* [*A Season in Hell*], *RCWSL*, 302-05.
[57] 'Newcastle is Peru', *Loiners*, 81.
[58] *Loiners*, 92.
[59] 'Inkwell', 34.

illuminating backdrop to the narrator's sense of being 'a stranger caught'[60] in his familial circumstances, a physically present but emotionally estranged ghost of himself. A contrast between Harrison's and Rimbaud's lives that is relevant to 'Ghosts' is that one stays and the other leaves poetry, friends and family. Yet both find themselves 'strangers' trapped in their different situations and this is an aspect of Harrison's identification with Rimbaud in 'Ghosts.' However, Harrison makes an enigmatic, symbolic reference to a ghostly figure who shadows him when he walks at night: 'The black spot crossing; on both sides / a blank male silhouette still strides.'[61] It is as if the ghost of Rimbaud is one of the dead friends accompanying Harrison through the dark.[62]

The epigraph and poem together evoke the different 'choices' made, the different prices paid, and how Rimbaud's example haunts the deeply ambivalent narrator of 'Ghosts.' A subtext of the poem is the conflict between family, freedom and 'this fiddle.' The title 'Ghosts: Some Words before Breakfast' suggests poetry happened during the precious hours before breakfast and the demands of domesticity. Harrison writes that 'All my energy is going into Jane's restoration and I find little left for poems.'[63] The narrator's claustrophobia extends beyond the hospital waiting room to his domestic situation: 'Air! Air! There's not enough / air in this small world.'[64] 'Ghosts' narrator yearns for far away lands and the company of travellers: 'O caravanserais!'[65] Harrison found that travel 'is the only thing that

---

[60] *Loiners*, 93.
[61] *Loiners*, 94.
[62] Harrison refers to dead writers of particular importance to him as 'friends' and of his need for 'the company of the dead.' See 'Interview', 245.
[63] Letter to Silkin (16 June 1968).
[64] *Loiners*, 93.
[65] *Loiners*, 95.

brings me out of myself.'[66] Academic positions overseas were attractive [67] but 'we have to stay put, like it or not' because of the familial situation recalled in the poem.[68]

However, 'Ghosts' describes familial love as 'this / brave trophallaxis of a kiss',[69] as fundamental as food and dignified by courage. This line, 'this / brave trophallaxis of a kiss', and the despair permeating the poem quietly reflect Harrison's material struggle 'so that food is again in the gobs of the children.'[70] The year *Loiners* was published Harrison wryly wrote that the only break from a diet of 'all tea, bread and spuds' was a basket of food delivered by a local charity worker. She said 'we heard about you.'[71] Financial difficulties plagued the poet and his young family in the period 'Ghosts' recalls and intermittently for the next decade despite a few Fellowships and some success in the theatre. There was also pressure from traditional parents. His father didn't understand why 'he didn't do a job with a decent living.'[72] His mother 'was very keen that I get on' in a respectable profession such as a schoolmaster. In a letter to Ross, Harrison expresses relief at receiving the Gregynog Fellowship: 'I didn't want to over-exaggerate our position to you but it has been really bad this year, and in the end so bad I couldn't work properly.'[73] When he dedicated himself to poetry economic insecurity undermined his ability to concentrate but academic positions left him without time 'for my own work.'[74]

---

[66] Letter to Ross (21 July 1973).
[67] Letter to Ross (5 April 1968).
[68] Letter to Ross (4 May 1968).
[69] *Loiners*, 92-3.
[70] Letter to Jeffrey Wainwright (18 December 1980), BC Ms 20c Wainwright, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds. A decade after *Loiners* was published, Harrison writes to Wainwright that he had to put aside his own projects and find theatre commissions 'so that food is again in the gobs of the children.'
[71] Letter to Ross (7 October 1970).
[72] Harrison's Aunt Vera in discussion in *Them & [uz]: A Portrait of Tony Harrison*, *Arena*, BBC TV (15 April 1985).
[73] Letter to Ross (7 October 1970).
[74] Letter to Silkin (8 November 1964).

In 'Ghosts' Harrison identifies with Rimbaud as a poor man who struggled for material survival as a poet, and as an outsider in the literary world. Rimbaud's famous rejection of poetry must be considered in the context of the failure of his fierce efforts to survive as a professional writer. He wrote that 'I despise poverty': '*Eh bien! je dois enterrer mon imagination et mes souvenirs! Une belle gloire d'artiste et deconteur emportee!*' ['Well, I have to bury my imagination and my memories! A fine reputation of an artist and story-teller lost sight of!'][75] Living in precarious circumstances, no longer with his lover and sometime financier Verlaine, ostracized by the French literary community and without publishers Rimbaud was aware his poetic burial was a tragedy, and Harrison sees this loss of poetry in a similar way. Harrison has said in conversation that he came to 'love Rimbaud' through his poetry and epistolary biography.[76] The 'Ghosts' epigraph is also an epitaph for Rimbaud as a poet and a person.

'Ghosts' is in part a memorial to Rimbaud as a figure of great poetic and personal importance to Harrison. The line that became the epigraph to 'Ghosts' was from one of the last letters by a distraught, gravely ill Rimbaud and the amputation he referred to was followed by complete paralysis and a terrible death. 'Ghosts' invokes the spirit of Rimbaud, including a capacity to meet his own death with dead-pan humour, to be funny in his own tragedy. Rimbaud's last published letter is addressed to the director of a shipping company and enquires about the price to travel from Aphinar to the Suez. It reflects his enormous will to keep moving and working, and significant humour:

> *Tous ces services sont là partout, et moi, impotent, malheureux, je ne peux rien trouver, le premier chien dans la rue vous dira cela.*

---

[75] '*Adieu*' ['Farewell'], *Une Saison en enfer* [*A Season in Hell*], *RCWSL*, 302-03. This is not Rimbaud's last poem but it bids farewell to hope of surviving as a poet.

[76] Harrison, with whom I had a conversation at the National Theatre in London on 11 April 2008, answered my question as to whether he liked Rimbaud by saying 'I love Rimbaud.'

Envoyez-moi donc le prix des services d'Aphinar à Suez. Je suis complétement paralysé: donc je désire me trouver de bonne heure a bord. Dites-moi à quelle heure je dois étre transporté à bord.

[All the services there are everywhere, and I, infirm, miserable, I cannot find anything, the first dog in the street will tell you so.
Please send me the price for services from Aphinar to Suez. I am completely paralysed. I would therefore like to be on board well in advance. Tell me at what time I should be carried aboard.][77]

Rimbaud may have been in denial about the nearness of death. Or he may have been finding support in a story which allowed him to die with courage and style. Harrison's interest in courage and humour in dark times is evident in letters from this period. He is grieving for Rimbaud and for his wounded child in 'Ghosts.'

A later poem '*Fonte Luminosa*' is also haunted by Rimbaud and centres round the crushing of Jane's legs and Harrison's existential need for movement. Jane's tears 'as once more you start coming through' 'your seventh anaesthesia'[78] remind Harrison of the famous luminous fountain in Brazil, the *fonte luminosa*. The reference to the fountain's lights reflects the recurring symbolism of illumination in the poetry. '*Fonte Luminosa*' is the second of the four parts comprising the long poem 'Sentences', which was first published in 1978 but draws on Harrison's travels in Brazil and Cuba in 1969 during his UNESCO Fellowship. '*Fonte Luminosa*' also recalls his life in England and Africa in the 1960s. He walks past 'the crossing / where you had your legs crushed':[79]

Walking on the Great North Road
with my back towards London
through showers of watery sleet,
my cracked rubber boot soles
croak like African bullfrogs[80]

---

[77] Letter to the Director of the Messageries Maritimes (9 November 1891), *RCWSL*, 446-8.
[78] '*Fonte Luminosa*', *CP*, 107.
[79] *CP*, 106.
[80] *CP*, 106.

While the poem associates walking on the Great North Road in Newcastle-upon-Tyne with Harrison's travels in Africa, the associative image of the poet walking recalls Rimbaud, 'the wanderer along the main road.'[81] In '*Fonte Luminosa*' Harrison's existential need to move is again shadowed by Rimbaud.

The importance of walking in '*Fonte Luminosa*' and 'Ghosts' includes its continuity with other forms of exploration undertaken by loiners from Leeds to Africa. As the PWD man explains: 'Life's movement and life's danger and not a sit-down post.'[82] Rimbaud's need to move was so great that he combined tramping with measures like legal expulsion as a foreign immigrant and joining merchant navies in order to travel without money, and he travelled widely in Europe and Africa.[83] There is uncertainty about what caused the paralysis that ended Rimbaud's journeys but Robb suggests that he must privately have suspected syphilis.[84] Because Rimbaud contracted syphilis in Africa[85] while participating in French imperialism he embodies the *Loiner's* trope of sexual disease for empire. He is part of the literary history of syphilis alluded to in *Loiners*. He is also an involuntary member of a nineteenth-century French club of literary syphilitics, whose other great and unfortunate participants include Baudelaire, Maupassant and Flaubert.[86] In the last poem of *Loiners*, Harrison summons into the present a ghost from the literary history of imperialism. Rimbaud haunts the imagination of Tony Harrison, Loiner.

---

[81] Rimbaud, '*Enfance*, IV' ['Childhood, IV'], *Illuminations*, *RCWSL*, 312-3.
[82] 'The Songs of the PWD Man, II', *Loiners*, 52.
[83] See for example Robb, *Rimbaud*, 162. See also Enid Starkie, 'On the Trail of Arthur Rimbaud', *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 38, no. 3 (1943), 206-16.
[84] See Robb, *Rimbaud*, 418. In a letter written from the Hospital of the Immaculate Conception Rimbaud identified his illness as 'synovitic, hydro-arthritic, etc., a disease of the bend of the joint and the bone.' See Letter to His Family (undated), *I Promise to be Good*, 339. Medical reports suggest Rimbaud's illness was a type of bone cancer. See Robb, *Rimbaud*, 425.
[85] Robb, *Rimbaud*, 322.
[86] Julian Barnes, 'Introduction', in Alphonse Daudet, *In The Land of Pain*, trans. and ed. by Julian Barnes (London: Jonathon Cape, 2002), v - xv, vii. Barnes does not mention Rimbaud.

Chapter 6

The Presence of Rimbaud

The importance of Rimbaud's life and work for Harrison's identity and poetic has not been recognized in the scholarship. Yet the identification implicitly registered in 'Ghosts' is explicitly made by Harrison in *v.*, where he identifies with Rimbaud the hoodlum poet and this is explicated in Chapter 8. This chapter explores further the presence of Rimbaud in Harrison's writings as a coda to *Loiners* and as a preface to *v.*, where the ghost of Rimbaud appears in another guise.

Harrison's elective affinity with Rimbaud, from the *enfant terrible* of French poetry till his death, is signaled by his quotation from one of Rimbaud's earliest letters in *v.* and from one of his last letters in 'Ghosts.' The endurance of Harrison's preoccupation with Rimbaud is evident in *v.* being written at least fourteen years after 'Ghosts.' Rimbaud was important to Harrison as a young man[1] and is important to him now, as noted in the previous chapter. In 'The Inkwell of Dr Agrippa' (1971), an autobiographical statement published in *Bloodaxe 1*, Harrison also refers to 'the example of Rimbaud' as important and 'disturbing.'[2] The allusion to Rimbaud in *v.* has received very limited critical attention, the allusion in 'Ghosts' has only been noted by one previous critic[3] and the allusion in 'Inkwell' has gone unremarked. There are also traces of Rimbaud's African years infused through the literary and historical terrain of the African poems of *Loiners* which have gone unnoticed. The allusion to Rimbaud in 'Inkwell', Harrison's adoption of Rimbaud's

---

[1] Desmond Graham, 'The Best Poet of 1961', in *TH: Loiner*, 29-41, 32.
[2] 'Inkwell', 34.
[3] *H, v. & O*, 13.

identity as the white '*négre*', the influence of Rimbaud's African years, his travels and his aesthetic of verbal photography or 'illuminations' are examined in this chapter.

In the prose work 'Inkwell' Harrison fathoms his genesis as a poet and presents Rimbaud as a formative influence. He suggests that Rimbaud's example is one of both emulation and difference for him. 'Inkwell' suggests that Harrison saw in Rimbaud's poetic silence an ominous warning and that he felt an affinity with Rimbaud's identity as the white '*négre*.' Harrison's identification with the '*négre*' and with *négritude* is signalled in 'Inkwell.' The title alludes to 'The Story of the Inky Boys', a German children's tale about white boys who are turned black in the inkwell of Dr Agrippa for teasing a blackamoor. Agrippa chastises the boys to 'leave the Black-a-moor alone!' because 'He cannot change from black to white.'[4] Harrison, however, has changed from white to 'black.' 'Inkwell' is the story of the inky poet, Harrison. Metaphorically blackened in Agrippa's inkwell of learning, he discovers that his class oppression is the basis of an affinity with Africans. 'Inkwell' and 'On Not Being Milton' were both written in 1971. As Rutter has observed, Harrison's dip into Agrippa's inkwell is linked to his 'growing black' and his *négritude* in 'On Not Being Milton.' As discussed in Chapter 3, in 'On Not Being Milton' the allusion to Aimé Césaire's iconic poem of *négritude*, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* [*Notebook of a return to the native land*] signals Harrison's parallel development of an aesthetic to ennoble Northern working class experience.[5] It has not been noticed in the scholarship on Harrison, however, that he implicitly adopts Rimbaud's poetic identity as the white '*négre*.'

---

[4] Heinrich Hoffman-Donner, 'The Inky Boys', in *Struwwelpeter, or, Merry Rhymes and Funny Pictures* (London: Blackie, 1900), 8-11, 9.
[5] See also *Permanently Bard*, 171.

Césaire regarded Rimbaud as his most important inspiration[6] and Rimbaud and Césaire are powerful and related influences on Harrison's *négritude*. As noted, in *Cahier d' un retour au pays natal* Césaire coined the defiant term *négritude*, which is derived from the racist '*négre*' or 'nigger', as 'a violent affirmation' in a world where to be black was to be ashamed.[7] Rimbaud also identified himself as a '*négre*' but translated this, as Harrison does, into the class degradation of a poor white man. Harrison's *négritude* is implicitly an adoption of Rimbaud's self-conception as a white 'nigger.' In the prose poem '*Mauvais Sang*' ['Bad Blood'], from *Une saison en enfer* [*A Season in Hell*], Rimbaud's white narrator says '*Je suis de race inferieure*' ['I am of an inferior race'][8] and uses the derogatory term '*négre*' subversively to express his origins in an inferior white domestic class and his poverty.[9] 'Bad Blood' was originally titled *Livre païen* [*The Book of the pagan*] or *Livre négre*' [*The Book of the Nigger*].[10] Rimbaud's narrator affirms he is a savage: '*Je suis une bête, un négre*' ['I am a beast, a savage'].[11] He imagines travelling to the primitive tropics and returning to Europe with darkened skin.[12] In a poetic eulogy Verlaine described Rimbaud as a 'white Negro, splendidly civilized / Savage.'[13]

---

[6] Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, 'Introduction' in *Aimé Césaire: The Collected Poetry*, trans. with an Introduction and Notes by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 1-31, 16.

[7] 'Interview with Aimé Césaire', in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. by Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 65-79, 69.

[8] '*Mauvais Sang*' ['Bad Blood'], *Une saison en enfer* [*A Season in Hell*], *RCWSL,* 268-9.

[9] *RCWSL,* 270-71. This is not to enter into a debate about Rimbaud's race politics, or to ignore his references in letters to Africans as 'savages.' However, in 'Bad Blood' Rimbaud's use of the derogatory term '*négre*' is subversive. The politics of the usage of a word like 'nigger', or 'whore', is complex because they have been appropriated by the groups they are typically intended to demean.

[10] Letter to Ernest Delahaye (May 1873), RCWSL, 392-3.

[11] '*Mauvais Sang*' ['Bad Blood'], *RCWSL,* 270-1. Fowlie translates '*négre*' as 'savage', while some other authors translate '*négre*' as 'Negro' or 'nigger.' See for example Christopher L. Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1985), 150; and *Arthur Rimbaud: Selected Poems and Letters*, trans. with an Introduction by Jeremy Harding and John Sturrock (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 146-7. '*Negre*' is usually regarded as a derogatory term. See also '*negre*', *OED Online*. I have followed Césaire, as an influence upon Harrison, in using the translation of '*négre*' as 'nigger.' See 'Interview with Aimé Césaire', 69.

[12] *RCWSL*, 268-9.

[13] Paul Verlaine, 'To Arthur Rimbaud', *Paul Verlaine: Selected Poems*, trans. by Martin Sorrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 219.

Harrison and Rimbaud both came from inferior white domestic classes and dramatize their origins through a poetic identification with enslaved Africans. Rimbaud's narrator in 'Bad Blood' declares that he has never belonged to Christian Europe and that '*J'entre au vrai royaume des enfants de Cham*' ['I am entering upon the true kingdom of the children of Ham'].[14] The last line of 'On Not Being Milton' includes the words '*I Ham.*'[15] Ham was the second son of Noah. The curse of Ham is the curse of servitude Noah laid on his son in the *Book of Genesis*.[16] The descendants of Ham came to be regarded as the enslaved Africans, with whom both Rimbaud and Harrison identify. Harrison's familiarity with the biblical Ham is evident in his allusion to 'the sable sons of Ham' in 'Voortrekker.'[17] In 'On Not Being Milton' '*I Ham*' is part of a quotation of the last words of Richard Tidd, the Cato St. conspirator hanged as an enemy of the state in 1820: '*Sir, I Ham a very Bad Hand at Righting*.' This reference to the history of English working-class radicalism and the standardization of English is a subject of Chapter 7. However, the punning allusion to Ham serves to link Harrison and the Northern working class with enslaved Africans. The allusion to the biblical Ham is consistent with other signals in the poetry of Harrison's identification with Africans, which is also mediated through Rimbaud.

Harrison's reclamation of his 'black' barbarian roots in 'Inkwell' and 'On Not Being Milton' parallels Rimbaud's establishment of his 'black' barbarian history in 'Bad Blood.' Harrison declares, upon returning to England from Africa, that he is 'growing black enough to fit my boots', black 'boots' connoting black 'roots', in 'On Not Being Milton.'[18] In a reverse trajectory Rimbaud leaves Europe to return to his black roots. Rimbaud also

---

[14] *RCWSL*, 270-1. For a discussion of the myth of the Negro in Rimbaud's 'Bad Blood' see also Christopher L. Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 150-7.
[15] 'On Not Being Milton', *CP*, 122.
[16] *The Book of Genesis*, 9: 18-25.
[17] 'Voortrekker', *CP*, 111.
[18] *CP*, 122.

suggests solidarity between the Africans and the French Communards in '*Qu'est-ce pour nous, mon coeur*' ['What does it matter for us, my heart'], reaching out to his '*frères: Noirs inconnus*' ['brothers: / Dark strangers'], in despair after the bloody destruction of the Paris Commune in 1871.[19] Harrison shares this sense of brotherhood with Africans and forges a class-based identification with the black race Rimbaud's narrator declares he belongs to in 'Bad Blood.' In both poets there is an empowering association of the white lower classes with the reviled black race. This association ironically and subversively recalls the common presentation of the lumpenproletariat as a depraved tribe in nineteenth-century bourgeois social analysis.[20] In *v.* Harrison identifies with Rimbaud, who combines poet, lumpenproletarian 'skin' and white 'nigger.' The exploration in *Loiners* of lower-class Europeans gaining class and racial ascendancy in Africa, the account of the loiner who becomes 'someone else' in Africa, recall the life of Rimbaud in Africa and Harrison paraphrases Rimbaud's famous dictum in *v.*.

Rimbaud is also important for one of Harrison's greatest obsessions, the struggle for personal and historical articulation versus a silence bespeaking powerlessness. In 'Inkwell' Harrison traces his unlikely formation as a poet by traversing ostensibly disparate stages in his life, from WWII to Leeds Grammar to Africa to his own reading and translation. The subtle uniting theme of these experiences is Harrison's definitive efforts to gain eloquence despite biographical and historical pressures to be silent. His 'bouts of speechlessness' began in his childhood experiences of WWII, where images of Belsen and VJ day bonfires

---

[19] '*Qu'est-ce pour nous, mon coeur*' ['What does it matter for us, my heart'], *RCWSL,* 214-15. For an account of the importance of Africa in Rimbaud's poetry and letters see Enid H. Rhodes, 'Under the Spell of Africa: Poems and Letters of Arthur Rimbaud inspired by the Dark Continent', *The French Review*, Special Issue, no. 2, Studies in Nineteenth-Century French Literature (Winter 1971), 20-8.

[20] Peter Stallybrass, 'Marx and Heterogeneity: Thinking the Lumpenproletariat', *Representations*, no. 31 (Summer 1990), 69-95, 70.

to celebrate Hiroshima still 'casts dark shadows in my skull.'[21] Other formative pressures to be silent were the Victorian view that 'children should be seen and not heard', Northern reticence and his schooling, where his poetic imagination was regarded as 'waywardness' and his Northern tongue as barbarous.

'Haunted by recent history on which speech gags,' and with the examples of Rimbaud, Hieronymus Fracastorius and Virgil in mind, Harrison wavered between the effort to keep writing and a vow of silence.[22] Harrison's struggle against speechlessness is why the silence of Rimbaud, Fracastorius and Virgil, major poets in his personal canon, is important to him. Fracastorius 'was born literally without a mouth and died speechless';[23] Virgil requested that his 'botched' masterpiece *The Aeneid* be burned at his death; and Rimbaud's leave taking of poetry 'is also disturbing.'[24]

Harrison's struggle with silences and his conception and experience of Africa are entwined dimensions of Rimbaud's importance for him. Rimbaud was an impoverished poet who fell silent and sought his fortune as a trader in nineteenth-century Africa.[25] Legend has it that Africa was the destruction of Rimbaud's poetry and in letters Harrison suggests that Africa could also impose silence on him. Africa was a place of 'aridity'[26] that 'burnt out' the senses and forced Europeans 'to cut off their awareness because it is hard on the mind and the senses to take in Africa.'[27] Harrison anticipated that he would write his African poems after he left Africa,[28] though he wrote and staged *Aikin Mata* in Nigeria and

---

[21] Inkwell', 32.
[22] 'Inkwell', 34.
[23] 'Inkwell', 34.
[24] 'Inkwell', 34.
[25] See for example Letter to his Family (15 January 1885), *RCWSL*, 428-31. See also Graham Robb, *Rimbaud* (London: Picador, 2000), 335-36.
[26] Letter to Silkin (8 November 1964).
[27] Letter to Silkin (4 December 1962).
[28] Letter to Silkin (28 February 1963).

began writing *Loiners* there.[29] Rimbaud and Joseph Conrad have been seen as major figures in mythologies of Africa as either a place of literary inspiration or a place that reduces European writers to silence.[30] These mythologies of Africa as the negation or inspiration of European literature as mediated by Rimbaud and Conrad have resonances in Harrison's letters and in poems like 'Heart of Darkness' and '*Satyrae*.' Silence and a Sartrean sense of nothingness and nausea are imposed on a European stranded between 'South six hundred, miles of churning sea' and the African Sahara in '*Satyrae*, V.'[31] Africa, silences, *négritude* and the age of exploration and empire are preoccupations in the African poems of *Loiners* and in 'Inkwell.'

Rimbaud is a ghost in the imaginative landscape of the African poems in *Loiners*. He was part of many of the historical scenes referred to in the poems, and sometimes translated into a twentieth-century setting, including the migration of European men making their fortune in 'the scramble for Africa,' and engaging in sexual and domestic relationships with the Africans.[32] Harrison's fascination in the 1960s with Africa, sex, empire and *Heart of Darkness* emanates from historical terrain inhabited by Rimbaud. Ideas associated with Rimbaud in Africa are also explored by Conrad in works like *Heart of Darkness*, such as the notion of becoming someone else and escaping the constraints of civilization. Ian Watt observes that there are symbolic parallels between the legend of Rimbaud 'lost in the midst of Negroes',[33] and Kurtz, the poet and political radical who 'went native' and rejected European civilization.[34] Rimbaud was dead by the time Conrad began writing in the mid 1890s but in the year *Heart of Darkness* was published Conrad said he was familiar with

---

[29] 'Inkwell', 34. For a discussion of *Aikin Mata* and its African themes see Chapter 3, 105-07.
[30] Miller, *Blank Darkness*, 181.
[31] '*Satyrae*, V', *Loiners*, 26.
[32] See Robb, *Rimbaud*; Enid Starkie, *Arthur Rimbaud in Abyssinia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937); and Charles Nicholl, *Somebody Else: Arthur Rimbaud in Africa 1880-91* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997).
[33] Letter to his Family (4 August 1888), *RCWSL*, 437.
[34] Ian Watts, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1980), 164.

Rimbaud's verses.[35] Harrison's entwined fascination with Africa, *Heart of Darkness* and Rimbaud finds expression in *Loiners*.

Harrison's self-conception as a poet-traveller and explorer is partly modelled on Rimbaud, a poet who whose early travels were important to his poetry and who metamorphosed into an explorer in Africa. Graham Robb describes Rimbaud as 'the Dr Livingstone of French literature.'[36] Harrison aspired to be the Dr Livingstone of English literature: 'Somehow it seems that my two early ambitions to be Dr Livingstone and George Formby, were compromised in the role of poet, half missionary, half comic, Bible and banjolele, the Renaissance *ut doceat, ut placeat*.'[37] The missionary Livingstone's origins as a Scottish cotton mill worker and autodidact would encourage Harrison's sympathetic regard for him. Harrison's poetry is the vehicle for a secular 'mission' and his poetic identity incorporates the entertainer, the teacher and the explorer.

Harrison shares with Rimbaud an enduring interest in the accounts of nineteenth-century explorers. Like the young Harrison reading *Livingstone's Travels*, Rimbaud's early writings were inspired by adventure novels like *Robinson Crusoe* but also *Discovery of the Source of the Nile* by the nineteenth-century explorers Speke and Grant.[38] Harrison also refers to travellers' accounts including those of Livingstone and Francis Galton.[39] *FRAM* (2008), Harrison's most recent play, is about the nineteenth century Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen, another man of adventure devoted to poetry and art to whom Harrison is drawn. Some of Rimbaud's letters were also an explorer's account of Africa, in the sense

---

[35] Joseph Conrad, Letter to William Blackwood (8 February 1899), *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, vol. 2, ed. by Laurence Davies and Gene M. Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 162.
[36] Robb, *Rimbaud*, 399.
[37] 'Inkwell', 33.
[38] Robb, *Rimbaud*, 20.
[39] Harrison refers to Francis Galton's travels in South Africa, for example, in the 'Preface' to *The Misanthrope*, reprinted in *Bloodaxe 1*, 138-53, 139-140. See also Francis Galton, *The Narrative of an Explorer in Tropical South Africa* (London: John Murray, 1853).

that they describe foreign lands and his expeditions into uncharted territories,[40] and are part of the travel literature to which Harrison is indebted. Rimbaud also published a very influential essay about one of his expeditions which 'helped to shape French policy and thus the modern history of East Africa.'[41] Robb's view is that 'apart from Victor Hugo, no French poet of the late nineteenth century had a greater impact on imperial politics or earned more money' than Rimbaud.[42] Harrison is also very interested in Hugo's life and times and his republicanism. Harrison's *The Prince's Play* (1996) is a translation of Hugo's *Le roi s'amuse*. Harrison's reading of Robb's biography *Victor Hugo*, in which the life is understood in its historical context, also suggests Harrison's continuing interest in the nineteenth-century imperial history of which Rimbaud was a part.[43]

Harrison's highly visual poetry is also conceived of as verbal photography about his travels and wider experience, and this too may have been inspired by Rimbaud. Literary geography and naming places are important to many of Harrison's poems, particularly in *Loiners*, and are also important to Rimbaud's poems, particularly later poems like *Illuminations*. The '*Zeg-Zeg Postcards*' foregrounds the poet as a verbal photographer in the context of travel. The title '*Zeg-Zeg Postcards*' presents this sequence of poems as '*Postcards*' in which the visual and linguistic elements are literally and semantically inseparable. The fictional author of the poems written on postcards is, as discussed in Chapter 4, the eponymous character the White Queen, the English poet and professor in Africa. The note at the end of '*Zeg-Zeg Postcards*' explains: '*The postcards are all from, or of, places in Europe visited by the "White Queen" on leaves from Africa, and the poems*

---

[40] See Starkie, *Arthur Rimbaud in Abyssinia*, 23-6.
[41] Rimbaud's account of one of his expeditions was published in *Le Bosphore égyptien* (25 and 27 August 1887). See Robb, *Rimbaud*, 384.
[42] Robb, *Rimbaud*, xvi.
[43] As noted in Chapter 3, in conversation with the poet at the National Theatre, in London on 11 April 2008, Harrison discussed his admiration for the biography *Victor Hugo* by Graham Robb.

on them are, almost without exception, about Africa. Picture and poem are often strangely inter-related.'[44] Using the persona of a gay white poet in Africa Harrison writes poems that he titles '*Postcards*', and that reflect an obsession with the relationship between Europe and Africa. The concept of '*Zeg-Zeg Postcards*' recalls Rimbaud, who tried to establish himself as a photographer in Africa and sent letters and black and white photographs back to Europe. In the photographic self-portraits Rimbaud, as he prophesied in 'Bad Blood', has skin so dark he might almost be of a different race,[45] so dark that he is 'tanned almost to *négritude*.'[46]

'*Zeg-Zeg Postcards*' also seems inspired by the *Album Zutique*, a series of homo-erotic parodic poems circulated as playful correspondence between Rimbaud, Verlaine and a group of poets collectively known as the *Vilain Bonhommes* and later the *Zutist Circle*. As noted, many of the '*Postcards*' contain risqué or pornographic homosexual images that have parodic elements. The '*Postcards*' *s*hare the spirit of the *Album Zutique* whose title is derived from the slang '*zut*', a stronger version of 'damn', and is also akin to the aggression signified by Harrison's polyvalent *v.* sign. The title the *Album Zutique* also invites the reader to conceive of the poems as a collection of photos in an album. Similarly, the title and end 'Note' to '*Zeg-Zeg Postcards*' invites the reader to conceive of these poems as '*a collection written on the backs of postcards and gradually accumulated over the years in a card-index cabinet.*'[47] Harrison collects postcards and considered having reproductions of postcard images accompany the text of '*Zeg-Zeg Postcards.*'[48]

---

[44] 'The White Queen 5: from *The Zeg-Zeg Postcards*', Note, *Loiners*, 46.
[45] *RCWSL*, 268-9.
[46] 'Newcastle is Peru', *Loiners*, 87. For examples of Rimbaud's self-portraits see Robb, *Rimbaud*, photographs inserted between 364-5; and Nicholl, *Somebody Else*, photographs inserted between 241-2.
[47] *Loiners*, 46.
[48] Letter to Ross (30 December 1969).

The trope of photography for Harrison's poetry is also found in several filial sonnets from *The School of Eloquence*. For example, the title of 'Still' literally refers to a movie still or photograph of Rudolph Valentino, and also to the stillness of death and metaphorically to the continuation of his relationship to the dead beloved. The title of 'Gaps' refers to the physical gap left between his father and son when the poet moved to photograph them, and metaphorically to the gap left in his life by his father's death and by his son's absence through madness, specifically schizophrenia,[49] 'his visions frightening as the First Gulf War's.'[50] Ironically, the person not in the 'snap' of 'a snatched but happy family scene' is the only one still fully present. The subtle intimation of private grief in 'Gaps' is quietly framed by public mourning, and its reference to individual insanity is framed by historic madness, which anticipates the gaping hole in New York City's landscape after the terrorist attacks in 2001, and which the poem links to American foreign policy in the Middle East, like the Gulf Wars. The background in the photo is 'the World Trade Centre's unbombarded towers.' In another *School of Eloquence* sonnet 'Background Material' the poet photographing his parents can be discerned as a background reflection. Several of the Sonnets for August 1945, 'The Figure', 'Black & White' and 'Snap', also use the trope of photographs for poems. The relationship between word and image in Harrison's poetry is also reflected in his being a poet of the stage and the screen, where his verse literally accompanies visual mediums. He has observed how 'The scansions of the screen and the prosodies of poetry' together create the 'mutually illuminating momentum' of the film-poem.[51] Harrison is regarded as a master innovator of the poem-film, significantly advancing the form since W.H. Auden wrote the rhyming verse for the 1935 film *Night Mail*.

---

[49] 'Two Poems for My Son in his Sickness: 1. Rice-Paper Man', *CP*, 344.
[50] 'Gaps', *CP*, 215.
[51] 'Flicks and This Fleeting Life', in *Collected Film Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), vii-xxx, xxx.

In 'Bridlington' Harrison sketches the scene of his portrait being sketched by the Yorkshire artist David Hockney and mirrors their arts: 'Him drawing those lines me composing these.'[52] In 'Skywriting', dedicated to Hockney, Harrison likens and contrasts their visual and linguistic arts: 'My desk top's like a Californian pool',[53] an allusion to Hockney's famous paintings which take pleasure in that environment and lifestyle even as they observe its superficiality. Harrison suggests that his art and temperament is antithetical to a 'HAPPY' Californian culture that occludes the 'dark depths' of experience.[54] 'Skywriting' punningly chastises Californian narcissism by alluding to the myth of Narcissus, which had tragic subjects like unrequited love, retribution and death. It identifies Harrison as a 'blackface Narcissus' who does not limit his gaze to reflections but metaphorically enters the water and the underworld.[55] 'Skywriting' is a later poem which also shows the continuation of his metaphorical identification as 'black': 'The tarred creator stares at seas of ink.'[56] The poem suggests that Harrison's art is highly visual and honours the depth of human experience, and presents the poet as a visual artist giving voice to human 'cries.'

Harrison's conception of poetry as verbal photography and the particular influence of Rimbaud are also suggested by *The School of Eloquence* sonnets 'Illuminations I, II, III.'[57] Harrison's title 'Illuminations' alludes to Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, his collection of highly visual prose poems.[58] The title of Rimbaud's *Illuminations* meant 'coloured plates',[59]

---

[52] 'Bridlington', *CP*, 374.
[53] 'Skywriting', *CP*, 226.
[54] *CP*, 228.
[55] *CP*, 228.
[56] *CP*, 228.
[57] *CP*, 157-9.
[58] *Illuminations*, *RCWSL*, 309-57.
[59] In an introduction to *Illuminations*, when the poems were first published in *La Vogue* in 1886, Paul Verlaine explained the title: 'The word *Illuminations* is English and means coloured engravings, - *coloured plates*: it is even the subtitle that Mr Rimbaud had given to his manuscript.'

referring to the method of photography then used. Rimbaud's interest in photography dated back to *Illuminations*. He also conceives of his poetry as verbal hallucinations in '*Alchimie du verbe*' ['Alchemy of the Word'], from *A Season in Hell*.[60] Rimbaud's project in '*Voyelles*' ['Vowels'] is to verbally create colours and paint visual scenes.[61] The title *Illuminations* signifies the verbal photography of Rimbaud's poetry and also metaphorical 'visions', intuitions or epiphanies. Harrison also refers in 'Initial Illuminations' both literally to the coloring and embellishment of letters in the holy manuscripts and metaphorically to poetic vision and epiphany. The title of Harrison's 'Illuminations' also has the sense of verbal portraiture and of epiphany and registers the influence of Rimbaud but also of Shelley, Walter Benjamin and Joyce.

The concept of 'illuminations' begins and ends the first and second 'Illuminations' sonnets. The Blackpool lights are a quotidian objective correlative for the metaphysical light or epiphany articulated in 'Illuminations I, II.' The last sentence of 'Illuminations, I' is: 'The penny dropped in time! Wish you were here!'[62] The poet wishes that his dead father was with him now and that he had realized while there was still time together the nature of his life and his love, but 'it took me until now to understand.'[63] Instead there are late illuminations and the poem itself. Like a penny dropping in the 'machines on Blackpool's Central Pier',[64] illuminations are truths that shine through ordinary experience. Harrison's illuminations recall Joyce's epiphanies, where the 'soul of the commonest object ... seems to us radiant' and shines through the material and the ordinary.[65]

---

[60] '*Alchimie du verbe*' ['Alchemy of the Word'], *Une saison en enfer* [*A Season in Hell*], *RCWSL*, 288-89.
[61] '*Voyelles*' ['Vowels'], *RCWSL*, 140-1.
[62] *CP*, 157.
[63] *CP*, 157.
[64] *CP*, 157.
[65] James Joyce, *Stephen Hero: part of the first draft of 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'*, ed. by T. Spencer, rev. edn (London: Jonathon Cape, 1969), 213.

The title of Harrison's 'Illuminations', and its signification of meanings which transcend time and the material world, may also allude to Hannah Arendt's classic selection of essays by the Jewish-German literary critic Walter Benjamin entitled *Illuminations*. Harrison has read Benjamin's essays and *Illuminations* is probably the edition he read or would certainly be aware of.[66] 'Illuminations I, II' are set in 'that post-war year.' The 'millions of ghosts in the machine' encompass the millions of Jewish lives taken, like Benjamin's, by Nazism.[67] *The Haunted House* is a machine on the pier but also an image of the collective cultural imagination and unconscious haunted by the terrors of recent history. Harrison's first wife and mother-in-law, to whom 'Schwiegermutterlieder' is respectively dedicated and named after, were also Czech-Jewish refugees from Nazism. The Nazis' industrialization of genocide is signified by five references in a fourteen line sonnet to 'machines.' The reference to '50 weeks of ovens, and 6 years of war' refers to the ovens his father baked bread in but recalls the incineration of the bodies of inmates of the camps during the war. Arendt chose *Illuminations* as the title because this word was used by Benjamin to describe his work. Some of Benjamin's illuminations have resonances in Harrison's 'Illuminations.' Benjamin's conception of metaphorical language as 'the means by which the oneness of the world is poetically brought about',[68] and the constellation of past, present and future illuminates the electricity metaphor charging 'Illuminations, II.' Harrison's reference to 'Ohm's Law' metaphorically suggests that the invisible flow of electrons is 'that small bright charge of life' where his parents meet in him. The metaphor articulates the oneness of past, present and future generations as genetic, mnemonic and

---

[66] Harrison refers to Benjamin's essay 'The Task of the Translator' in 'Preface' to *The Misanthrope*, reprinted in *Bloodaxe 1*, 138-153.
[67] Walter Benjamin took his own life to avoid capture by the Gestapo. See Hannah Arendt, 'Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940', in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt and trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 1-58, 18.
[68] Arendt, 'Walter Benjamin', 14.

poetic, where illumination is also the apprehension of the possibility of 'eternity' and a reality that is not discernible to the world of the senses.

Harrison's 'illuminations' also involve the philosophical idea that there is a pure reality behind the visible world and this idea was important to Rimbaud, who was fascinated with the works of the nineteenth-century Illuminists and their belief 'that behind the stage-set of sensory impressions lies a pure, absolute reality.'[69] Illuminism was an important concept behind poems like 'Vowels' and *A Season in Hell* and is also engaged with in *Illuminations*.[70] In 'Illuminations, II' Harrison presents 'eternity, annihilation, me', intuiting a continuing connection between himself and his dead parents.

> Two dead, but current still flows through us three
> though the circle takes forever to complete –
> eternity, annihilation, me,
> that small bright charge of life where they both meet.[71]

Harrison corporealizes the sense of connection with the dead as his begetting by his parents. He also though evokes 'eternity' and an invisible current of connection with the dead, as live as electricity. In a number of the elegiac sonnets his rational atheism co-exists with a hope of reunion and an instinctual sense of connection to the dearly departed. An ambiguous sense of eternity in the elegiac sonnets may owe much to Rimbaud's interest in Illuminism.

In the sonnet 'Continuous' Harrison senses the presence of his dead father and intimations of a reality beyond the material world, which is mediated through Shelley's interest in Illuminism and a James Cagney's gangster film.[72] Describing Cagney's as 'the

---

[69] Robb, *Rimbaud*, 159. Enid Starkie also discusses Rimbaud's interest in occult and illuminist philosophy and his reading of other poets influenced by illuminism like Charles Baudelaire. See Enid Starkie, *Arthur Rimbaud* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1947 [1938]), 100-03.
[70] Robb, *Rimbaud*, 159.
[71] 'Illuminations, II', *CP*, 158.
[72] *CP*, 154.

only art we ever shared,'[73] 'Continuous' connects this popular art with the learned culture that separated him from his father, but which might illuminate his continuing sense of connection to him despite death. Recalling childhood memories of seeing Cagney films with his father, in particular *White Heat*, Harrison continues their outings on his own but wears the gold ring his father gave him and buys the childhood treat of a choc-ice: 'I wear it now to Cagneys on my own / and sense my father's hands cupped round my treat.'[74] The gold ring is a symbol of eternal connection in 'Continuous' and in other filial elegies collected in *Continuous*. In the poem Mr Harrison's cremation is imagined taking place on the stage of the old-style cinema they went to together, where the movie-house organists played live music between features. Harrison though hears a looped recording that also suggests mnemonic continuity between generations. The imagined cremation of Mr Harrison in the cinema recalls the last scene of *White Heat* when the Cagney character, Coady Jarret, commits suicide by causing a conflagration. Coady is a psychopathic criminal with an Oedipal complex, and he tells an associate that he still talks to his dead 'ma' and has a comforting sense of her presence, but asks if this seems insane. Harrison's poem about sensing his dead father's presence explores Coady's question through the larger mystery of what lies on the other side of life.

Harrison turns for possible answers to Shelley's 'Adonais' and its reflection of his interest in Illuminism. In 'Continuous' the 'blinding light' of the crematorium flames annihilating Mr Harrison's body is also a metaphorical intimation of eternity. Introducing 'Continuous', Harrison explains that *White Heat* refers to the film but also to 'what Shelley

[73] *CP*, 154.
[74] *CP*, 154.

called "the white radiance of eternity."'[75] He is quoting a line from 'Adonais', Shelley's elegy for John Keats, which ends with the soul of Keats, figured as Adonais, continuing 'where the Eternal are':[76] 'Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass, / Stains the white radiance of Eternity.'[77] Shelley's conception of life and eternity also resembles Rimbaud's ideas about 'illuminations', 'coloured plates' and an absolute reality behind the visible world, particularly, for example, in the prose poem *Les Ponts* ['Bridges], from *Illuminations*: '*Un rayon blanc, tombant du haut du ciel, anéantit cette comédie*' ['A white ray, falling from the top of the sky, blots out this dumb comedy.'][78] In the poem the skies are like 'Gray crystal', the pattern of bridges is mirrored in the lighted canal like a mirage, and the city is a sideshow and an illusion erased by a white ray of light.

Shelley also argued that the 'poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one' and that poetry must work through images of life to intimate transcendence in 'A Defence of Poetry',[79] which Harrison has read.[80] In 'Continuous' film is a metaphor for life understood as a stage-set of images, through which the metaphysical radiance of 'eternity' can be glimpsed. The idea is also present in 'Testing the Reality', an elegiac sonnet for Harrison's mother where the instinctual flocking of birds symbolizes transcendence but has 'blacked Beeston's sky.'[81] The world of the senses, 'all sight, all hearing, taste, smell, touch' has also 'blocked the light.' The son is 'the last soul still unhatched left in the

---

[75] Tony Harrison, 'Poets on Screen', <http://lion.chadwyck.com/poetsonscreen/showclip.jsp?TYPE=poets_on_screen&ID=ON0921> [accessed 4 March 2010].
[76] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Adonais', *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. with an Introduction and Notes by K.N. Cameron (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1951), l. 495, 278.
[77] Shelley, 'Adonais', ll. 462-63, 277.
[78] *Les Ponts* ['Bridges], *RCWSL*, 326-27.
[79] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', *Shelley's Prose, or The Trumpet of a Prophecy*, ed. with an Introduction and Notes by D.L. Clark (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1988 [1955]), 279. See also John Hardy and Nicholas Brown, 'Shelley's "Dome of Many-Coloured Glass"', *Sydney Studies*, 103-106, 105.
[80] As discussed in Chapter 3, the epigraph to 'The White Queen 3: *Travesties*, I' is from Shelley's 'A Defence of Poetry.'
[81] 'Testing the Reality', *CP*, 173.

clutch.' Death is intimated as a birth into a reality associated with light beyond the material world and embodied self, in which the son will be reunited with his mother. The reference to Shelley, an atheist like Harrison and Rimbaud, mediates an instinctual sense of eternity behind the transient stage-set of the senses, symbolized by the metaphor of film and cremation's flames in 'Continuous.'

While there may be several sources for Harrison's 'illuminations' the presence of Rimbaud seems of primary significance. Harrison and Rimbaud conceive of their poems as 'illuminations' or 'coloured plates', intensely observed verbal 'photographs' of the sensory, material world, through which eternity is sometimes manifest in epiphanies or 'illuminations.' There are traces of Rimbaud's significance for Harrison wherever he uses photography as a trope for poetry, in the highly visual character of his verse for the page, stage and screen, in the relationship between his poetry and travel, in the possibility of eternity he allows as an elegist, and in the authenticity of a brilliant and angry poor boy, 'the white Negro' who gains his fullest voice in *v.*.

Chapter 7

The Politics of Eloquence

In the sonnet sequence *The School of Eloquence* Harrison enacts the role of the revolutionary mythologist, working to raise the spirits of oppressed ancestors and revolutionary forefathers, summoning them into a metaphorical union with the present.[1] Harrison faces North in *The School of Eloquence*, towards his lowly place of origin, and towards 'the tradition of all the dead generations [that] weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.'[2] Through the power of the word he summons the energies of political movements from the seventeenth century English Revolution, nineteenth century resistance to Capital and post-colonial independence movements. In the politico-historical sonnets in *The School of Eloquence* Harrison inscribes the issues of class, colonization and resistance at the heart of his eloquence within an historical and cosmopolitan drama. *The School of Eloquence* draws together the experience of class and colonization from Leeds to Africa, the Caribbean to Cornwall and Wales: 'what the mythologer makes appear within the parochial content of a particular struggle is the glimmering substance of a broader, deeper political history, of which the particular event is microcosmic.'[3] As a political mythologist Harrison dramatizes the shared substance of particular struggles, illuminating the deeper political history that unites them.

---

[1] I am adapting what Terry Eagleton has said of Milton, Blake and Yeats, which even more precisely applies to Harrison. See Terry Eagleton, 'The God that Failed', in *Re-Membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Traditions,* ed. by Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson (London and New York : Methuen, 1987), 342-49, 342. Eagleton is in turn drawing on some of Karl Marx's observation in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. See Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 329-31.

[2] Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, 329. Quoted in Eagleton, 'The God that Failed', 344.

[3] Eagleton, 'The God that Failed', 343.

In *The School of Eloquence* language is a carrier of biographical and historical memories that are the basis for its entwined personal and political mythology. The intimate relationship between the 'historical, the autobiographical and the metaphysical'[4] in Harrison's poetry is nowhere more humanely portrayed than in the filial sonnets in *The School of Eloquence*. The filial sonnets contain a dramatic account of his life with his parents, uncles and neighbours in working-class Leeds that is refracted by Harrison's socialism and is the basis for his representation of division between the Northern working-class and the Southern bourgeoisie. The dramatic personae 'Tony Harrison', 'mam' and 'dad', the uncles Jo and Harry and their situations are heavily historicized. The filial sonnets are a sequence of shared stories about private struggle, love and grief which are also a humanist argument about cultural and material deprivation and injustice. The discussion will focus on sonnets which create biographical mythologies first, and then on sonnets which create politico-historical mythologies. The structure of the discussion partly reflects Harrison's grouping of the sonnets into the biographical and the politico-historical. The mythologist Harrison's communal task is to make his poetry offer solace and strength to his community of origin, articulating their cultural identity, their history, their victimization and their tradition of resistance to Kings and Capital and to the monopolization of power and discourse.

I

Harrison's major sonnet sequence *The School of Eloquence* is an unfinished 'work in progress'[5] and seemingly will only end with the poet's death. *The School of Eloquence* will though continue beyond Harrison's life because it has gained canonical status and appears

[4] 'Interview', 230.
[5] Note on the dust jacket of *From 'The School of Eloquence' and Other Poems* (London: Rex Collings, 1978).

to be amongst the small body of contemporary poetry which may still be read in fifty years. The sonnet sequence to date has an unusual and complex publication history, and has progressively appeared in a variety of publications. The first publication of *The School of Eloquence* was a private edition containing ten sonnets and published by Rex Collings as a Christmas Book (1976), with 150 copies made.[6] The sequence expanded to eighteen sonnets in *From 'The School of Eloquence' and Other Poems* (1978), and to fifty sonnets in *Continuous: Fifty Sonnets from 'The School of Eloquence'* (1981). Sixty-four sonnets appeared in the first edition of the *Selected Poems* (1984). A further ten sonnets appeared in *Ten Sonnets from 'The School of Eloquence'* (1987) and in the same year seventy-six sonnets appeared in the second edition of the *Selected Poems*. The *Collected Poems* (2007) contains ninety-five sonnets. A number of the sonnets were collected in anthologies, and also progressively published individually in magazines and newspapers before being collected together in the more permanent book form. The ongoing nature of the sonnet sequence is indicated in the title of most publications of it by the word 'from', which suggests additions to an open-ended structure. The word '*Continuous*' in the title of the 1981 edition emphasizes that Harrison regards the sequence as 'a continual enterprise.'[7]

Harrison's use of the unfinished sonnet sequence is not without precedent. Literary pretexts for the sequence include George Meredith's *Modern Love* (1862), which anticipates the sixteen line sonnet form used by Harrison. Although *Modern Love* is not an unfinished sequence it is a series of fifty connected poems, just as *School* is a long series of connected poems which though are also grouped into subsections. Harrison uses a variable sixteen line Meredithian sonnet, not the fourteen-line Shakespearian sonnet, primarily for its technical possibilities:

---

[6] Acknowledgements page, *From 'The School of Eloquence'* (1978).
[7] 'Interview', 228.

> I decided on the sixteen-line sonnet because not only can you make it do what the traditional octet-sestet fourteen-liner can do but also because you can use it, for example, as two octets – so that the dialectic can be stronger. It also has strong narrative possibilities when you use it in the form of four quatrains: I can use that narrative impulse to leave an up-beat which will carry on into the next poem. It is a very malleable form, with all the narrative possibilities of Meredith as well as all the single, one-off strengths of the traditional sonnet.[8]

Modern Love reflected Meredith's traumatic experience of the dissolution of his marriage to Mary Ellen Nicoll, the widowed daughter of Thomas Love Peacock.[9] Harrison's original choice of *Modern Love* as a model may also be a displaced commentary on the breakdown of his first marriage. Harrison has maintained privacy about his marriages but referred to the 'American poems' such as *A Kumquat for John Keats* (1981) as about 'rediscovering love in my life after much bitterness.'[10] The biographical reference is to his subsequent marriage to the Greek-American soprano Teresa Strata, to whom the *Selected Poems* and *The School of Eloquence* sonnet 'Loving Memory' are dedicated. Similarly, Harrison may also be articulating the bitterness associated with his first marriage in *Palladas: Poems* (1975). This selection is Harrison's translation of Palladae of Alexandria, the epigrammatist of the fourth century A.D.. The verse of Palladas inherited the anti-feminist strain of Classical Greek poetry and perhaps reflected his estrangement from his Christian wife.[11] Harrison's translation of Palladas, the last pagan poet and one of 'the world's great pessimists',[12] is more widely a way of 'siphoning off the pessimism.'[13]

Another literary antecedent for *The School of Eloquence* sonnet sequence is the American modernist poet Ezra Pound's *Cantos*. Like *The School of Eloquence*, Pound's *Cantos* is an unfinished personal mythology with political commentary, with the centrality

---

[8] 'Interview', 231-32.
[9] George Meredith, *Modern Love*, with an Introduction by C. Day Lewis (London: Rupert Hart Davis, 1948).
[10] *Tony Harrison: Poets and People*, a Freeway Films Production for Channel 4 (1984).
[11] 'Interview', 235.
[12] 'Preface', *Palladas: Poems*', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 133-35, 133.
[13] 'Interview', 235.

of the poet-persona and his vocation. Harrison said 'Pound was important to me for that reason', because he called 'the bluff of all that sort of artificial English.'[14] However, Harrison observed that Pound's verse 'virtually lost the struggle with comprehensibility.'[15] By contrast, *The School of Eloquence* uses accessible language and seeks a wide readership. The American poet John Berryman's epic sequence *Dream Songs* has been compared to *The School of Eloquence* because of the shared capacity for infinite expansion.[16] Harrison's particular interest in Pound and his *Cantos* is also evident in the quatrain poem 'Summoned by Bells.'

In 'Summoned by Bells', whose title is derived from John Betjeman's verse autobiography,[17] it is not church bells but 'the new faith of the nation', consumerism, that interferes with the capacity for concentration and art.[18] The epigraph is a quotation from Pound's letters in which he predicts the demise of art, a vision which the poem validates. In 'Summoned by Bells' the accumulation and guarding of property and 'the sacredness of things' is the purpose of existence and art is a waste of time.[19] A 'poor illiterate man' stole Harrison's bag, unaware it was filled with 'Poems! All by me!' and a manuscript of Pound's *Cantos*. Ironically, the burglar's illiteracy left him unaware the *Cantos* manuscript would have been priceless: 'He'd even ditched an Ezra Pound / *Cantos* manuscript.'[20] For Harrison it is Pound's fascism and elitism that helped 'rebotch' what Pound had called in

---

[14] 'Tony Harrison in conversation with Michael Alexander', *Talking Verse: Interviews with Poets*, ed. by Robert Crawford, Henry Hart, David Kinloch and Richard Price (Verse: St Andrews and Williamsburg, 1995), 82-91, 83-84.
[15] 'Tony Harrison in interview with John Tusa', BBC Radio 3 (March 2008). <http://wwwbbccouk/radio3/johntusainterview/harrison_transcriptshtml>, [accessed 31 June 2010].
[16] Blake Morrison, 'The Filial Art', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 54-60, 56; and 'Interview', 229.
[17] John Betjeman, *Summoned by Bells* (London: J. Murray, 1960).
[18] 'Summoned by Bells', *CP*, 287.
[19] *CP*, 288.
[20] *CP*, 289.

Hugh Selwyn Mauberley 'a botched civilization.'[21] Harrison rejects Pounds politics but is interested in his ideas about literature and, most importantly, *Cantos* is a model for *School.*

An important question which needs to be addressed is why Harrison, a politically engaged poet, chooses an apparently apolitical form, the sonnet, in *The School of Eloquence*. He knows most people don't read poetry and certainly not sonnets. Given the centrality of political ideas to his poetry, it would seem a more obvious choice for Harrison to only write public verse or forms of poetry that have more often been used as vehicles for political ideas. John Donne for example uses the sonnet to talk about religion and love. Shakespeare and Sir Philip Sidney are of a tradition in which the sonnet is used to talk about love. Although traditionally and in more recent times the sonnet has been seen to be an apolitical form, there is an earlier tradition of republican writers who chose the sonnet form for political discussion.

In *The School of Eloquence* Harrison follows Milton in using the sonnet to talk about politics. He is also interested in Milton's ideas. Milton used the sonnet as a vehicle for his republican politics in, for example, 'Sonnet XVI: To the Lord General Cromwell', or 'Sonnet XVIII: On the Late Massacre in Piedmont', while his essays waged a rhetorical war on monarchy. Milton's importance for Harrison as a republican poet is addressed in the discussion of 'On Not Being Milton' that occurs later in this chapter. Harrison has taken the formal sixteen-line sonnet used by Meredith in *Modern Love* and uses it for social and political commentary. Milton also used the sixteen-line sonnet but Milton is not the only model for a political sonneteer. Another important poet for Harrison who used the sonnet to talk about politics and one influenced by Milton's example is Shelley in, for

[21] Ezra Pound *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, Selected Poems 1908-59* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), ll. 90-1, 101.

example, 'England in 1819' or 'Feelings of a Republican on the Fall of Bonaparte.' Authors of modern political sonnets whom Harrison reads include W.H. Auden and also Dylan Thomas, whose 'The Hand that Signed the Paper' Harrison has referred to.[22] Other poets such as Andrew Marvell and John Keats are also significant political writers for Harrison. But Milton's use of the sonnet for a wide range of topics was clearly inspirational for Harrison. He has identified Milton's sonnets X to XXIII, 'ranging from the public statement of "A book was writ of late called *Tetrachordon*" to that tender, inward sonnet, "Methought I saw my late espoused saint"' as the most important literary model for his sonnets.[23]

Harrison also suggests the importance of Milton's sonnets to the structure and conception of his poetry in his 'Author's Statement.'[24] Milton is implicitly the supreme standard against which Harrison measures his poetry. He again focuses on 'how Milton's sonnets range from the directly outward to the tenderly inward, and how the public address of the one makes a clearing for the shared privacy of the other.' Harrison similarly regards his dramatic work as making a clearing for his lyric poetry.[25] The important relationship Harrison sees between sonnets with public and private preoccupations in Milton is also integral to the structure of *School*.

Continuous established a permanent tri-partite structure for the sequence. *The School of Eloquence* as it appears in *Continuous* and in later *Selected* and *Collected* editions is divided into three parts. The public sonnets became the 'bookends' framing the private

---

[22] 'All Out', review of *The Penguin Book of Socialist Verse*, *London Magazine*, new series, vol. 10, no. 12 (March 1971), 87-91, 90.
[23] 'Interview', 237.
[24] 'Authors Statement', *Tony Harrison*, Contemporary Writers Series (London: Booktrust, 1987), reprinted in *Bloodaxe 1*, 9.
[25] 'Authors Statement', 9.

sonnets. Part One mainly contains the politico-historical sonnets that first appeared in *From 'The School of Eloquence' and Other Poems* (1978). Part Two mainly contains the filial sonnets that first appeared in *Continuous*. Part Three contains sonnets on a wider range of themes weighted towards the politico-historical. There are also further sequences within the sequence. The 'Art & Extinction' sonnet sequence appeared in Part Three of *Continuous*. The 'Sonnets for August 1945' sequence was later added to Part Three. To date Part Two and Part Three have continued to expand the most while Part One has had just one new poem added since *Continuous*. As Morrison has observed, *The School of Eloquence* was conceived as 'more blatantly and single-mindedly a thesis about linguistic and political oppression than it appears in the *Selected Poems*.'[26] However, the filial sonnets 'are more than simple elegies and to praise them for being "moving" (as most reviewers have done) is to emasculate them of their hard political edge.'[27] The sonnets' political meanings often exist independently but also, as in a sonnet like 'Timer', through being part of the sequence. Harrison's politicization of the elegy in his sonnets will be shown in the course of this discussion.

The title *The School of Eloquence* is derived from E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, a humanist Marxist account of the making of working-class consciousness, politics and culture in the period 1780-1832. This 'history from below' is drawn on in the first two *School* sonnets, 'On Not Being Milton' and 'Rhubarbarians, I', and alluded to in other sonnets. Harrison's 'poetry from below' seeks, like Thompson's historical narrative, to rescue from condescension the experience of the artisan and working class. The title and an epigraph in *School* are taken from a passage in Thompson about the introduction of special legislation in 1799 'utterly suppressing' the London Corresponding

[26] Morrison, 'The Filial Art', 56.
[27] Morrison, 'The Filial Art', 55.

Society (L.C.S.) and the United Englishmen. These working men's political organizations were targeted as part of the wider suppression of reformers, who were uniformly vilified as 'Jacobins' with links to French republicanism following the 1789 Revolution. When 'the indefatigable conspirator, John Binns' was 'arrested he was found in possession of a ticket which was perhaps one of the last "covers" for the old L.C.S: "Admit for the Season to the School of Eloquence."'[28]

The School of Eloquence is named after a cultural 'cover' for a working men's political society. The form of the 'cover' for the L.C.S., a ticket to a season of 'Eloquence' suggests attending a cultural event, such as a season of theatre. The 'cover' suggests that the L.C.S. was struggling for eloquence as a requirement of entrance to the political and cultural spheres. As Sarah Bloom observes, in choosing a cover for the LCS as his title 'Harrison is aligning himself with a long tradition of republican and reformist working-class movements, and drawing attention to the centrality of language in the struggle for political power.'[29] Harrison admired the corresponding societies giving working people access to political and cultural education: 'In the eighteenth century working people would meet and one literate person would read to a room, and working people would discuss literature and politics.'[30] The title identifies the sonnet sequence with the continuing struggle for the inclusion of working class citizens in political and cultural discourse, and this is an important aspect of Harrison's egalitarian republicanism.

'Eloquence' is a key word that signals the public dimension of the lyric voice in *The School of Eloquence*. In Harrison's lexicon 'eloquence' refers to poetry, 'the word at its

---

[28] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1991 [1963]), 191.
[29] Sarah Broom, *Contemporary British and Irish Poetry: An Introduction* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 13.
[30] *Harrison: Poets and People*, Channel 4.

most eloquent',[31] and to rhetoric, the persuasive function of language as it addresses public life. 'Eloquence' signals that the republican 'orator of resistance',[32] the 'stutterer Demosthenes',[33] Cicero and Milton, who tried to sway the people on important issues, are a model for Harrison's conception of his vocation as a poet. He has said that his sonnets are, like all his poetry for page, stage, screen and newspapers, 'part of the same quest for a public poetry.'[34] 'Eloquence' signals Harrison's rejection of the now dominant separation of lyric poetry from eloquence, or rhetoric.

John Stuart Mill argued that poetry and eloquence were in part antithetical modes of expression. Mill famously stated that 'eloquence is *heard*, poetry is *over*heard. Eloquence supposes an audience ... Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude.'[35] Kevin McGuirk regards *The School of Eloquence* sonnets as lyric poems in which 'he proceeds as an Arnoldian Romantic' and uses the lyric conservatively to make a rapprochement with his family.[36] The historicized subjectivity and dilemmas of Harrison's lyric voice is at odds with Arnold's definition of lyric as the spirit and 'best self' transcending history and politics. In these sonnets the 'I', the dramatic persona 'Tony Harrison', steps beyond the Romantic conception of the lyric poet as a solitary figure without an audience. They are meant to be read in private but also heard in public and Harrison has read the sonnets at poetry readings and for radio, the internet and television.

---

[31] *Harrison: Poets and People*, Channel 4.
[32] David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics 1627 –1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 138.
[33] 'Them & [uz], I', *CP*, 133.
[34] 'Author's Statement', 9.
[35] John Stuart Mill, 'Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties', in *Dissertations and Discussions: Political, Philosophical and Historical*, 2nd edn, vol. 1(London: Longmans, 1867), 63-94, 71. Also quoted in Kevin McGuirk, '"All Wi' Doin": Tony Harrison, Linton Kwesi Johnson, and the Cultural Work of Lyric in Postwar Britain', in *New Definitions of Lyric: Theory, Technology and Culture*, ed. by Mark Jeffreys (New York and London: Garland, 1998), 49-75, 55.
[36] McGuirk, '"All Wi' Doin"', 50-1.

The intimate and the public voice meet and the autobiographical is a platform for communal and historical experience.

'Eloquence' signals that Harrison's sonnets participate in a pre-Romantic, classical tradition of lyric poetry animated by rhetoric, and a classical alignment of poetic and political voice. Eloquence was a foundation of his own classical education, where oratory, signifying the exercise of eloquence to persuade, was central to political life in the Ancient Roman Republic. The reference in 'Classics Society' to '*The grace of Tullies eloquence*',[37] that is, to the great orator and Republican Consul Marcus Tullius Cicero, suggests Harrison's awareness of Cicero's theories of ancient rhetoric and his view that the poet and the politician were engaged in different forms of eloquence. The significance of 'eloquence' to Harrison encompasses its importance as a tool of poetry and politics. Cicero also wrote didactic poems[38] and lived in a society where poetry addressed public themes, of which Lucretius' philosophical poem, *On the Nature of Things*, is the most famous example. Harrison's foregrounding of eloquence recalls poetry's participation in the important spheres of public life in the republic of Ancient Rome and his efforts to bring poetry back into public life.

Harrison's identification with the classical tradition of eloquence is also aesthetically signalled by the paratextual framing devices for the text of the 1976 and the 1978 editions of *School*. Both editions have a classical appearance and the title is visually paramount on a cover without decoration or pictures. The semantic centrality of 'eloquence' is visually presented in the classically styled paperback edition of *Ten Poems from 'The School of Eloquence'*, where '*Eloquence*', the only the word on the front cover, appears in large

[37] *CP*, 130.
[38] Marcus Cicero, *The Poems of Cicero* (New York: Garland, 1978).

elegant capitals, spaced across three lines, on a red centerpiece. The borders are in a beige and marbled blue, with '*Eloquence*' in beige-blue font. In the 1978 edition the black letters of the title, *From 'The School of Eloquence' and Other Poems*, are on a white background with a black frame. The classical aesthetic of the paratextual presentation conveys that 'eloquence' in the classical sense of rhetoric is central to Harrison's politico-poetic project.

The title *Continuous* reflects the forging of continuities between Harrison's world and that of his parents, between the dead and the living, and the wider preoccupation with making connections that are political, metaphysical and historical. The 'continuous' nature of these connections is a definitive feature of Harrison's sensibility, one intrinsic to the unfinished nature of the sequence. The 'continuous' nature of the sequence importantly includes the way the sonnets work associatively, which they do in several senses. The sonnets are intended to be read interconnectedly, a practice encouraged by the title and unnumbered pages of *Continuous*.[39]

The cover of *Continuous* is a paratextual framing device which reflects the poetry's obsession with circles of connection across divisions that are also in the nature of mortality. The title '*Continuous*' appears on the bottom half of the black and grey cover in red letters, except for the 'O', which has been highlighted in white on the front cover and gold on the back, and recalls his parents' wedding rings in several of the filial sonnets including 'Timer.' In the sonnet 'Continuous' the title, his father's ring and 'a looped tape' of music at his cremation symbolize a mnemonic relationship with the dead.[40] In 'Under the Clock', a poem about his parents' courting long ago, the wedding bands are '"eternities" to be

[39] Rick Rylance observes that the unnumbered pages encourages 'the reader, looking for one poem, to continuously read the others.' See Rick Rylance, 'On Not Being Milton', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 114-28, 120.
[40] 'Continuous', *CP*, 154.

inscribed with names.'[41] Harrison's death will allow him 'to keep our rendezvous.' A hope of reunion with the beloved in death is in conflict with Harrison's rational atheism in a number of the filial sonnets. In 'Bookends II', although 'I believe life ends with death, and that is all', in grief 'he behaves like his father.[42] He acts as if the beloved were still living and calls his parents' disconnected number across the abyss of death. 'O' is also a symbol in Harrison's work of the wider metaphysical abyss, the circle of Greek theatre, the nightmare of history and other themes. The cover of *Continuous* is based on a photograph of the site of Shakespeare's Globe in London and the background colours are black and charcoal. The scene of the cover is reminiscent of a building site and Harrison's handwritten name appears on the top half of the page. Harrison's graffiti-like signature on *Continuous* is the first sign of the poet as vandal who takes centre stage in *v.* and signs his name on his parents' gravestone in a Leeds cemetery.

The filial sonnets of *Continuous* were written in the shocked wake of the deaths of Harrison's mother and father. *Continuous* is dedicated to Florence and Harold Harrison. These elegiac sonnets are epitaphs and the dedication is set out like a tombstone:

for
mam
&
dad

in memoriam

F.H 1906 - 1976
H.A.H. 1903 – 1980

The dedication of *Continuous* suggests the heightened importance of memorialization for the secular humanist Harrison. Classical mythology was religious in motivation and

[41] 'Under the Clock', *CP*, 180.
[42] H.G. Widdowson, 'Person to Person: Relationships in the Poetry of Tony Harrison', in *Twentieth Century Poetry: From Text to Context*, ed. by Peter Verdonk (Routledge: London, 1993) 21-31, 27.

explained the world in relation to the gods. Harrison's secular humanist mythology answers the negation of meaning death poses by building narrative connections between past, present and future. *Continuous* is an elegiac work whose mourning spans the biographical and the historical, and continues the ancient literary dialogue with the dead.

In 'Study' the poet is figured as Aeneas meeting his father Anchises in the underworld in Book VI of Virgil's *The Aeneid*, and like Virgil Harrison meditates upon the Land of the Dead. 'Study' concludes with the isolated creative figure's silence: 'My mind moves upon silence and *Aeneid* VI.'[43] The further allusion is to 'Long-legged Fly' by W.B. Yeats, where the poem similarly closes with the isolated creative figure's silence and where it is in silence and isolation that great works can be produced: 'His mind moves upon silence.'[44] The last line of 'Study' stands alone and underneath the preceding three-line stanza, so that the form of the poem reflects its thematic preoccupations with the isolation required for creativity and with the underworld, or the Land of the Dead. 'Study' is set in the front room, which is for the boy Harrison to study in and 'For deaths, for Christmases, a houseless aunt.'[45] In 'Study' we are told twice that the clock has stopped. Calendar time is irrelevant when poetry communes with the dead. Death and poetry are merged in Harrison's imaginative formation. In 'Clearings, II' he calls on his parents to 'Haunt me, and not the house!' The poems are the place where 'I've got to lard / my ghosts' loud bootsoles with fresh midnight oil.'[46] 'Study' proceeds 'as if there could be some sort of meeting in the afterworld, both with my father and everything implied by his class and forebears.'[47] What is implied by the meeting with his father's class and forebears is a wish

---

[43] 'Study', *CP*, 125.
[44] W.B. Yeats, 'Long-legged Fly', *The Collected Poems*, 2nd edn (London: MacMillan, 1950), 381-82.
[45] 'Study', *CP*, 125.
[46] 'Clearings, II', *CP*, 156.
[47] 'Interview', 229.

to give voice to their suffering and for his poetry to be a form of historical atonement for their dispossession.

'Study' casts Harrison's persona as Aeneas, the exile who seeks a homeland for his dispossessed people.[48] The poem is the cultural territory won for Harrison's silenced forebears, articulating the silences and linguistic struggles of the Northern working-class with reference to his own family, the bereaved 'dumbstruck' aunty and Uncle Joe, whose 'gaping jaws / once plugged in to the power of his stammer' was 'like a d-d-damascener's hammer.'[49] The poet skillfully wields his 'hammer' to mould the sonnet's meter to the Northern vernacular, and to make a space of remembrance for 'Mi aunty's baby' and Jo. Harrison did his doctoral dissertation on verse translations of the *Aeneid* and came to regard Virgil's epic as contaminated by the compromises the imperial laureate made to please the Emperor Augustus.[50] In 'Study' Harrison appropriates *The Aeneid* for his republican parable of the dispossession of his people and the restoration of their cultural voice in his poetry, where meeting with the dead involves a literary, personal and political reckoning.

Harrison's remembrance of his father in *The School of Eloquence* begins with an epigraph that first appears in *Continuous*. The epigraph is a quotation of the first and last stanzas of Milton's Latin poem '*Ad Patrem*' ['To My Father'], so that Harrison speaks through Milton to convey his love for the father who scorns his poetry and to offer the poem as a gift.[51] Through the concluding stanza of '*Ad Patrem*' Harrison intimates his

---

[48] In the poem the allusion to *The Aeneid* also suggests Harrison's forebears were a culturally distinct people with a claim to their own nation and political self-determination.
[49] 'Study', *CP*, 125.
[50] 'The Poetic Gaze', *The Guardian* (24 October 2009). At: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/oct/24/tony-harrison-speech-pen-pinter> [accessed 15 December 2009].
[51] *CP*, 120. Harrison does not include the title '*Ad Patrem*' in the epigraph and reproduces the two stanzas in the Latin. See also John Milton '*Ad Patrem*' ['To My Father'], *The Poems of John Milton*, ed. and trans. by John Carey and Alastair Fowler (Harlow: Longmans, 1968), l. 8 and l. 17, 153.

wishes for the filial sonnets, that is, that a poem will survive its author's death and preserve 'my father's name, which has been the subject of my verse.'[52] As Morrison observes, '*Ad Patrem*' in its entirety justifies Milton's intention to become a poet to a father who, like Mr Harrison, was contemptuous of poetry.[53] Harrison does not translate Milton's Latin '*Ad Patrem*' into English and therefore signals and affirms the high cultural dimension of the sequence. '*Ad Patrem*' appears between the historical epigraph from Thompson and also Harrison's verse epigraph 'Heredity.' Like those at the beginning of *Loiners*, the epigraphs to *The School of Eloquence* reflect the strands of history and high and low culture in the poetry. The merging of filial and class political commitments in the sonnet sequence are introduced in 'Heredity.'

II

'Heredity'

'Heredity' is a short verse by Harrison which answers bourgeois condescension regarding the 'mystery' of a poet from the working class:

> *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.*[54]

A catalyst for the poem-epigraph was Harrison hearing a comment by an upper class woman attending *The Misanthrope*: *'He has such a command over language, but they say he comes from Sheffield.'*[55] 'Heredity' also responds to his mother's sense of 'mystery' about her poet-son: *'Well, I don't know where it comes from, our Tony. There's been no*

---

[52] Milton '*Ad Patrem*', l. 128, 155.
[53] Morrison, 'The Filial Art', 56.
[54] 'Heredity', *CP*, 121.
[55] 'Interview with Tusa', BBC.

artist in our family.'[56] 'Heredity' addresses the bourgeois and working class expectation that artistic and intellectual capacity naturally belongs with the bourgeoisie.

'Heredity' is a fighting verse, announcing that the most important influence on Harrison's poetry was his patrilineal, Northern inheritance of linguistic struggle: 'most people of course think that you're going to give them a long list of poets … but there are more important influences also. It's called "Heredity".'[57] Harrison's reading of 'Heredity' conveys a loving and angry defence of his Uncle Harry, who was '*dumb*' and deaf, and Uncle Joe, 'the worst stammerer I've known.'[58] Witnessing the inarticulacy of the men in his family gave Harrison his sense that articulation was 'absolutely vital':[59]

> Coming from that background and being so aware of inarticulacy, nobody could have gone to languages with more passion or industry than I did. I thought that somehow language would take me away, but – on the contrary - the more I became articulate, the more I was conscious of what I owed to the goad of the inarticulate.'[60]

Joe and Harry's physical impediments to articulation are the great emblem in *School* for the '*dumb*' working class: '*dumb*' in the sense of silenced through the repression of working class speech; and '*dumb*' in the sense of being seen to lack intellectual capacities, thus naturalizing the exclusion of working-class speech from public discourse.

'Heredity' begins the story of how Joe and Harry's battles deeply impressed upon the boy Harrison that language had to be fought for and mastered. Harrison's uncles are a model for his eloquence because they struggled for articulation. The reticence and embittered silence of Harrison's father is articulated in a number of the filial sonnets:

> The poet's inheritance, this epigraph implies, is linguistic struggle, awkward articulacy, 'mute ingloriousness', and the poems that follow are rife with imagery of stuttering,

---

[56] 'Interview with Tusa', BBC.
[57] Tony Harrison, *Poetry Quartets*, <http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts-literature-publications-poetryquartets-harrison.htm> [accessed 11 November 2010].
[58] 'Self-Justification', *CP*, 186.
[59] 'Interview with Tusa', BBC.
[60] 'Interview', 234.

> spitting, and chewing, the mouth 'all stuffed with glottals, great lumps / to hawk up and spit out.' If the metre and syntax sometimes seem strained, this is precisely Harrison's point: his poems let us know that they have come up the hard way; they are written with labour, and out of the labouring classes, and on behalf of Labour Party aspirations.[61]

Harrison's linguistic aggression is also modelled on Uncle Harry's fighting recourse to the dictionary in 'Wordlists, II': 'Uncle Harry most eloquent deaf-mute / jabbed at its lexis till it leaped to life.'[62] Like Harrison, Harry used his eloquence for political ends 'when there were Tory errors to confute.' The young Harrison learnt that the dictionary and wider education were weapons in working-class intellectual warfare:

> A bible paper bomb that dictionary.
> I learned to rifle through it at great speed.
> He's dead. I've studied, got the OED
> and other tongues I've slaved to speak or read:[63]

In 'Self Justification' Harrison remembers how Joe's 'jaws and spirit almost broke' on consonants.[64] In the last line of 'Self Justification' Harrison spaces the line, reproducing 'blank printer's ems' to typographically reproduce the silences 'by which all eloquence gets justified.' Joe's silences, struggle and achievement justify and are a model for Harrison's hard-won eloquence: 'And Uncle Joe. Impediment spurred him, / the worst stammerer I've known, to be a printer.' To handset type Joe had to spell a wide range of words quickly, reminding us that this working-class trade required significant literacy.

'Fire-Eater' is the one sonnet where Harrison's father's articulation stands alongside Joe's as the spirit of courage igniting his son's poetry. Harold Harrison and Joe's unschooled, eclectic and dramatically resourceful linguistic performances are conveyed by comparison with circus conjurors pulling colourful silks 'up out of their innards.' In a

---

[61] Morrison, 'The Filial Art', 57. This essay was first published in 1987, before Tony Blair's New Labour dropped traditional 'Labour Party aspirations', notably their commitment to nationalization through the removal of Clause IV of the Labour Party Constitution in 1995. Blair's war in Iraq is a target of several of the verses in 'The Krieg Anthology', particularly XI, 'Holy Tony's Prayer', *CP*, 398.
[62] 'Wordlists, II', *CP*, 128.
[63] *CP*, 128.
[64] 'Self Justification', *CP*, 186.

conflagration of learned and popular culture the poet-as-entertainer enters the circus ring as the clown and becomes the conjuror and the fire-eater:

> Theirs are the acts I nerve myself to follow.
> I'm the clown sent in to clear the ring.
> Theirs are the tongues of fire I'm forced to swallow
> then bring back knotted, one continuous string
> igniting long-pent silences,[65]

The poet is the phoenix 'singing from the flames' poetry about the 'long pent silences' of his oppressed forefathers. Many untold stories are woven into 'one continuous string' and given powerfully unified utterance through the metaphorical language of poetry.

In 'Fire-Eater' the divine tongues of fire, symbols of a universally comprehensible language,[66] are visited on inarticulate men and blasphemously swallowed by the poet as fire-eater. Harold's and Joe's language is 'Coarser stuff than silk' but, when it comes, issues from 'deep down in their gut.'[67] Authenticity and directness are great virtues of their articulation, and are hereditary strengths of Harrison's poetry, particularly in *The School of Eloquence*. The simplicity and dramatic power of Harold, Joe and the fire-eater are models for Harrison's poetry. The circus ring also recalls the circle of Greek theatre and the accessibility of drama and popular culture that Harrison brings to his learned poetry.

The tongues of fire are a motif for Harrison's aspiration to a universally accessible language, and this aspiration has its source in the politics of class and love. Harrison found a poetic voice to address his parents after their deaths: 'Sorry, dad, you won't get that quatrain / (I'd like to be the poet my father reads!)'[68] Harrison 'would like to think I have

---

[65] 'Fire-Eater', *CP*, 182.
[66] *The Book of Acts* 2:3-6,
[67] *CP*, 182.
[68] 'Rhubarbarians, II', *CP*, 124.

worked to be accessible.'[69] Accessibility is a central hereditary commitment of his work. In 'Lines to my Grandfathers' Harrison models his 'sedentary toil' on the manual labour of his grandfathers. The direct lines of Harrison's poetry are like crops ploughed and railway tracks laid in straight lines: 'I strive to keep my lines direct and straight, / and try to make connections where I can.'[70] Comparably, Seamus Heaney models his identity as a poet on the disciplined simplicity and strength of his father's manual labour digging potatoes in 'Digging.'[71] Harrison makes connections with his forebears and his family and their class by integrating his inheritance into his poetic and by being accessible. *The School of Eloquence* sonnets were the first of Harrison's poems to be widely translated and he found that 'the immediacies of those poems works in other cultures too.'[72] The tongues of fire are a motif in Harrison's poetry for his literal and metaphorical translations across divisions of class and culture.

In *The School of Eloquence*, translation, the motif for which is the tongues of fire, mainly refers not to the transposition of languages but to ruling class control over a shared language, and Harrison's poetic contestation of that control. In *The School of Eloquence* translation means the way the ruling class dominate the use of the English language and the interpretation of social and political matters. Harrison's translation is a tool to counter the linguistic imperialism that operates within a shared but heterogeneous language and which occludes conflicts like those of class and internal colonialism. For example, Harrison's passionate defence of his family and their class from the historical charge of stupidity is informed by his reading of history, including the arguments of the conservative political

---

[69] In conversation with the poet at the National Theatre in London, on 11 April 2008.
[70] 'Lines to my Grandfathers, II', *CP*, 192.
[71] Seamus Heaney, 'Digging', *New Selected Poems 1966-1987* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), 1-2. 'Digging' closes with Heaney's pen being likened to a shovel, a model of patient determination as an alternative to confrontation and the way of the gun suggested in the opening couplet of the poem.
[72] 'Interview', 230.

theorist Edmund Burke who, as noted in the last chapter, is quoted in 'Classics Society.' Harrison appears to view Burke as anti-democratic and to be aware that Burke 'advocated repression of the reading audience and of authors in the belief they were incapable of understanding complex argument.'[73] For Burke, the peoples' lack of intelligence 'and their irrationality justified their exclusion from political discussion.'[74] *The School of Eloquence* presents the imputed stupidity of the working class as the establishment's excuse for their exclusion from cultural and political life.

In 'Marked with D', the great elegy for Harold Harrison, the poet's reticent father, 'D' is for dad, death and dunce. 'Marked with D' is about class power and hatred exercised through language and education. This elegiac sonnet remembers Mr Harrison's cremation and his 'feeling of being worthless because he was mocked as a dunce at school and felt a dunce all his life.'[75] 'Marked with D' mourns 'The baker's man that no one will see rise / and England made to feel like some dull oaf.'[76] Harold worked as a labourer in a bakery. The use of the possessive in describing him as 'the baker's man', or an owned man, and an end line rhyme on 'oaf' / 'loaf' in the last stanza, suggest the humiliations Harold was subjected to. The sonnet puns upon the rising of the bread he baked and the denial of the baker's man, and contrasts the risen loaves with 'the tongue that weighed like lead.' Language 'kept him down.' The political implications of merging the rising of the baker's man with the mastering of language are clear in a sequence preoccupied with the relationship between linguistic and political suppression:

---

[73] Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language 1791-1819* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1984), 74.
[74] Smith, *The Politics of Language*, 74.
[75] Harrison says that his father was called a dunce at school, 'and always felt a dunce in his life because he had no mastery of words', when he introduces his filmed reading of 'Marked with D.' At: <http://lion.chadwyck.com/poets_on_screen/showclip.jsp?TYPE=poets_on_screen&ID=ON0924 > [accessed 25 December 2010].
[76] 'Marked with D', *CP*, 168.

but he hungered for release from mortal speech
that kept him down, the tongue that weighed like lead.

The baker's man that no-one will see rise
and England made to feel like some dull oaf
is smoke, enough to sting one person's eyes
and ash (not unlike flour) for one small loaf.[77]

'Marked with D' is a good example of the politics of sentiment in *The School of Eloquence* because it powerfully argues that there is no correspondence between linguistic sophistication and human worth. Indeed, in 'Marked with D' Harrison's illiterate father's desire to speak his love to his dead wife is as intense as Milton's desire for union with his wife in the afterlife. O'Brien observes the allusion in 'Marked with D' to Milton's sonnet XXIII: '... I trust to have / Full sight of her in Heaven without restraint.'[78]

I thought of his cataracts ablaze with Heaven
and radiant with the sight of his dead wife,
light streaming from his mouth to shape her name,
'not Florence and not Flo but always Florrie.'[79]

The great Milton has essentially the same hopes of reunion with the beloved as the silent Harold. Lending Miltonic eloquence to mute proletarian passion enables the evocation of a transcendent quality to the curmudgeonly widower's love, though love too will fail him by ending in the grave: 'which makes me sorry, / sorry for his sake there's no heaven to reach.' This angle on the gap between surface and interior, and the belief that redemption is only possible this side of the grave, is another dimension to the politics of language and of sentiment in *The School of Eloquence*.

The politics of sentiment is also clear in sonnets like 'Turns', where Harrison can make us cry because his father has been 'broke' by consignment to the working-class ghetto of

---

[77] *CP*, 168.
[78] Sean O'Brien, 'Tony Harrison: *Showing the Working*' in *The Deregulated Muse: Essays on Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1998), 51-64, 56.
[79] *CP*, 168.

exploitative labour, and because 'He never begged. For nowt!'[80] In 'Punchline' his father's 'cast-off uke' reflected his hopes as a young man of becoming a stand-up Northern comic, like the ukulele-playing George Formby.[81] An old man busking for coins by strumming 'a uke' he'll never play' in 'Punchline' is a symbol of cheated lives, and one in the succession of embodiments of his father's ghost in *School*. Rylance observes that recent literary criticism has been ill at ease with the powerful emotion of Harrison's poetry.[82] The political nature of this poet's bid for the heart is illuminated by Christopher Hill's reading of Milton's post-Restoration political mythology, *Paradise Lost* 'as the urging of a new political phase': 'the foundations must be dug deeper into the hearts of individual believers in order to build more securely.'[83] Sentiment, the poet's ability to move and inspire the reader (his ability to play the heart strings in displaced fulfilment of his dad's yearning to play the uke), is a political weapon deployed in *The School of Eloquence*.

'Heredity' is about Harrison's patrilineal inheritance but Harrison also affirms that he is constitutively a Northern working-class poet because it is not possible to erase 'the *mother* tongue':

> Traditionally, when you climb a ladder you are expected to kick the rungs away, but I think that's impossible with language: you are always conscious of how your mother spoke. The most formative linguistic part of your life is the *mother* tongue, the early speech.[84]

Harrison's identity as a Northern poet is also a choice because he 'is not going to embrace literature as a thing in splendid isolation: he remembers his origins and the speech in which

---

[80] 'Turns', *CP*, 162.
[81] 'Punchline', *CP*, 163.
[82] Rick Rylance, 'On Not Being Milton', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 114-28, 117.
[83] Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 350.
[84] 'Interview', 232.

he was educated before school.'[85] In 'Blocks' the poet, shocked into silence at his mother's funeral, remembers her teaching him to spell and 'the simple rhymes that started at her knee.'[86] In 'Isolation' his mother is shown teaching him language, a country saying.[87] In 'Testing the Reality' she teaches him 'numbers', numerical literacy and the language and observation of the world that his numbered verse grew from.[88] Harrison's education has not erased the foundation of his language and sensibility. Rather, his focus on his heredity suggests concern that his entrance into the canon of English literature might occlude the Northern working class character of his poetry, and recalls his rejection of the 'cultural piracy' of the Southern bourgeoisie. In 'Heredity' the first line only scans as regular pentameter if the word 'mystery' is read in his mam's tongue, eliding the second syllable '(/mIstri:/).'[89] In this sense, Mrs Harrison is the answer to the mystery of where the poetry of '*our Tony*' came from.

'Heredity' is also a brilliant reply to 'Hereditary Talent and Character' (1865) and *Hereditary Genius: an Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences* (1892) by the nineteenth-century British eugenicist and explorer Sir Professor Francis Galton. Galton was the English ideologue of eugenics, a term he coined in his *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (1883). 'Heredity' in effect presents Harrison's poetic achievements as an empirical refutation of Galton's eugenicist arguments for selective parenting of 'the finest' humans to improve hereditary endowments and to breed out families deemed genetically inadequate, as it was applied to the British lower classes.[90] 'Heredity' ironically concurs

---

[85] 'Interview', 234.
[86] 'Blocks', *CP*, 176.
[87] 'Isolation', *CP*, 153.
[88] 'Testing the Reality', *CP*, 173.
[89] *TH Holocaust*, 263.
[90] Galton argues for example that selective mating of 'the finest' humans could improve the species because selective mating of animals has achieved this goal. See Francis Galton, 'Hereditary Talent and Character' (1865), *The Occidental Quarterly*, vol. 2, no.3 (August 2002), 45-68, 55.

with Galton's argument in his essay 'Hereditary Talent and Character', and in his book *Hereditary Genius*, that mental abilities, like physical traits, are inherited. Galton's view, as it is relevant to 'Heredity', is 'that talent is transmitted by inheritance in a very remarkable degree' and 'that the mother has by no means the monopoly if its transmission.'[91] While 'Heredity' presents Harrison's genius as indeed a patrilineal inheritance it also ironically and implicitly concurs with Galton's view 'that whole families of persons of talent are more common than those in which only one member is possessed of it.'[92] Harrison affirms that his 'genius', by which Galton meant exceptional inherited abilities, is evidence of the genius of his deaf and dumb uncles.

'Heredity' presents men of talent in Harrison's family, Joe and Harry, in parallel to Galton's presentation of the kindred of 'illustrious men', with particular reference to the section on 'Poets' and the appendix listing the illustrious kin of poets like Wordsworth and Milton in *Hereditary Genius*.[93] Harrison, in effect, says to Galton that his poetic talents are inherited from deaf and dumb forebears and that as a poet now lauded by the ruling class, he is of the very class and of a family Galton wanted to exterminate through selective breeding. The allusion to *Hereditary Genius* reminds the reader that a mere century ago eminent people like Sir Professor Galton wanted to breed out families like the Harrison's, and their class, through selective mating.[94] 'Heredity' targets the conflation of class hierarchy with a genetic hierarchy of intellectual and artistic capacities, implicit in the '*mystery!*' of a great poet from the working class.

---

[91] Galton, 'Hereditary Talent', 45.
[92] Galton, 'Hereditary Talent', 45.
[93] Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry Into Its Laws and Consequences* (London: MacMillan, 1892 [1869]), 218-29.
[94] As a poet of holocaust Harrison is also aware eugenics was popularized in the first half of the twentieth century, most infamously by Nazism, and practised in liberal democratic societies in the form of forced sterilization and removal of children from 'unfit' families.'

Harrison has read Galton's *The Narrative of an Explorer in Tropical South Africa* and is familiar with his use of measurements and statistics to give scientific credibility to hierarchies of race. In the 'Preface' to *The Misanthrope* Harrison describes Galton using a sextant to 'obtain accurate measurements' of the steatopyga of the 'Venus among Hottentots.'[95] Galton's lascivious scientific investigations, 'restrained by Victorian pudeur', become an amusing anecdote through which Harrison recommends a 'bolder and more intimate' approach from the translator.[96] A later poem 'Voortrekker' refers grimly to the enslavement of the Hottentots by the Christian Boers.[97] Harrison is aware Galton used measurements and other methods of quantification to claim the scientific basis of hierarchies of race and also of class. The interpretation of the numbers, however, reflected Galton's prejudices against Africans and the lower domestic classes. Galton regarded *Hereditary Genius* as 'a purely ethnological enquiry, into the mental peculiarities of different races.'[98] 'Heredity' regards eugenics as an expression of class prejudice, which is how eugenics is widely regarded. Harrison's family is of the lower domestic classes that were the target of a Darwinist theory of genetic hierarchy within the white race, which justified breeding out the weak. Africans and other 'primitive' peoples were also the target of Darwinist theories of genetic hierarchy, based on race rather than class, and of other rationalizations for European expansion, in which the imperial extermination of the lower races was justified as merely hastening an inevitable evolutionary process.[99] 'Heredity' is a passionate and sophisticated attack on 'scientific' hierarchies of class and race, and

---

[95] Francis Galton, *The Narrative of an Explorer in Tropical South Africa* (London: John Murray, 1853), 87-88.
[96] 'Preface', *The Misanthrope*, 140.
[97] 'Voortrekker', *CP*, 111.
[98] Galton, 'Preface to the Original Edition', in *Hereditary Genius*, v.
[99] See Sven Lindqvist, *"Exterminate All the Brutes"*, trans. by Joan Tate (New York: New Press, 1996).

demonstrates an historical basis of the affinities between colonial and class victimization presented in the poetry.

If 'Heredity' considers Galton's adaptation of Charles Darwin's theories of evolution to humanity, in the form of selective mating to improve the species, 'Dark Times', from the 'Art & Extinction' sequence, considers the application of Darwinism to humanity in the context of the Industrial Revolution. Harrison refers to Galton as the cousin of Darwin in 'Preface' to *The Misanthrope*. 'Heredity' and 'Dark Times' reflect his familiarity with the theories of both men and their mutually influencing theories. Darwin came to agree with Galton's theories of genetic hierarchies of mental abilities, and refers to Galton in *The Descent of Man*.

In 'Dark Times' Darwin and Karl Marx, theorist of political economy and socialism, are implicitly contrasted as evolutionary thinkers with fundamentally different visions of humanity, who profoundly shaped political interpretations of the Industrial Revolution. In 'Dark Times' Marx's dedication of *Das Capital* [100] to Darwin is implicitly a sign of the shared ground of Darwinism and Marxism, as evolutionary theories which destabilized theological account of the universe. In the poem Darwin's refusal of the dedication is a sign of the antithetical character of their attitude to humanity. Where social Darwinism advocated the survival of the strongest and letting the weak go down, Marx antithetically argues for the interdependence of human society and the defence of the vulnerable.

'Dark Times' implicitly suggests that the application of Darwin's theory of 'the survival of the fittest' to humanity was a rationale for 'these tides of blackness' that descended on Leeds and Northern England during the Industrial Revolution. The 'smoke-grimed'

[100] 'Dark Times', *CP*, 210.

industrial landscape and the industrial working class have been blackened by 'soot' and pollution. The grim lives led by labourers in the mines and mills is implicit in 'these tides of blackness', and explicit in sonnets like 'Working' and in Harrison's prose. As noted in the last chapter, the motif of blackness (in 'Dark Times' and other poems) signals the degradation of the Northern working class and their bond of oppression with the Africans.

The poem narrates the story of the evolutionary skills of the *Peppered Moth* as a parable of historical evolution and human agency. The moth evolved from white to black to survive undetected in the Leeds landscape blackened during the Industrial Revolution. The poem asks if the *Peppered Moth* will, like the Leeds landscape, slowly regenerate 'to flutter white again above new Leeds':

> if Man's awakened consciousness succeeds
> in turning all these tides of blackness back
> and diminishing the need for looking black,
>
> to flutter white again above new Leeds?[101]

The last line alludes to Blake's 'Preface' to *Milton*, to the 'Mental Fight' to build Jerusalem in England,[102] or rather Leeds. 'Dark Times' marries a vision of darkness with a vision of hope, hope which seems to wager on the possibilities that might be afforded by larger forces of ecological and economic 'evolution' and 'Revolution', but also human adaptability, resilience and learning. The allusion in 'Dark Times' to the great political mythologer Blake, and through him his forebear Milton, signals Harrison's project in *School*. Harrison writes out in republican verse, like Milton, Blake, Yeats, and other political mythologers

---

[101] *CP*, 210.
[102] William Blake, 'Preface' to *Milton*, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman, commentary by Harold Bloom, newly rev. edn (Berkley: University of California Press, 1982 [1965]), ll. 13-16, 95-6.

before him, the suffering and aspirations of a people, and offers consolation and cultural weaponry to the Northern working class.[103]

III

'On Not Being Milton' and 'Rhubarbarians, I' are the leading politico-historical sonnets in *The School of Eloquence*. 'On Not Being Milton' and 'Rhubarbarians, I' are densely allusive sonnets and incantations wherein the poet-mythologer invokes the revolutionary energies that momentarily disturbed the triumphal procession of the victors, of kings, colonialists and capitalists. The heightened political moments drawn on in these poems are secular equivalents of what the German literary critic Walter Benjamin refers to as 'the time of the now', 'the chips of Messianic time' scattered through the ruins of history.[104] 'On Not Being Milton' and 'Rhubarbarians, I' remember the occluded history of the Luddites during the Industrial Revolution, and champion their direct action against Capital and the subordination of human need to profit. In 'On Not Being Milton' Harrison is a cheering supporter of self-education and political organization by the artisan and working-class against political and linguistic exclusion and suppression. 'On Not Being Milton' also remembers the seventeenth-century republican revolution against the monarchy and measures Harrison's republican poetic in relation to the ambivalent presence of Milton. An account of Harrison's wider relationship to Milton will be discussed next. Milton, the republican literary and political tradition, the Luddites, the Cato Street Conspiracy and,

---

[103] Emyr Humphreys observes that 'Myth-making is a recognized activity among defeated peoples' and argues that 'It is not only a source of consolation. Properly understood and used, it is a most potent weapon in the struggle for survival.' See Emyr Humphries, *The Taliesin Tradition: A Quest for the Welsh Identity* (London: Black Raven Press, 1984), 227-28.

[104] Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, ed. and with an Introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 253-64, 263.

intertextually, the Levellers and the London Corresponding Society are cornerstones of the political mythology of resistance in *The School of Eloquence*.

'On Not Being Milton' alludes to one of the major intellectual traditions which have influenced Harrison, republicanism. Harrison activates chains of association through the historical and cultural markers he selects. Foremost amongst these markers in 'On Not Being Milton' is the seventeenth-century English republican poet, pamphleteer and revolutionary himself. In the sonnet Milton is an icon of republicanism and through him Harrison taps into republican mythology. Harrison seems to regard Milton as a bourgeois republican revolutionary, following the view found in Marxist historians like E. P Thompson and Christopher Hill. Harrison's allusions to Milton are always to the republican revolutionary. He shows little interest in Milton's religion. Harrison's silence on Milton's religion signals his rejection of Milton's independent Puritanism. There is a humorous register to the title's identification with and negation of Milton. It is impossible to separate Milton's theology and his politics. However, Milton comes to Harrison via Blake, Marx and Shelley. Harrison is interested in Milton's radical republicanism. David Norbrook observes that Harrison is a contemporary republican poet who, like Tom Paulin, has 'had to do a certain amount of excavating to establish their tradition, for literary history in the twentieth century has often had a strongly monarchist bias.'[105] Milton is attractive to Harrison as a republican political writer and he locates Milton and himself in a republican literary lineage.

---

[105] David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics 1627 –1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 7. Norbrook also observes that an essay by Harrison on verse translations of Virgil's *Aeneid*, derived from his doctoral dissertation in the 1960s, shows an awareness unusual for its time of 'the Whiggish and republican cult of Lucan, Milton and Marvell.'

Harrison reclaims Milton the republican revolutionary from appropriation by various critical orthodoxies. In the eighteenth century Joseph Addison was a key figure who attempted to sanitize Milton for a gentlemanly Whiggism. Addison erased the identity of the radical Puritan inspired by the 'Inner Light', and substituted the sublime poet which dominates mainstream criticism today.[106] Thomas Gray, an important figure in Harrison's canon, also appropriated Milton for Whig political purposes. T.S Eliot, the self-described high Anglican in religion and Royalist in politics, maligned the reputation of the radical Puritan and republican heavyweight. Eliot, Leavis, the New Critics and C.S Lewis led the twentieth century critical offensive to lower Milton's profile in the canon. Harrison would agree with his fellow classicist T.S Eliot, however, that the civil war 'has never been concluded.'[107] Harrison is on the side of the republicans and he wants to claim Milton for his particular brand of republicanism.

The critical contestation waged in the Milton industry over his identity and meanings is part of the legacy inherited by Harrison, whose evocations involve a range of left-wing perspectives on this major precursor. Christopher Hill acknowledges Milton's problematic relationship with the English people. For example, Milton did not support theories of democratic representation,[108] and in this Harrison too sharply differs from Milton. However, the paramount importance of the individual conscience in the Protestant tradition and rejection of ecclesiastical hierarchies suggest an egalitarian theology which it is often noted influenced Milton's politics. Hill discusses the enormous emphasis Milton placed on personal discipline as the basis for individual liberty and the fitness of the citizenry to be the foundation of the republic. He finally regards Milton Agonistes, the autobiographical

---

[106] Dustin Griffin *Regaining Paradise: Milton and the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
[107] T.S Eliot. It is used as an epigraph in Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution.*
[108] Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 129.

dimension of *Samson Agonistes*, as an authentic portrait of the blinded, imprisoned and unyielding giant who fought for his God and his people. Milton is also an imperfect but daunting and heroic figure in Harrison's imaginary.

Harrison sees the English civil war as a class war and in class terms he is not on the same side as the bourgeois republican revolutionary Milton. Republicanism is a heterogeneous movement. Milton rejected the divine right of kings and the hereditary principle, as Harrison does. 'A Celebratory Ode on the Abdication of King Charles III' honours 'Milton, whose Latin justified / to Europe Britain's regicide',[109] though Harrison would prefer Charles III to resign.[110] Unlike Harrison, Milton wanted power limited to an educated and propertied elite. Harrison measures his distance from Milton through the allusion to the London Corresponding Society in the epigraph to *The School of Eloquence* from E.P Thompson. Harrison aligns himself with the London Corresponding Society, who continued the demands of the democratic republican Levellers, whom Milton was to the 'right' of. The London Corresponding Society was against 'the century-old identification of political with property-rights ... The challenge had, of course, been voiced before - by the seventeenth century Levellers.'[111] Milton did not speak against Cromwell's crushing of the Levellers. In class terms Milton was part of the *status quo* challenged by the Levellers and successively the London Corresponding Society and Harrison.

This challenge can be seen in 'Rhubarbarians, I' where Harrison identifies himself as a tribune, one of those elected by the people to represent their interests in Republican Rome. Milton and other writers of the English revolution turned rhetoric 'away from its courtly setting and towards the true Ciceronian mode of rhetoric where orators served the state by

---

[109] 'A Celebratory Ode on the Abdication of King Charles III', *CP*, 321.
[110] *CP*, 323.
[111] Thompson, *Working Class*, 24.

first serving the people.'[112] Harrison's conception of his vocation and his type of republicanism especially resonates with the Milton of *Areopagitica*, who casts himself as a classical orator standing before the people in the Areopagus, the high court of Athenian justice.[113] *Areopagitica* was a printed 'speech' to the Parliament of England in 1644 for the liberty of unlicensed printing, at a time when Parliamentary speeches were printed for reading by the general public, so that this polemical tract addresses Parliament and the people.[114] The classical republican principle of the right of each 'man' to be both speaker and audience also informs Harrison's conception of his role, and his dialogic crowding of voices from 'high' and 'low' into his poems. In 'Rhubarbarians, I' there is a rhyme on 'each' / 'speech' at the end of the first and third lines, suggesting the right of each person to speak on public matters. The 'speech' is though also 'a tribune's speech.' In Harrison's poetry the right of citizens of the republic to speak for themselves exists alongside the poet-as-tribune's role in placing his eloquence at the service of the people. Harrison wishes to be among 'men speaking to men.'[115]

In the second stanza of 'On Not Being Milton' the poet is an artisan, working alongside other artisans, in forging a voice for his class, his pen like 'a swung, cast-iron Enoch of Leeds' sledge-hammer, and this recalls the vision in *Areopagitica* of artists, intellectuals and workers side by side in the republican city, where the hammer is also placed alongside the pen. In *Areopagitica's* republic at war artisans and scholars in their workshops are at one:

---

[112] Sharon Achinstein, *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 59.
[113] John Milton, *Areopagitica* , in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 2, 1643-48, ed. by Ernest Sirluck (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and Oxford University Press, 1953), 485-570.
[114] Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 129.
[115] 'Authors Statement', 9.

> the shop of warre hath not there more anvils and hammers waking, to fashion out the plates and instruments of armed Justice in defence of beleaguer'd Truth, then there be pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing ...[116].

'On Not Being Milton' and 'Rhubarbarians, I' figure the poet in alliance with the Luddites politically in their struggle against Capital, and identifies them as fellow artisans. The Luddites were skilled men in small workshops like printers and weavers, resisting mechanization of their trades and being forced into the factories.[117] Harrison, the 'poet who came to read the metre', with his conception of the poet as an artisan, of the bard as akin to the 'butcher, publican, and baker',[118] also recalls Blake's conception of the poet as an artisan and William Morris, from whom Harrison takes his epigraph to 'The Earthen Lot.'[119] 'On Not Being Milton' projects the artist and intellectual alongside workers, with reference to *Areopagitica*, and also resonates with the revolutionary events of Paris in 1968 which seem to have influenced Hill's and Harrison's portraits of Milton. The Milton of *Areopagitica* is closest to Harrison's egalitarian republicanism.

'On Not Being Milton' opens with an allusion to Milton and ends with an allusion to the Cato Street conspiracy. Little is known about the Cato Street conspiracy but it had republican links, connections to Yorkshire and began after the Six Acts were being rushed through Parliament in 1819.[120] The purposes of the Six Acts included launching an offensive against the 'seditious' and 'blasphemous' Radical press. They were also designed to prohibit, for example, Radical lecture-meetings[121] like those held by the London Corresponding Society, and the tavern groups and debating societies which were

---

[116] Milton, *Areopagitica*, 554.
[117] Thompson, *Working Class*, 211.
[118] *v.*, *CP*, 264.
[119] 'The Earthen Lot', *CP*, 193.
[120] Thompson, *Working Class*, 770-71.
[121] Thompson, *Working Class*, 768.

formed in 1819 when 'Radical London awoke.'[122] 'On Not Being Milton' unites two different strands of republicanism: *Areopagitica's* high cultural literary intervention against censorship in the form of pre-publication licensing and defence of intellectual autonomy for the republic's citizens, and the Cato Street conspirators and intertextually the London Corresponding Society's grass roots direct action against suppression of the press and the political self-education of the artisan and working class.

Harrison elsewhere alludes to *Areopagitica* in rejecting the 'excremental whiteness' of a cloistered poetry.[123] Milton's engagement with public matters, his advocacy of intellectual autonomy and his attacks on priestcraft and the clergy's control over thought, in *Areopagitica* and elsewhere, is an important part of Harrison's regard for him. However, in *The Blasphemer's Banquet* Harrison presents a 'great men of history' account of the fight for freedom of speech and publication, and the fight against priestcraft and bigots who kill authors and burn books. Milton, who became a censor, is not mentioned in *The Blasphemer's Banquet*, perhaps because he was not against burning books once they had been published, nor prosecuting their authors as *Areopagitica* makes clear.

Harrison's identification with a republican literary lineage is also evident in the classical republican texts that he has chosen to translate. Harrison's translations of classical republican texts may also be a way in which he sees his work as continuous with Milton's. He comments: 'We think that Milton used classical texts as a revolutionary.'[124] For the epigraph to *Areopagitica* Milton translates a passage from Euripides' *The Suppliant Women,* a passage which presents the right of all men to speak freely in public as central to

---

[122] Thompson, *Working Class*, 762.
[123] 'Beating the Retreat', review of poems by Clifford Dyment, P.J. Kavanagh, George Macbeth, Hugh MacDiarmid and Donald Davie, *London Magazine*, new series, vol. 10, no. 8 (November 1970), 91-6, 91-2.
[124] 'Interview', 245.

the 'true Liberty' of a republic.[125] Euripides' plays 'epitomized the spirit of bold thinking and speaking'.[126] Harrison translated Euripides' *Hecuba* and also Aeschylus's trilogy of republican Greek tragedies, *The Oresteia*. He has spoken about the defeat of women and of the female code in *The Oresteia*.[127] However, like Milton in *Areopagitica*, in *The Oresteia* Aeschylus lays claim to the Areopagus as a republican form of government and as part of the Greeks' democratic heritage.[128] Harrison's allusions to Milton and his translations of Euripides and Aeschylus are part of his identification with a republican literary lineage which advocates bold and free speech for all men in the public sphere, and a republican form of government in which there is participatory democracy.

This identification can also be seen in one of the epigrams Harrison translates from the *Greek Anthology*, 'Hypatia',[129] in *Palladas: Poems*. Harrison selects for translation seventy of the one hundred and fifty one epigrams by Palladas preserved in the *Greek Anthology*. Hypatia (355? – 415 CE) was a reknowned scholar who taught mathematics and natural philosophy at the great school at the Alexandrine library. Milton's publisher, John Toland, an anti-clerical Protestant, had an interest in Hypatia because she was assassinated by Christians. Toland published an essay in 1753 titled *Hypatia, or the history of an in everyway accomplished lady, who was torn to pieces by the clergy of Alexandria*.[130] Harrison also draws attention in his 'Preface' to the lynching of Hypatia 'by Christians wielding oyster shells like razors.'[131] 'Hypatia', unlike the other epigrams in *Palladas: Poems*, also honours its subject, 'revered Hypatia': 'knowing your province is really the

---

[125] Milton, *Areopagitica*, 485.
[126] Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 127.
[127] Interview', 241-42.
[128] Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 131.
[129] 'Hypatia', *CP*, epigram 67, 95.
[130] John Toland, *Hypatia: or, the History of a Most Beautiful, Most Vertuous, Most Learned, and Every Way Accomplish'd Lady; Who was Torn to Pieces by the Clergy of Alexandria* (London: M. Cooper, W. Reeve and C.A. Sympson, 1753)
[131] 'Preface' to *Palladas: Poems*, in *Bloodaxe 1*, 133-35, 134.

heavens, / finding your brilliance everywhere I look.'[132] Hypatia may be attractive to Harrison as a martyr against religious extremism admired by republicans like Milton's publisher.

'On Not Being Milton' cheers the tongue-tied working class and advocates high political and cultural aspirations: 'Three cheers for mute ingloriousness!'[133] This phrase alludes to a line in Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751): 'Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest.'[134] Gray's inglorious Milton was mute because he was of the illiterate rural labouring class: 'But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page / Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er did unroll.'[135] He rests among the anonymous peasants dead in the country churchyard in the *Elegy*. For Gray, as for Harrison, Milton is the measure of achievement. Gray suggests that the potential of even the prodigiously gifted Milton would have been wasted if he had been born into the rural poor. However, Gray renders natural and aesthetic the denial of human potential by comparing it to flowers 'born to blush unseen.'[136] 'On Not Being Milton' also suggests that an exhausted labouring class is filled with potential contenders for glorious achievements. However, Harrison's cheer for 'mute ingloriousness' does not naturalize deprivation nor map a passive path to the grave for the humble: 'Articulation is the tongue-tied's fighting.' The sonnet points to the importance of language in political struggle and calls on the inarticulate to fortify their linguistic weaponry.

---

[132] 'Hypatia', *CP*, 95.
[133] *CP*, 122.
[134] Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard, The Complete Poems of Thomas Gray: English, Latin and Greek*, ed. by H.W. Starr and J.R. Hendrickson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 37-43, l. 59, 39.
[135] Gray, *Elegy*, ll. 49-50, 39.
[136] Gray, *Elegy*, l. 55, 39.

'On Not Being Milton' suggests that literary silences are caused not by the absence of ability or inspiration but by material conditions, and in this it recalls 'The Effort', a sonnet about Mrs Harrison hand-washing clothes during WWII. The epigraph to 'The Effort' is taken from an essay by the American writer Tillie Olsen which grieves for the literary silences of working-class women whose energies are consumed by the demands of raising children and earning money, and which laments the distance between the world of literature and of domesticity.[137] The epigraph to 'The Effort' is: 'The atom bomb was in manufacture before the first automatic washing machine.'[138] The epigraph suggests the control of technology and resources by an elite more interested in war than working-class women's lives. Mrs Harrison's will is implicitly likened to the iron of her clothesline stump. The effort and discipline she brings to domestic labour is made to measure what she might have done if her life had not been constrained by injustices of gender and class. 'The Effort' is a paean to his mam's 'ferocious pride'[139] but also recalls the mute 'Miltons' whose potentials are buried by hard labour.

In 'On Not Being Milton' the allusion to Gray provides an example of the convention Harrison transgresses: the gentleman bard speaking about the silent, uneducated majority. Harrison poetry speaks about and on behalf of the silenced and is a vehicle for their voices. Graceless resistance to power is voiced in poetry and in history by the hapless Cato Street conspirator Richard Tidd, shoemaker. The last line is a quotation of the last written words of Tidd, who was among the least literate of the Cato Street conspirators:[140]

> Articulation is the tongue-tied's fighting.
> In the silence round all poetry we quote

---

[137] Tillie Olsen, 'One Out of Twelve: Writers Who are Women in Our Century', in *Silences* (New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1978 [1965]), 22-46, 38.
[138] 'The Effort', *CP*, 174.
[139] *CP*, 174.
[140] Thompson, *Working Class*, 787.

Tidd the Cato Street conspirator who wrote:

Sir, I Ham a very Bad Hand at Righting.[141]

Tidd's words were written before his execution for the failed conspiracy to assassinate the British cabinet in 1820. Harrison has elsewhere observed that 'What is recorded in history and literature is the political speeches of the ruling class in one way or another.'[142] By contrast, 'of course the language of the working class is considered important enough to record if they are on the point of being executed.' Harrison, who takes the quotation of a poor illiterate man from Thompson's 'history from below', is contravening literary collusion in the systemic censorship of the uneducated class.

'On Not Being Milton' puns upon Tidd's '*Righting*' to suggest that writing is the poet's way of 'righting' political wrongs. In this sense the sonnet is paralleled to Tidd's direct action. 'Articulation is the tongue-tied's fighting' and the eloquent poet's way of fighting for them. Tidd's 'Bad' writing, his illiteracy, and his affirmation that his failed action was 'Right' in its motivations are honoured in the supreme mode of eloquence, poetry. 'On Not Being Milton' merges the poet's voice with the collective voice of Harrison's desired constituency, the labouring classes. 'Three cheers' is a collective cry. In the sonnet's first line the poet speaks as 'I' but by the end it is 'we.' 'In the silence round all poetry we quote' those excluded from cultural, historical and political discourse, and 'the ghosts of the inarticulate.'[143]

Because Tidd has the only line of non-Standard English and because of the typography, the italicization of Tidd's vernacular, the sonnet draws attention to the standardization of English that was being introduced in this period in a country where class, region and dialect

---

[141] *CP*, 122.
[142] *Harrison: Poets and People*, Channel 4.
[143] 'Interview', 232.

heavily overlap. Harrison follows historians like Thompson in understanding the establishment of a universal standard of spoken and written English, based on the dialect of the governing classes, as a method of excluding working-class and regional vernaculars from public life.[144] 'On Not Being Milton', by honouring Tidd's words, raises the larger question of whose speech is admissible in poetry and historical and political discourse.

The 'Ludding morphemes' of Harrison's Leeds voice come down like an Enoch sledge-hammer on Milton's 'frames of Art.' The Luddites destroyed the textile machines being introduced into the Northern mills during the Industrial Revolution, technological progress that would deny them their livelihoods. Their industrial sabotage is paralleled to Harrison's linguistic sabotage of the inherited poetic forms that would deny a voice to the Northern vernacular:

> The stutter of the scold out of the branks
> of condescension, class and counter-class
> thickens with glottals to a lumpen mass
> of Ludding morphemes closing up their ranks.
> Each swung cast-iron Enoch of Leeds stress
> clangs a forged music on the frames of Art,
> the looms of owned language smashed apart![145]

Harrison's voice, his 'hammer', has the force of history and the Luddite's rightful struggle behind it. Harrison's wish to smash the traditional poetic forms that he bends is presented as linguistic class struggle, an effort to forge a political voice for his class in poetry. The Luddites are a metaphor for Harrison's poetic, his aesthetic and political defence of the Northern voice. However, his attack on inherited poetic forms is imagined so vividly it is as if he is present when the Luddites 'clang' their hammers down on the machines. The sonnet also creates the effect that Harrison is present at meetings of underground radicals

---

[144] See also Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819*; and Tony Crowley, *Standard English and the Politics of Language* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).
[145] *CP*, 122.

like the London Corresponding Society and the Cato Street conspiracy, having 'read and committed to the flames' all secret correspondence. 'On Not Being Milton', like 'Rhubarbarians, I', the sonnet which will be discussed next, shifts between centuries, past and present tense and a sense of the poet's voice expanding to include and accompany the Luddites and the wider Northern 'mob.'

The title 'Rhubarbarians' is Harrison's neologism for barbarians of Leeds. In 'Rhubarbarians, I' his *raison d'être* is to 'raise / "mob" *rhubarb-rhubarb* to a tribune's speech.'[146] Northern barbarian speech will be brought into poetic, political and historical discourse and in 'Rhubarbarians, I', as in 'On Not Being Milton', the Luddites are centre stage in this project. 'Rhubarb' is the word actors mutter to create inaudible 'mob' noises in the theatre and Harrison adapts the term to the Northern mob. 'Rhubarb' became associated with Northern speech for Harrison after his father told him that 98 per cent of British rhubarb was grown in Leeds.[147] '*Tusky*', as a note to the sonnet tells us, is the Leeds term for rhubarb. *Tusky* is associated in the sonnet with the Yorkshire Luddites speech and its historical and dramatic occlusion. '*Tusky-tusky*' also associatively links Harrison's father's generation of the Northern working-class with the Luddite resistance to victimization.

'Rhubarbarians, I' begins with Harrison's remembered sense of inadequacy about his Leeds voice, heavy with rebarbative consonants and glottals. He comes to realize though that his is the right poetic voice in which to remember and raise the Northern Luddites:

> Those glottals glugged like poured pop, each
> rebarbative syllable, remembrancer, raise
> 'mob' *rhubarb-rhubarb* to a tribune's speech

---

[146] 'Rhubarbarians, I', *CP*, 123.
[147] 'Conversation', 39.

crossing the crackle as the hayricks blaze.[148]

The bard seems to be present as the 'mob' is crossing the blazing hayricks. 'Rhubarbarians, I' dramatizes a Yorkshire Luddite attack on a mill, and may relate to the legendary attack on Cartwright's mill at Rawfolds in 1812, which is detailed in Thompson.[149] The Luddites did not attack the mill of Horsfall of Ottiwells, who is named in the sonnet for other reasons. Cartwright's mill was guarded by the soldiers, armed strike-breakers and sentinels alluded to in the sonnet.[150] The assonance in the third stanza creates an incantatory sense, evoking the hush and danger of the midnight attack and the ghostly, metaphysical presence of the Luddites in the hills and in the sonnet:

> What t'mob said to the cannons on the mills,
> shouted to soldier, scab and sentinel
> 's silence, parries and hush on whistling hills,
> shadows in moonlight playing knurr and spell.[151]

The allusion to the Northern game of knurr and spell,[152] or Northern spell, reminds us that the Luddites are Yorkshiremen. The sound of the 'mob' is 'silence' because of the illegal nature of the Luddites' activities,[153] just as little is known of the Cato Street conspiracy. The sonnet also suggests that the true story of the Luddites is occluded in the history books.

'Rhubarbarians, I' contrasts the historical silence surrounding the Luddites and their attacks on property with the historical recording of bloody threats against the Luddites' persons by a mill-owner, who can speak out loud because Capital is supported by the law and military in the sonnet. History has recorded the exact words of Horsfall of Ottiwells, another large mill-owner who disregarded the Luddites' demands:

---

[148] *CP*, 123.
[149] Thompson, *Working Class*, 612.
[150] Thompson, *Working Class*, 612.
[151] *CP*, 123.
[152] Sidney Oldall Addy, *A Glossary of Words used in the Neighbourhood of Sheffield*, vol. 1 (London: Trubner, 1888), 126. Also see George Walker, *The Costume of Yorkshire*, 2nd edn (Sussex: Caliban Books, 1978[1814]), Plate XII. Knurr and spell resembles the modern game of trap-ball and also golf.
[153] Thompson, *Working Class*, 540. Quoted in *TH Holocaust*, 269.

Horsfall of Ottiwells, if the bugger could,
'd've liked to (exact words recorded) *ride*
up to my saddle-girths in Luddite blood.[154]

'Rhubarbarians, I' impresses upon us the bloody intentions of the mill-owners. Cartwright had soldiers firing cannon at the Luddites. The sonnet also makes clear the alignment of the State and military with Capital. Soldiers guard gaffers or bosses, and blacklegs or scabs. In the sonnet the army use disproportionate force and aim cannon at civilians armed only with pikes. In 'Rhubarbarians, I' the Luddites, the Army of Redressers, are armed with pikes. 'The *tusky-tusky* of the pikes' suggests it is Yorkshiremen carrying the pikes. 'Rhubarbarians, I' endorses direct action and armed struggle against oppression as just and necessary. The poet valorizes the Luddites, as he does the Cato Street conspirators and the London Corresponding Society.

'Rhubarbarians, I', like 'On Not Being Milton', participates in the cultural production of the mythology of Luddism. The Luddite counter-offensives against the large mill-owners were celebrated in the croppers' song, which Harrison would have read in Thompson:

And night by night when all is still,
And the moon is hid behind the hill,
We forward march to do our will
With hatchet, pike and gun![155]

The third quatrain of 'Rhubarbarians, I' recalls the croppers' song perhaps, especially in its 'mills' / 'hills' rhyme.

What t'mob said to the cannons on the mills,
shouted to soldier, scab and sentinel
's silence, parries and hush on whistling hills,[156]

Thompson observes: 'The folk-traditions of the Rawfold's attack emphasized the heroism of the Luddites and the callousness of the defenders.[157] 'Rhubarbarians, I' also evokes the

[154] *CP*, 123.
[155] Thompson, *Working Class*, 611.
[156] *CP*, 123.

heroism of the men who attacked the mill, emphasizes the bloody force used against them, and uses the historical record against Capital by quoting the murderous words of the other mill-owner, Horsfall of Ottiwells. Harrison adds the more dramatic cannon-fire, where in fact it was heavy gunfire used against the Luddites.[158]

The politics of selection in 'Rhubarbarians, I' arguably enhances the heroic mythology of Luddism and does not refer to the defeat of the Luddite attack on Rawfolds mill, nor to the subsequent assassination of Horsfall of Ottiwells. The assassination is more ethically complex than the attack on property represented in the sonnet. The assassination also occasioned some 'revulsion of feeling' among Horsfall's community, but not very much.[159] Each of the struggles Harrison honours, the Luddites, the Cato Street conspiracy and the London Corresponding Society, was defeated. In 'Rhubarbarians, I' and 'On Not Being Milton' Harrison, a poet without a revolution, a 'tribune' without an official constituency, renders his services to the artisan and working class, not as an official identified with the political or cultural establishment but as a cheering supporter, poet, 'remembrancer' and mythologist.

Why Harrison makes Luddism a cornerstone of his political mythology is best understood by considering the historical account to which he directs us in his opening epigraph. Thompson writes that the Luddites were among the first agitators to fight for 'an alternative political economy and morality' to the unlicensed competition of Capital during the Industrial Revolution:[160] 'Luddism can be seen as a violent eruption of feeling against

---

[157] Thompson, *Working Class*, 614.
[158] Thompson, *Working Class*, 612.
[159] Thompson, *Working Class*, 624.
[160] Thompson, *Working Class*, 603.

unrestrained industrial capitalism.'[161] Like other guerrilla armies, the Luddites were supported and sheltered by their communities.[162] In history books and in the popular imagination Luddism has become synonymous with primitive reaction against technological progress, unconnected to any credible political tradition. 'Rhubarbarians, I' builds on Thompson's historical account to remind us of the honourable and intelligent purpose of the Luddites. Their resistance to being forced into the factories was also part of a more comprehensive and continuing fight for the subordination of profit to human need and it is for these reasons that the 'remembrancer' poet gives the Luddites a central and honoured place in his political mythology for the North, as does Thompson who sees them as part of 'the long and tenacious revolutionary tradition of the British commoner.'[163]

In the last stanza of 'Rhubarbarians, I' the poet, having immortalized the Luddites in verse, ironically ponders the political redundancy of his own trade. That 'wiseowl' mocks the wise guy poet and scholar because poetry is no more useful to a military action than Latin or a grammar drill:

> It wasn't poetry though. Nay, wiseowl Leeds
> *pro rege et lege* schools, nobody needs
> your drills and chanting to parrot right
> the *tusky-tusky* of the pikes that night.[164]

'The owl is the city emblem of Leeds and of its schools, and "*pro rege et lege*" is both the school's and city's motto: for "king and law."'[165] The sonnet's quotation of *pro rege et lege* emphasises the relationship between bourgeois educational institutions and centres of power. The Luddites did not need a Grammar school education to take control of their own

---

[161] Thompson, *Working Class*, 601.
[162] Thompson, *Working Class*, 615-16.
[163] E.P. Thompson, 'Revolution', in *Out of Apathy*, ed. by E.P. Thompson et al (London: New Left Books, Stevens and Sons, 1960), 287-308, 308.
[164] *CP*, 123.
[165] *Permanently Bard*, 146.

affairs. Harrison's sense that language is not enough in political struggle aligns him with Nedd Ludd, General of the Army of Redressers. After every petition to Parliament to protect their livelihoods failed, the Luddites' General wrote: 'We petition no more - that won't do - fighting must.'[166] Harrison's sense of the limitations of language in political struggles sets the tone for 'Rhubarbarians, II.'

'Rhubarbarians, II' unhappily contemplates poetry's futility in the elite enclave of the theatre, in contrast to 'Rhubarbarians, I' which derives confidence from its affinity with the mythology, folk-lore and grass-roots struggle of the Luddites. In 'Rhubarbarians, II' the Leeds poet occupies the theatre stage and it is 'the MET-set', the cultural circle he was once excluded from, that does not have a part to play and have become a mob muttering 'rhubarb.'[167] Harrison likens himself to the Northern stand-up comic George Formby but it is high cultural forms that the poet-as-entertainer gives a Northern character to: 'Rhubarb arias, duets, quartets / soar to precision from our common tongue.'[168] Although he aspires to give a high cultural voice to the common tongue of 'Uz', the context of elite theatre in which Harrison, Britain's leading theatre poet, is operating leads to brutal self-mockery. The poet who would be a guerrilla fighter, like *Frelimo* or the Luddites, the dedicatees of his poems, is busking the bourgeois mob, as he does in 'Turns', and it is his '*hanba* (shame).'

The relevance of the Luddite struggle against being forced into the factories, mills and mines for Harrison's other sonnets about the Northern working-class is given particular historical clarity in 'Working.' This sonnet is about child labour in the Northern mines during the Industrial Revolution, and is set several decades after the Luddite period of

---

[166] Thompson, *Working Class*, 579
[167] 'Rhubarbarians, II', *CP*, 124.
[168] *CP*, 124.

activity from 1812-16. Dedicated to Patience Kershaw, an adolescent girl who was a 'hurryer' in the coal mines, the sonnet is informed by the testimony Patience gave to the *Children's Employment Commission of 1842*.[169] She worked on her hands and knees, semi-naked among miners, covered with coal dust and wore a chain and harness. In her labour Patience would have borne resemblance to a chained black girl. She was sometimes beaten. Patience explained to the *Children's Employment Commission* that 'the bald place upon my head is made by thrusting the [coal-filled] corves' with her head.[170] 'Working' alludes to the chafing of her hair and skull. The sonnet imagines the young girl's circumstances: 'I stare into the fire. Your skinned skull shines. / I close my eyes. That makes a dark like mines.'[171] The subterranean darkness of the coal-pits is an emblem of historical silences about class oppression, with particular reference to the mines: 'You've been underneath too long to stand the light.'[172] Patience's name also puns upon 'patience' to suggest that this questionable Christian virtue is imposed on the powerless.

'Working' also makes this illiterate girl's words and work a metaphor for Harrison's working: '*th'art nobbut summat as wants raking up*.'[173] The '*art*' of the poet Harrison is to rake up the scraps of history, exhausted people like Patience, and break the silence about their hardship: 'Wherever hardship held its tongue the job / 's breaking the silence of the worked-out-gob.'[174] A note to 'Working' explains that 'gob' is 'an old Northern coal-mining word for the space left after the coal has been extracted' and also refers to the mouth and speech. The end line rhyme on 'job' / 'gob' emphasizes that Harrison's labour is

---

[169] Patience Kershaw, testimony to the *Children's Employment Commission of 1842*, quoted in Thompson, *Working Class*, 369-70.
[170] Kershaw, *Children's Employment Commission*, quoted in Thompson, *Working Class*, 369-70.
[171] 'Working', *CP*, 135.
[172] *CP*, 135.
[173] *CP*, 135.
[174] *CP*, 135.

in language and his effort is to put the right words into the mouths of the silenced, with particular reference to the Northern mines.

Political and historical silences and working in the Northern coal mines link 'Working' to 'Cremation', the poem that follows it in *The School of Eloquence*. 'Cremation' is about an ex-miner and it is set a century later than 'Working' but it also describes 'His, his dad's and *his* dad's lifetime down below'[175] in the mines. Being 'down below' in 'Cremation', like being 'underneath too long' in 'Working', uses the mines as a metaphor for class servitude. The title 'Cremation' alludes to the impending death of the ex-miner and to the coal that has destroyed his health and fuels his hearth and the crematorium's flames. While the ex-miner hacks up of black phlegm 'every few seconds', his wife is 'aware what he's raking / 's death off his mind; the next attack.'[176] The ex-miner has 'black lung', pneumoconiosis or another incurable lung disease, caused by breathing in coal dust, that is common amongst miners. He is 'contemptuous' that the reward for his 'huge nightshift' in the mines is the destruction of his health, but he remains silent. In 'Cremation', as in 'Working', there is no sign of the Northern tradition of resistance championed in 'On Not Being Milton' and 'Rhubarbarians, I.' Victimization in the mines and historical silences are also a theme of the next poem to be discussed, 'National Trust', but the context is Cornwall and the subjugation of the miners is presented as a matter of class and colonial power.

[175] 'Cremation', *CP*, 136.
[176] *CP*, 136.

IV

'National Trust' is an exemplary sonnet of that preoccupation in *The School of Eloquence* with economic and linguistic dispossession in the regions.[177] 'National Trust' contemplates the extinction of the Cornish language and the remnants of its poetry, the annexation of Cornwall and the dispossession of the Cornish tin-miners. The title punningly raises the historical occlusion of the Cornish nation, a matter returned to in the last lines of the sonnet. In the tenth century Cornwall became 'the first part of the Celtic periphery to be incorporated within the English state.'[178] Toward the end of the fifteenth century English replaced Cornish as the majority language in Cornwall,[179] and by the end of the eighteenth century the traditional Celtic vernacular of Cornwall was extinct.[180] An irony of the title is that the appropriation of the Cornish nation by Britain was not a matter of trust or goodwill but 'the beginning of a thousand years of political and cultural subordination.'[181] The abuse of trust is a charge extended to the British 'gentlemen' and the anglicized elite who owned the Cornish tin-mines, and the 'scholars' who have constructed and maintained the orthodoxy that Cornwall was never anything other than an organic part of England.[182] Economic colonization by Capital and the extinction of the language that might have carried the Cornish account of the colonization of their nation are obfuscated by euphemistic notions of national unity and 'national trust.'

---

[177] 'National Trust', *CP*, 131.
[178] Mark Stoyle, 'The Dissidence of Despair: Rebellion and Identity in Early Modern Cornwall', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 38, no. 4 (Oct., 1999), 423-444, 424.
[179] Stoyle, 'The Dissidence of Despair, 435.
[180] Peter Berresford Ellis, *The Cornish Language and its Literature* (London and Boston: Routledge, 1974), 124.
[181] Stoyle, 'The Dissidence of Despair', 424.
[182] Stoyle, 'The Dissidence of Despair', 424.

'National Trust' momentarily recovers the Cornish tin-miners and their language from the 'Bottomless pits' and black holes in official histories.[183] In the sonnet the police are in league with Capital, while the mine-owners, publicly regarded as 'stout upholders of our law and order', 'borrowed' a convict from a warder for a macabre game. They torture the convict by flaying and dangling him down a pit, leaving him mute. The incident becomes a parable for what the sonnet presents as the mine-owners' silencing of the Cornish language: 'those gentlemen who silenced the men's oath / and killed the language that they swore it in.'[184] The ironic use of the term 'gentlemen' for the mine-owners is equalled by contempt for the scholars who have remained silent about the suppression of the Cornish tin-miners and the colonization of their country. As Spencer observes, 'National Trust' is concerned with the *trahison de clercs*, as well as the linguistic dispossession of the miners.[185] Harrison recommends dangling down a pit scholars who discredit their trade by being voluntarily 'dumb':

> O gentlemen, a better way to plumb
> the depths of Britain's dangling a scholar,
> say, here at the booming shaft at Towanroath,[186]

'National Trust' is preoccupied with the political role of language in resisting or occluding historical injustices. Harrison has elsewhere observed, with evident reference to 'National Trust', 'that certain languages, like Cornish, have been made extinct: the language of the powerful ruling class always kills off the language of the class beneath it.'[187] In the sonnet the suppression of a language by the ruling class 'gentlemen' is presented as a strategy in the economic and political suppression of a people:

> The dumb go down in history and disappear

---

[183] *Permanently Bard*, 145
[184] *CP*, 131.
[185] *Poetry TH*, 73.
[186] *CP*, 131.
[187] 'Interview', 234.

and not one gentleman 's been brought to book:

Mes den hep tavas a-gollas y dyr

(Cornish) -

'the tongueless man gets his land took.'[188]

Harrison fleetingly restores the Cornish language by quoting and then translating the line '*Mes den hep tavas a-gollas y dyr*', from the 'one genuine survival in Cornish' of an englyn, a Celtic poetic form that is particularly difficult to translate.[189] There are two other surviving versions of this englyn, and in them the line translated in 'National Trust' is alternately translated as 'But he that had no tongue, lost his land', and 'but a man without a tongue shall lose his land.'[190] In 'National Trust' economic and linguistic colonization are presented as mutually reinforcing processes. The job of the bard and the 'remembrancer' is to make history tell the truth about the defeat of the Cornish people, who 'raged against the dying of their own particular light', fighting with great tenacity,[191] and the crimes British gentlemen and the anglicized elite were never 'booked' by the police for in their own time nor since by scholars in the history books.

In 'National Trust' the use of the Cornish language, which more than anything else demonstrated the distinct cultural identity of the Cornish, is a subversion of the now dominant 'four nations' history, wherein the English, Irish, Welsh and Scottish are recognized as separate peoples. The 'four nations' history is a progressive revision of 'British' history and challenged the dominant view of Britain as an organic and homogeneous nation-state[192] but it also sometimes downplayed expressions of difference

---

[188] *CP*, 131.
[189] Ellis, *The Cornish Language*, 103-104. Also quoted in *TH Holocaust*, 273-74.
[190] Ellis, *The Cornish Language*, 103.
[191] Stoyle, 'The Dissidence of Despair', 444.
[192] An early and influential example of 'four nations' history is Hugh Kearney's *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989). See also Brendan Bradshaw

and oppression.[193] 'Four nations' history recognized that Britain was an archipelago containing distinct nations: the English, Irish, Welsh and Scottish, but Cornwall is rarely mentioned. 'National Trust' reminds us that the Cornish lost their land, language, and the recognition that they ever existed.[194] Writing during a period of defeat for the Northern working-class, Harrison remembers the subjugation of the Cornish and the death of their language, and implicitly asks how far the Southern ruling class colonization of his native North will go.

'National Trust' also reflects a contemporary polemical purpose of remembrance. There are minority calls within Cornwall for autonomy. The use of the Cornish language in 'National Trust' demonstrates that it is not altogether lost. Harrison is a poet particularly conscious of the living nature of language and its phoenix-like capacities. There is a significant minority within Cornwall seeking autonomy from Britain, and to be recognized as a national minority within the European community. This minority has petitioned for an independent assembly, and has called for the recognition of traditional Cornish law, Stannary Law. The Cornish language has recently been recognized by the British government as an indigenous language of the United Kingdom. 'National Trust' addresses the question of the recognition of the Cornish as a distinct people. The poem on the page suggests we regard the status of Cornish identity as exclusively a retrospective question of correcting the historical record. However, a question 'National Trust' addresses, the recognition of the Cornish as a distinct people, is echoed in a contemporary political debate.

---

and John Morrill, eds., T*he British Problem, 1534-1707: State Formation in the Atlantic Archipelago* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

[193] Murray G.H. Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 98-99.

[194] An example of more recent historical scholarship which argues that Cornwall has a history independent of the British state, and that the Cornish had and retain a distinct and evolving cultural identity see Philip Payton, *Cornwall* (Fowey: Alexander Associates, 1996). The book includes a recollection by Robert Louis Stevenson of meeting emigrant Cornish tin-miners in America in 1879 and his perception that they were 'more foreign in my eyes' than 'a red Indian.' See Payton, *Cornwall*, 323.

The final sonnet I wish to discuss as evidence of the concern with territorial and linguistic dispossession in the United Kingdom in *The School of Eloquence* is 't' Ark.'[195] Harrison lived in Wales in 1973-74 as the Gregynog Arts Fellow at the University of Wales,[196] and 't' Ark' seems to be a product of this period. It is the only sonnet in what later became the 'Art & Extinction' sequence to appear in *From 'The School of Eloquence' and Other Poems* (1978). 't' Ark' brings together his concern with forms of extinction and of imperialism in a Welsh context, and with reference to Africa, Papua, Cornwall and implicitly Northern England. 't' Ark' has attracted very limited critical commentary but this rich sonnet can be more fully explained by disclosing its engagement with the Welsh poetic tradition, and placing it in the historical and contemporary context of Welsh cultural and political nationalism. The poem is also concerned with the imperial erasure of native cultures from Europe to Africa.

Harrison's sympathy with an alternative nationalism in Wales and other regions of the United Kingdom is clear in an undated letter from the 1970s. He was attending a Miners' Strike in Wales, probably the 1974 Miners' Strike which was in progress when he was there, and wrote:

> In Wales it was good: someone asked can you think of a decent poet worth reading who lives in London? Surrounded by nationalists Scottish, Welsh and Northern, London seemed like an appendix that was withering away.[197]

In 1974 questions about the revival of the Welsh language and political devolution were major issues in Wales. The rise of Welsh cultural and political nationalism was importantly a consequence of several major twentieth-century events, one of which was the flooding of the village of Capel Celyn in the Tryweryn Valley in 1965 to provide a water reservoir for

---

[195] 't' Ark', *CP*, 211.
[196] Gregynog House is a centre for Welsh culture.
[197] Letter to Alan Ross (undated).

Liverpool.[198] Capel Celyn was home to one of the last entirely Welsh-speaking villages and the flooding was 'seen in terms of a colonization of Welsh land, but also, and inextricably linked, an attack on the Welsh language.'[199] This appropriation of Welsh water and land by an act of Parliament in London led to an upsurge in Welsh nationalism and the formation of *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg* (the Welsh Language Society).[200] 't'Ark' seems to allude to the historic flooding of Capel Celyn and to draw upon its place in Welsh political mythology.

The title begins the poem's use of the Biblical mythology of the Great Deluge to illuminate the shared terrors of the historical waves that have washed away colonized peoples and their languages, and perhaps to specifically recall the flooding of a Welsh-speaking village by the imperial power in the region:

> Not only dodo, oryx and great auk
> waddled on their tod to t'monster ark,
> but 'leg', 'night', 'origin' in crushed people's talk,
> tongues of fire last witnessed mouthing: *dark!*[201]

The poem uses the parable of divine genocide to dramatize man-made genocides and ecological disaster: '*dark.*' The last word of the poem is *cynghanedd*, a Welsh word that refers to Welsh poetry in strict meter, and which may be 'the oldest surviving poetic tradition in Europe.'[202] In the poem the Ark that survived the Deluge is also a symbol of the role of enduring poetic forms in carrying their languages and the stories of their people in dangerous times.

---

[198] Owain Llŷr ap Gareth, *Welshing on Postcolonialism: Complicity and Resistance in the Construction of Welsh Identities* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wales Aberystwyth University, 2009), 135.
[199] Gareth, *Welshing on Postcolonialism*, 135.
[200] Dave Ward, 'Liverpool Says Sorry for Flooding Welsh Valley', *The Guardian* (13 October 2005). At: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2005/oct/13/water.society> [accessed 20 January 2010].
[201] *CP*, 211.
[202] Raymond Williams, 'Community', in *Who Speaks for Wales: Nation, Culture, Identity*, ed. by Daniel Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 27-33, 27.

Contemplating the extinction of languages, poetry, peoples and species Harrison, true to form, turns to a poetic tradition which has survived for centuries, and to translation as a method of preserving poetic traditions and languages: '(or mourn in Latin their imminent death, / then translate these poems into *cyghanedd*.)'[203] This final couplet is an example of the use in 't' Ark' of 'the epigrammatic concentration which is a feature of so much Welsh poetry.'[204] *Cynghanedd* uses a set of poetic techniques that produces 'the harmony, the interlocking, by alliteration, assonance, and rhyme, all through the lines.'[205] 't' Ark' uses the Meredithian sonnet form but integrates some of the poetic features of *cynghanedd* such as alliteration, assonance and rhyme, and a dense sequence of metaphors.[206] Raymond Williams quotes the Welsh writer Emyr Humphreys, who argues that the continuation of the Welsh poetic tradition from the sixth century to the present day has 'contrived to be a major factor in the maintenance, stability and continuity of the Welsh identity and the fragile concept of Welsh nationhood.'[207] 't' Ark' similarly suggests the role of poetic traditions in the survival of threatened cultural identities and nations.

't' Ark' draws on a Modernist conception of cultural survival, under conditions of great and often destructive historical change, that Raymond Williams called a 'dynamics of mobility,'[208] where remnants of extinct languages survive as traces in other speech, a kind of linguistic inter-breeding: *'Restsprache.'*

> Now when the future couldn't be much darker,
> there being fewer epithets for sun,
> and Cornish and the Togoland *Restsprache*

---

[203] *CP*, 211.
[204] Gweneth Lilly, 'The Welsh Influence in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins', *Modern Language Review*, vol. 38, no. 3 (July 1943), 192-205, 192.
[205] Rolfe Humphries, *Green Armor on Green Ground: poems in the twenty-four official Welsh meters* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), xv.
[206] Williams, 'Community', 28.
[207] Emyr Humphreys, *The Taliesin Tradition: A Quest for the Welsh Identity* (London: Black Raven Press, 1984), 2. Quoted in Williams, 'Community', 28.
[208] Williams, 'Community', 28.

name both the animals and hunter's gun,[209]

Restsprache is not in the German dictionary. However, '*Sprache*' means language, and *Rest* means a variety of things including 'and the rest', or remainder, residue, surplus, leftovers, which sometimes also have residual traces in surviving languages, but also the balance of something. The poem suggests that the remnants of their language are what is left of extinct cultures. Harrison's neologism, *restsprache*, may also refer to the way the requirements of cynghanedd often compelled its poet to coin new words.[210] The unfamiliar term '*restsprache*' invites the reader to consider the linguistic consequences of imperialism, which involve both destruction and adaptation. The conception of cultural survival is not a backward looking mythologizing of an idealized and timeless past that, as Williams observes, is propagated by the cultural Right, from F.R Leavis to T.S. Eliot to the Welsh nationalist leader and poet Saunders Lewis.[211] Instead the poem reflects a new concept of continuity in which languages disintegrating under the weight of historical change and imperial power can survive by changing shape, a theme of Welsh literature that reflects historical processes.[212]

Harrison certainly seems to have regarded the Welsh as a colonised people. In 't' Ark' the situation of Wales is linked to Cornwall, and in turn to the now extinct Togoland. The comparison of Cornwall's fate to that of Togoland is consistent with the lament for the erasure of Cornwall from the map, and the suppression of the Cornish language in 'National Trust.' Togoland is referred to in 't' Ark' because its history epitomizes national extinction at the hands of imperial cartography. After a series of carve-ups by various

---

[209] *CP*, 211.
[210] Lilly, 'The Welsh Influence in the Poetry of Hopkins', 192.
[211] Williams, 'Community', 29. See also Richard Griffiths, 'Another Form of Fascism: The Cultural Impact of the French "Radical Right" in Britain', in *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain*, ed. by Julie V. Gottlieb, Thomas P. Linehan (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 162-181, 175-80.
[212] Williams, 'Community', 30.

victorious powers Togoland ceased to exist. The last stages in the extinction of this historic region included its division, by the League of Nations in 1922, into a French and a British mandate, and in 1946 both mandates became trust territories of the United Nations. In 1957 British Togoland became part of the independent state of Ghana, while French Togoland became independent as the Republic of Togo in 1960. Togoland no longer exists but fragments of it survived in altered forms. Harrison's allusion to the washing away of a Welsh speaking village by a foreign political power, like his references to the fates of Cornwall and Togoland, renders visible the imperial erasure of a region and its communities and languages.

The use of the word 'reserve' in the opening line of 't'Ark' seems to pun upon a reserve/reservoir of water: 'Silence and poetry have their own reserves.' The dignity accorded to silence and poetry in this line suggest they are naturally fertile spaces, in contrast to the theft of resources associated with imperialism. These lines also resonate with Harrison's recurring expression of dissatisfaction with 'special reserves for poetry', such as Fellowships and other grants. He made these comments after he had received a series of Fellowships and Grants and, as noted, may well have written 't' Ark' while he was on the Gregynog Fellowship. It is quite likely the opening line reflects a stage in his thinking about these 'special reserves' for poetry. Although Harrison expressed his preference to go on 'living in the wilderness' for as long as possible, in 't' Ark' he seems, on the one hand, to suggest how difficult it is for languages to survive at all in a violent world: 'tongues of fire last witnessed mouthing: *dark!*' On the other hand, he suggests that a poetry which rejects a retreat into the aesthetic, and is committed to history and human beings can offer limited refuge to at least the languages of dying peoples.

't' Ark' is also the only one of the 'Art & Extinction' sequence that uses the Northern dialect. In the title, which would presumably otherwise be 'The Ark', and the second verse, Harrison uses the Northern 't'' for RP's 'the': An explanation for this, in a poem which makes no other reference to Leeds, is that it links the situation of the declining Northern dialect of Harrison's parents' generation to that of Welsh. 't' Ark' subtly compares the linguistic and political situation in Northern England to that of indigenous Wales. Similarly, in 'National Trust' Harrison implicitly suggested, through its placement in the sequence and through comments in interview, that the extinction of Cornish served as an historical warning for Northern England, where the indigenous language and way of life is at an earlier stage on the same path towards extinction. 't' Ark' is a poetic vessel to preserve traces of the languages of indigenous peoples, from Togoland to the Tryweryn Valley to Leeds being washed away by larger politico-historical forces.

The political role of language in defending cultural identity and material resources is implicit. The flooding of the Tryweryn Valley, despite eight years of political opposition in Wales, suggested that self government was the only way the Welsh could choose how they were governed. The Labour party controlled Liverpool at the time of the reservoir's construction, and the event demonstrated that the class politics of Old Labour was still tied to an oppressive nationalism, despite the post-war decline of the British Empire. The British Labour Party had, for most of twentieth century, regarded Welsh nationalism with contempt and viewed devolution as undermining the unity of the British working class. This stance was an example of why Raymond Williams thought that the British Left had to move away from centralised politics, and rethink its attitude to nationalism. The way Williams spoke about Wales and other regions of Britain in the context of alternative nationalisms, and his advocacy of building political autonomy in places like Wales and

Northern England,[213] is consonant with Harrison's perception of Wales and the North as places where political power is far removed from the population, and the local language and community is dissolving.

't' Ark' offers a poetic mythology of imperial dispossession and regeneration. It uses the Meredithian sonnet form, as noted, but instead of sixteen lines composed of four quatrains, there are eighteen lines in 't' Ark.' Where the Meredithian sonnet has one hanging couplet, 't' Ark' has two. The last couplet is:

> (or mourn in Latin their imminent death,
> then translate these poems into *cynghanedd*.)[214]

In this final couplet Harrison, on the one hand, translates a dead language, Latin, into a dead language, Welsh. The 'dead' status of these languages is emphasized by the rhyme on 'death' / '*cynghanedd*.' Paradoxically though, through the act of translation, Harrison keeps these 'dead' languages alive. The poem's reference to the biblical tongues of fire, symbols of a universal language, also evokes the powers of language and translation. The ideas in 't' Ark' about linguistic and cultural survival through resourcefulness and creativity suggest that 'powers of a certain kind – hope, fidelity, eloquence – are repeatedly distilled from defeat.'[215] The form of the poem also reflects its thematic preoccupations. The last couplet is a tail in the tail of the poem. Wittily, in a poem about death and resistance, the tail in the tail is fighting back. After traversing the United Kingdom, Ireland and Africa, Harrison writes *v.*, which is set in Leeds, and is his great 'state of the nation' poem discussed in the next chapter.

---

[213] Raymond Williams, 'Decentralism and the Politics of Place', in *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, ed. by Robin Gale (London: Verso, 1989), 238-245; and 'The Practice of Possibility', in *Resources of Hope*, 314-22, 318.
[214] *CP*, 211.
[215] Williams, 'Community', 30.

Chapter 8

The State of the Nation: Dissenting Voices

v.[1] is set in Leeds in 1984 when it was also written, and it was first published in the *London Review of Books* on the 24 January 1985.[2] A highly personal and political cultural intervention, *v.* also articulates the unifying preoccupations of the poetry selected for examination in this dissertation. The poem reflects Harrison's entwined class, anti-colonial, republican and humanist poetic. It is about Harrison's native Leeds and it continues his trademark occupation of the heartland of the canonical British literary tradition on behalf of dispossessed peoples of the North. It is also in *v.* that Harrison most directly voices his enduring elective affinity with Rimbaud, here particularly as a regional poet from the lower classes practising a poetics of classical vandalism.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Each section examines *v.* in a distinct context. The chapter explains the unifying themes of the poem, and shows the poem's preoccupation with the meaning of work and unemployment for different classes in different historical moments. The discussion begins with an examination of *v.*'s engagement with the historical and political conditions of its production in 1980s England, where a poetically subtle but politically acute resistance to the Thatcher government's rhetorical targeting of the unemployed, for example, and to the discursive erasure of class is witnessed. Prominent left criticisms of Harrison's abandonment of a radical working-class critique in *v.* are contested. The second section of this chapter illuminates Harrison's

[1] All references to *v.* in this chapter are from the *CP* and will be given in brackets after the text.
[2] *v.*, *London Review of Books*, vol. 7, no. 1 (24 January 1985), 12-13. As recorded in Chapter 1, *v.* was also published in a variorum edition by Bloodaxe Books in 1985, Richard Eyre's film of *v.* was first broadcast by Channel 4 on 4 November 1987, and a second edition of *v.* including media and political reaction to the poem and film was published by Bloodaxe Books in 1989.

identification with Rimbaud, and it considers Rimbaud's and Harrison's ideas about work through a consideration of the nineteenth-century Marxist political writer Paul Lafargue's parodic text *The Right to Be Lazy*. The last section of this chapter examines *v.*'s attentive relationship to its literary model of difference, Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. It observes the poem's valorization of labour, and Harrison's reworking of Gray's poem to make his own points, including his distinct presentation of the poet as a working man, and his disruption of a Whig political and literary tradition of resignation to injustice that Gray's *Elegy* represents. This chapter and study conclude with a coda that considers the epitaph to *v.*, the verse that Harrison the artisan intends to have chiselled upon his tombstone in the Beeston Hill graveyard, the fighting epitaph of the Rimbaud of Leeds.

I

v. tells the story of Harrison's memorable visit to Leeds and to the Beeston Hill graveyard to tend the family plot. In the opening stanzas the narrator 'Tony Harrison' establishes the relationship between his work, poetry, and that of the deceased generations of artisans who provided the essentials of life: beef, bread and beer. *v.* establishes, in traditional working men's terms, that a man's sense of identity and dignity depends upon his work, and that the community he belongs to also depends upon his labour. Harrison then finds that the tombstones of his parents and of the working men, who are identified on the obelisks by their name and trade, have been defaced with four-letter words by soccer hooligans. As the middle-aged poet meditates upon why graves have been vandalized he is verbally assailed by a Leeds United supporter, an unemployed young skinhead. The 'skin' explains, in essence, that his vandalism is an attack not upon the dead but upon the injustice that men of earlier generations had work when he does not: '*Ah'll tell yer then what really riles a bloke. / It's reading on their graves the jobs they did -*' (*CP*, 270). The lumpenproletarian youth

represents a generational underclass of the terminally unemployed. The skin says that '*Death after life on t'dole won't seem as 'ard!*' (*CP*, 270). The encounter between poet and skin takes place against the background of the historic 1984 Miners' Strike against pit closures in the North (*CP*, 266). The unemployed skin's degradation signifies the political victimization of the North, by the policies of the Thatcher Government in the South.

The polyvalent title *v.* points to the interrelated political, generational, metaphysical, historical and biographical divisions and unities explored in the poem. The binaries of conflict and connection in *v.* are dramatized in the internally divided dramatic character 'Tony Harrison.' During a dialogical Bahktinian battle waged in the graveyard between poet and skin, in the middle section of the poem, the skin is revealed to the poet as his alter-ego: 'He aerosolled his name. And it was mine' (*CP*, 273). The war of words between the two Harrison personae dramatizes a series of wider divisions, including the divide between the employed and the almost three million unemployed in Britain, disproportionately concentrated in the North, at the time *v.* was being written. The argument between poet and skin is also between a liberal and a radical politics, and their explanations for human suffering. Before the revelation that the skin is his *doppelgänger*, Harrison is cast in the role of a bourgeois political liberal who mourns injustice but is not prepared to fight the system that he is a beneficiary of. Terry Eagleton acutely observes that *v.*'s poet is more pained by division than oppression and that this is 'roughly the divide between the liberal and the radical.'[3] The lumpenproletarian skin espouses a radical politics of '*class war*' (*CP*, 273). The liberal poet offers sophisticated metaphysical rationales for a universalized human condition. The skin, by voicing the plight of '*dole-wallahs*' (*CP*, 271)

[3] Terry Eagleton, 'Antagonisms: Tony Harrison's *v.*', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 348-350, 350.

and '*the shit they're dumped in*' (*CP*, 270) points to contestable political and historical conditions of injustice.

A critical mistake in the commentary has been the near-conflation of Harrison with the character of the liberal poet in *v.*, despite the dramatic device of the *doppelgänger*. Eagleton thinks that the skin 'stands to the left of the poet' but also to the left of Harrison himself, and writes that the skin 'needs to harangue his author a little further ...'[4] Spencer is one of the few critics to allow the possibility that Harrison might be consciously depicting the insufficiencies of liberal ideology.[5] The character of the liberal poet represents Harrison as he might have become if he had not been raised in working-class Leeds. The skin represents Harrison as he might have been if he had not gained an education and left Leeds. But, in essence, the skinhead is an enduring constitutive aspect of himself. *v.* reflects Harrison's faithfulness to conflicted dimensions of his identity and an interrelated sense of responsibility to the discourses juxtaposed in the poem. There are also different facets to the identities of both poet and skin in the Janus-faced 'Tony Harrison.' The discordant chorale of voices, including those of the metaphysician, class warrior and inarticulate dispossessed enrich a polyphonous political epic.

v.'s epigraph introduces the poem's profound preoccupation with the mastery of language and with inarticulacy and their relationship to questions of power, one of Harrison's greatest themes. The epigraph quotes from a newspaper interview with Arthur Scargill, then President of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The epigraph is: 'My father still reads the dictionary every day. He says your life depends on your power to master words.' (Arthur Scargill, *Sunday Times*, 10 January 1982). These words pertain to

[4] Eagleton, 'Antagonisms', 349-50.
[5] *Poetry TH*, 95.

the role of language in personal and class political agency because they belong to Scargill's father, a private figure, and to Scargill himself, who led what was at that time the most powerful union in England and the industrial strong-arm of the working class. The epigraph signals *v.*'s attentiveness to the power of language in the politico-economic battle raging between 'Coal Board MacGregor and the NUM' (*CP*, 266), a reference to the conflict between the miners and Thatcher, who appointed Sir Ian MacGregor to close mines deemed unprofitable.

Eagleton comments that 'The actual Miners' Strike impinges on *v.* hardly at all,' except for the epigraph, and that *v.* reflects Harrison's 'dispirited political imagination.'[6] David Kennedy concurs that the Strike is marginal to *v.*'s concerns.[7] Ken Worpole is disappointed that *v.* contains 'no reference at all to the working-class miners and their families.'[8] Worpole also regards the vision of the Leeds working-class in *v.*, and elsewhere in Harrison's poetry, as typical of the metropolitan intelligentsia and attributes this to Harrison's estrangement from his origins.[9] There are two explicit references to the Miners' Strike in *v.*, as well as its implicit importance for the epigraph. *v.*'s poet refers to 'Coal Board MacGregor and the NUM', and to the 'police v. pickets at a coke-plant gate' (*CP*, 277). There is a politics of selection in any text and it is true that the explicit primary focus of *v.* is not the Strike or the miners, but they have a pervasive implicit importance in the poem. Instead of the explicit literary attack on Thatcherism that some left commentators hoped for from Harrison, *v.* offers subtle and complex resistance that negotiates competing perspectives, and a symptomatic diagnosis of an ailing and besieged North. Received

---

[6] Eagleton, 'Antagonisms', 350.
[7] David Kennedy, '"Past Never Found": Class, Dissent and the Contexts of Tony Harrison's *v.*', *English*, vol. 58, no. 221 (2009), 162-81, 165.
[8] Ken Worpole, 'Scholarship Boy: The Poetry of Tony Harrison', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 61-74, 73.
[9] Worpole, 'Scholarship Boy', 72.

criticisms of Harrison's class political commitments in *v.* either miss what they are looking at or reject the legitimacy of the poet's choice of subject and angle.

Harrison is not looking firstly at the working class but at a workless underclass. He is looking at the lumpenproletariat. He is not looking primarily at those who still have a job but at the unemployed. Harrison is at one level in a different political debate to his critics and he is looking at a different political class. The frustration of a left critic like Worpole with Harrison's focus upon an unemployed thug rather than the valiant miners might also be seen in the longer perspective of the left's apparent disengagement from the lumpenproletariat, whom Marx for example described as 'this scum, offal, refuse of all classes.'[10] Distinctly, Harrison gives the 'scum', those even worse off than the miners, 'a hearing!' (*CP*, 271) and is concerned with the suffering of those who fall to the very bottom of society.

However, *v.*'s foregrounding of the young lumpenproletarian skinhead is indissolubly bound up with the crisis of the Northern mining communities, and serves as a metonymic and symptomatic forecast of an increasingly grim future for Leeds if the Strike against pit closures is lost. Harrison underlines the relationship between mining and employment in the region, and the victimization of the unemployed, by metaphorically suggesting that dumping people on the dole is like chucking coal on the fire. The skin tells the poet:

> *Aspirations, cunt! Folk on t'fucking dole*
> *'ave got about as much scope to aspire*
> *above the shit they're dumped in, cunt, as coal*
> *aspires to be chucked on t'fucking fire.* (*CP*, 270).

[10] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, ed. by C.P. Dutt (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 75.

The rhyme on 'dole' and 'coal' also reminds us, without placing analysis in the skin's mouth, that the decimation of the coal industry by the Thatcher government was a policy of mass unemployment.

The rhyme on 'dole' and 'coal' is similarly used in Harrison's film-poem *Crossings* (2002) to liken former Northern mining communities dumped on the dole to cattle dumped on the fire during the 2001 foot- and-mouth epidemic in the United Kingdom: 'Along with culled cattle, culled kingdoms of coal, / one dumped on the bonfire, one on the dole.'[11] Harrison's film-poem *Prometheus* (1998) remembers the 1984 Miners' Strike and valorizes the striking miners.[12] In her essay on *Prometheus* Edith Hall writes that 'Harrison is the only serious artist in Britain still refusing to allow his audience to forget these destitute communities.'[13] Hall makes this observation about the impact that the pit closures, which were announced in 1984, would have upon the mining communities:

> The closures would necessitate making over twenty thousand men redundant, removing the income from hundreds of thousands of British people in mining and allied industries, and destroying dozens of communities across the poorest regions of Wales, Scotland and Northeast England.[14]

v.'s anticipation of the defeat of the miners and the fatal blow to the communities they support is symbolically suggested by the community graveyard resting precariously above closed coal galleries: 'Subsidence makes the obelisks all list' (*CP*, 265). Eagleton rightly observes that the coal pit is a symbol of a metaphysical abyss.[15] However, primarily and urgently, as Linden Peach comments, the mine beneath the graveyard becomes 'a symbol for a worked-out class and generation, his father's generation ...'.[16] Harrison is

---

[11] *Crossings*, *CP*, 399-414, 405.
[12] *Prometheus* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), 7.
[13] Edith Hall, 'Tony Harrison's *Prometheus*: A View from the Left,' *Arion,* vol. 10, no. 1 (2002), 129-40, 136.
[14] Hall, 'Tony Harrison's *Prometheus*,' 133.
[15] Eagleton, 'Antagonisms', 350.
[16] Linden Peach, *Ancestral Lines: Culture & Identity in the Work of Six Contemporary Poets* (Bridgend: Seren, 1993), 111-133, 126.

envisioning the past and also the future, the 'place of rest' and implicitly the way of life in Leeds collapsing into the worked-out pit (*CP*, 264).

v. wages a dramatic challenge to Thatcherite rhetorical attacks on the miners, and on the unemployed and soccer hooligans like the skin, groups vilified as 'enemies within' the nation in the immediate years before and during the writing of *v.*, or the first half of the Thatcher decade (1979-90). The poem offers an alternative account of 'the enemies within' (*CP*, 274). 'The enemies within' is a key political phrase of the period *v.* examines. Harrison directly uses the phrase 'the enemies within' and also makes the concept of internal enemies central to his poetic account of the self and of the nation. The poet in *v.* says: 'Half versus half, the enemies within / the heart that can't be whole till they unite' (*CP*, 274). *v.* explores not only 'the enemies within' 'Tony Harrison' but also within Thatcher's England. The poem's alertness to the political language of the day is emphasized by its epigraph being derived from a newspaper, for example, and its poet watching the nightly news. 'The enemies within' registers the resonances between the public language of the day and the language of *v.*.

In *v.* the phrase 'the enemies within' directly refers to Thatcher defining the miners in 1984 as 'the enemies within' England, the 'enemies of liberty' who must be fought.[17] The bellicose language Thatcher used against the miners in a 1984 address to Conservative MPs was immediately reported in the media: 'In the Falklands we had to fight the enemy without. Here is the enemy within.'[18] Thatcher directed the language of war against the miners, British citizens. In *v.* the poet watches the 'national news' move seamlessly

[17] Margaret Thatcher, Address to the 1922 Committee in the House of Commons (19 July 1984), reported in 'Thatcher makes Falklands Link', *The Times* (20 July 1984). At: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/105563 > [accessed 3 July 2010].
[18] Thatcher, Address to the 1922 Committee.

between civil unrest involving British soldiers in Ireland and the war between Iran and Iraq and the British 'police v. pickets at a coke-plant gate' (*CP*, 277). Harrison seems to be referring to the mass picket staged by the NUM in June 1984 at a coking-plant in Orgreave, South Yorkshire. It was the most violent confrontation between the NUM and the police during the strike and it was covered in the national news. During the strike the miners and the NUM 'were almost universally presented as thugs' in the media.[19] The film of *v.*, however, showed footage of hundreds of police in riot gear and on horse-back charging the miners and beating unarmed men with truncheons.

The film of *v.* empirically draws on the 'Battle of Orgreave', as the clash was dubbed, or similar military-style operations against the miners, to make explicit what the text of the poem more subtly presents as a domestic dimension of the Thatcher regime's militaristic nationalism. Thatcher's 'industrial Falklands'[20] and wider adversarial politics is a prominent part of why she is clearly presented as the heir to the war-time Prime Minister Churchill in the film of *v.*. Thatcher is shown making the V sign in reverse, a symbol of crude aggression we might expect from the neo-Nazi skinhead spraying V signs in the graveyard. Thatcher too is portrayed as a thuggish warrior of the hard Right.

v. invites readers to see that the conflict between the Thatcher Government in the South and the miners in the North is an instance of British internal colonialism because it is paralleled to the war between British Northern Ireland and the free Irish Republic. On the nightly news images of 'police v. pickets at a coke-plant gate' is followed by 'The map that's colour-coded Ulster / Eire's' (*CP*, 277-78). The specific choice of the Irish Gaelic name for Ireland, *Eire*, which was formerly used to designate the independent Republic of

[19] Hall, 'Tony Harrison's *Prometheus*,' 133.
[20] Thatcher, Address to the 1922 Committee.

Ireland, also signals the history of linguistic and wider colonization, his support for cultural self-identification in a colonial context, and his anti-colonial republicanism. The imperial economic character of the war against the miners is also suggested by preceding the image of 'police v. pickets' with 'shots of the Gulf War' (*CP*, 277). A parallel is implicitly suggested between the 1984 war to shut down coal in the North, and the 1984 'Tanker War', a stage of the Iran-Iraq War when each nation attacked enemy oil tankers in the Gulf. The 'police v. pickets' and the NUM versus 'Coal Board MacGregor' are also instances of 'class v. class' (*CP*, 266). By presenting the working-class miners versus the police, an arm of the State, *v.* suggests that the State is an agent of the ruling class and of Capital like British Steel, who owned the coke-plant at Orgreave picketed by the miners and guarded by the police. The conflict is presented as a class war but also as a war between North and South in a two-nation state, and is an instance of the interrelation of issues of class and colonialism in Harrison's poetry.

v.'s imaginative dissent from the political language and argument of the New Right importantly includes a defence of another of Thatcher's enemies within, the unemployed, who were rhetorically targeted as 'scroungers.'[21] Harrison stages the moral adventure of having a safely middle-class liberal get beneath the skin of one of these 'scroungers', only to find that this seemingly irredeemable *dole-wallah* desperately wants work. The skin mockingly wonders whether the pointlessness of his life might be reflected in his epitaph:

> *When dole-wallahs fuck off to the void*
> *what'll t'mason carve up for their jobs?*
> *The cunts who lieth 'ere wor unemployed?* (*CP*, 271)

v. challenges the Tory imputation that the unemployed do not want work and are lazy. The ideological lynchpin of the poem is that this *dole-wallah* wants to work. Indeed in his way

[21] Ian Gough, 'Thatcherism and the Welfare State', in *The Politics of Thatcherism*, ed. by Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983), 148-68, 155-6.

the skin is really the self-reliant entrepreneur elsewhere celebrated by Thatcher, independently staging '*mi work on show all over Leeds*' (*CP*, 273).

v.'s focus on 'some HARPoholic yob supporting Leeds' (*CP*, 274), the skin, is prescient in that by 1985 the soccer hooligans had succeeded the defeated miners as Thatcher's enemies within. Referring to the soccer hooligans, Steve Redhead asks: 'What better alien force for the Iron lady to take on after vanquishing the "Argies" and the miners?'[22] Redhead observes that targeting soccer louts, the miners, and prosecuting the 1982 Falklands War were electorally popular for Thatcher.[23] Kennedy writes that although Harrison is established as a dissenting political poet the radical perspective of his poems about Britain, like *v.*, are 'harder to locate' and are more 'a matter of exemplary force as opposed to direct comment or intervention.'[24] He adds that 'There is no poetic bout between one of Britain's most visible scholarship boys and Britain's most successful scholarship girl.'[25] *v.*'s demystification of Thatcher's 'enemies within', the soccer hooligans, *dole-wallahs*, and the miners is a polemically acute but poetically subtle cultural intervention against a politics of victimization.

A political complexity of *v.* is that it focuses on unsympathetic subcultures associated with the Leeds working class. The skinhead is linked to the extreme right political organization the National Front. The poet observes 'a swastika with NF (National Front)'s / sprayed on a grave' and that 'another hand / has added, in a reddish colour, CUNTS' (*CP*, 266). An NF skinhead has put a swastika on a tomb. A communist (writing in a reddish colour) has responded by calling the NF 'cunts', and also defacing the tombstone. This

---

[22] Steve Redhead, *Subculture to Clubcultures: an introduction to popular cultural studies* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997), 17.
[23] Redhead, *Subculture to Clubcultures*, 17.
[24] Kennedy, '"Past Never Found"', 165.
[25] Kennedy, '"Past Never Found"', 165.

graffiti has a misogynistic application but primarily signals that the 'Left v. Right' division (*CP*, 266) pervades all strata of society.

The offence or challenge of *v.* derives from Harrison's imaginative identification with a lumpenproletarian neo-Nazi thug. It asks why the lumpenproletariat and sections of the working-class turn to the extreme right, a long-standing dilemma for the left, and *v.* points to unemployment, ignorance and nihilistic despair. The racism of the NF is on show in the local graveyard, where the graffiti includes 'Paki's' and 'Niggers' (*CP*, 269), and is deplored by the poet. However, *v.*'s poet sympathetically interprets the NF's vandalizing of a giant sign in the city as a protest against the monopolization of public space by Capital and the cultural establishment, including 'Tony Harrison' with 'my name' 'in Broadway lights.' He asks: 'so why can't skins with spraycans do the same'? (*CP*, 269). Harrison is sympathetic to the act rather than the content of the skinheads' vandalism, which is metaphorically linked to his own poetic vandalism.

The republican Harrison enjoys the NF's inadvertent dual jibe at monarchy and Capital. The NF nicked the missing letters of the giant sign but it is Harrison who gets the meaning out of the remaining sign:

> Some, where kids use aerosols, use giant signs
> to let the people know who's forged their fetters
> like PRI CE O WALES above West Yorkshire mines
> (no prizes for who nicked the missing letters!) (*CP*, 268)

The result of the NF's vandalism seems to echo a question Harrison raises in *v.*: at what price are mining regions in Yorkshire sold out by Capital and the British establishment?

v. also implies the hypocrisy of lumpenproletarian skinheads being widely reviled when a 'genteel' British ruling class and international Capital accommodates pro-Nazi business

interests. The poem refers to the German Krupp dynasty, industrialist who opened an arms factory in Auschwitz using Jewish slave labour:

> Letters of transparent tubes and gas
> in Düsseldorf are blue and flash out KRUPP.
> Arms are hoisted for the British ruling class
> and clandestine, genteel aggro keeps them up. (*CP*, 269)

The Krupp's and the skinheads are punningly and typographically linked in *v.*. Like KRUPP, the skin's obscenities such as 'SHIT' are capitalized. Another common English slang word for 'shit' or faeces is 'CRAP', which sounds very similar to the German 'KRUPP.' The Krupps and the skin are both viewed as Nazi 'SHIT.' The poem is also more widely suggesting the moral poverty of Capital in a period when Thatcherism championed the free market at the expense of the Keynesian 'caring society.'[26] Harrison has commented that 'the pressure of ugly materialism, (I think at its ugliest in the Thatcher years) … made me finally accept that it's a good thing to be a poet.'[27] *v.* reflects grimly upon the rise of the New Right and the influence of the NF in 1980s England. In *v.* Harrison does not present his most recognizable political identity as 'laureate of the left.' But he remains 'squarely on the side of Old Left decencies.'[28]

v. disrupts the New Right's rhetorical manufacturing of the illusion of a united nation by locating it in the empirical context of class division. The liberal poet in *v.* makes a call for unity 'to Britain and to all the nations' (*CP*, 270), a call which reflects the political language of the day. Stuart Hall argues that Thatcher's rhetoric of national unity was an important aspect of her ideological campaign to forge a national consensus based on the

---

[26] Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, 'Introduction' in *The Politics of Thatcherism,* ed. by Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1983), 9-16, 11.
[27] 'Tony Harrison in conversation with Michael Alexander', in *Talking Verse: Interviews with Poets*, ed. by Robert Crawford and others (St Andrews and Williamsburg: Verse, 1995), 82-91, 91.
[28] Douglas Dunn, 'Abrasive Encounters', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 346-7, 347.

denial of class divisions.[29] *v.*'s liberal poet wants to construe 'an accident of meaning' and make the skin's expression of division, ironically signalled by 'United,' (a reference to the soccer team that represents Leeds and to a fascist politics), 'apply to higher things, and to the nation' (*CP*, 268). Harrison, however, shows that the illusion of national unity *v.*'s poet prefers requires the discursive exclusion of the skin's experience, and is not what 'honesty demands' (*CP*, 268). The poet's reluctant witnessing of the '*class war*' declared by the skin in the graveyard, and the conflicts between Capital and labour covered in the nightly news, assert the empirical reality of an England still fractured by class. Harrison's alertness to the discursive erasure of class in 1980s England is also reflected by his comments in an interview (with John Haffenden in 1983): 'When anyone says that I'm fighting a battle that's been fought long ago and that the class system doesn't exist, I know it does exist, I keep banging my head against it.'[30]

Harrison has consistently presented the English as a class divided people: 'Them & [uz].' Thatcher strove to define the English as a unified people with common interests. An example of Thatcher's populist denial of class that contrasts aptly with the poetry was made to the popular magazine *Woman's Own*: 'Don't talk to me about "them" and "us" in a company. You're all "we" in a company. You survive as the company survives, prosper as the company prospers - everyone together.'[31] Thatcher's rhetoric of unity replaced 'them' vs 'us' with 'we', and identified the interests of 'the people' with the imperatives of Capital, like profit before jobs.[32] Thatcher, like Heath before her but with more populist

---

[29] Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', in *The Politics of Thatcherism*, ed. by Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983), 19-39, 27.
[30] 'Interview', 231. This statement is also quoted in the Introduction to the thesis because Harrison's assertion of the continuing reality of class division in Britain is important both to an understanding of his wider political vision and specifically to *v.*'s engagement with a contemporary rhetoric of national unity.
[31] Margaret Thatcher, quoted in Hall, 'The Great Moving right Show', 31.
[32] Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', 31

appeal, 'deployed the discourses of "nation" and "people" against "class" and "unions".'[33] *v.* depicts the miners fighting to save their jobs, and a State shutting down unprofitable pits as an urgent example of 'the unending violence of US and THEM' (*CP*, 266). *v.* also implicitly refers to Thatcherism's attempt to forge national unity through the exploitation of racial division. The poem activates many different meanings of words like 'united', through punning, wordplay and association. The word 'United' links the fascistic politics of the skin and the NF to the Thatcher regime, who politically appropriated and legitimized the racism of extreme right organizations to forge a united nation. Similarly, the poet's witnessing of the crude racist graffiti in the graveyard exhibits the obscenity of Tory rhetoric. Kennedy argues that, twenty years after *v.* was published, the causes of mourning in the poem can be seen to include the decline of class as a social and political concept.[34] It is also true that *v.* in its historical moment resists Thatcherism's ideological campaign to forge a 'United' nation based on the denial of class: 'class v. class, as bitter as before' (*CP*, 266).

v. shares with the later quatrain poem 'Y' (1992) an identification of Thatcherism with the rhetorical occlusion of class. The quatrain poem's title literally refers to 'Y' or 'economy' class in airline seating. 'Y', in a different way to the title 'v.', also signals class division. 'Y' uses the divide between economy and business class as a metaphor and an instance of the division between the working class and Capital in England and America. Harrison, a passenger in Y class, observes 'the stewardesses serve', 'as on earth, so in the sky.'[35] The epigraph for 'Y' is a quotation of Thatcher: 'I'm good with curtains.' 'Y's epigraph punningly and metaphorically uncovers Thatcher's manipulation of a

[33] Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', 27.
[34] Kennedy, '"Past Never Found"', 163.
[35] 'Y', *CP*, 286.

stereotypically domesticated femininity as a cover for her discursive occlusion of class division.

'Y' also suggests that different national styles express transnational class structures in capitalist societies like England and America. In British airplanes curtains discreetly divide business from economy class. The blatant American style, however, 'draws no drapes' to divert attention from class inequities. Harrison's address to 'Ys of all nations' also suggests his consistent ideological view that the bonds of class are more fundamental than national divisions. 'Y' affirms the continued reality of class division:

> And from LHR to JFK
> from JFK to LHR
> things are going to stay
> just as they are.[36]

'Y' disrupts Thatcher's ideological curtain or illusion of a unified nation, and so does *v.*.

The *v.* sign also points to the divide between the post-war Keynesian welfare state in England and the period of its undermining, which began under a Labour government in 1975 and escalated under Thatcher.[37] *v.* makes a humanist defence of the welfare state by mourning the human cost of its dismantling. The poem witnesses the consequences of the end to the State's commitment to full employment. The skin's unemployment and bare literacy, and also the impoverishment of pensioners like Harrison's dad create a grim impression of the rotting welfare state in the 1970s and 1980s. Those canned beans his dad 'fancied' reflect the loneliness of the elderly widower, who has no need to buy 'whole lambs for family freezers' (*CP*, 276), but they also suggest poverty. *v.* is not a liberal

---

[36] *CP*, 286.
[37] For an account of the crisis in the welfare state during the Thatcher decade see Gough, 'Thatcherism and the Welfare State', 148-68.

evasion of the political as claimed by Worpole and Eagleton. *v.* is a deeply personal poem but also a public 'state of the nation' poem.

II

It is in *v.* that Harrison explicitly identifies with Rimbaud. He defines himself, and Rimbaud, as a divided union of high cultural poet and dispossessed vandal. *v.* reveals that half of Harrison's identity is, as discussed, a poet and the other half is the skinhead who 'aerosolled his name. And it was mine' (*CP*, 273). Harrison is the poet and the skin. The skin and poet are united in Harrison. He also declares that 'the skin and poet united fucking Rimbaud' (*CP*, 271).

v. not only paraphrases but enacts Rimbaud's famous poetic dictum that '*Je est un autre*' ['I is someone else'].[38] Adapting Rimbaud's phrase, Harrison the law-abiding poet metamorphizes into the skinhead thug: 'the *autre* that *je est* is fucking you' (*CP*, 271).[39] The union of poet and skin in Harrison is manifest in that gradual merging of their idioms as the poet begins to speak the language of the cultural elite and of the street:

> 'You piss-artist skinhead cunt, you wouldn't know
> and it doesn't fucking matter if you do,
> the skin and poet united fucking Rimbaud
> but the *autre* that *je est* is fucking you.' (*CP*, 271)

'I is someone else' has been variously interpreted but is often understood to mean the series of identities a poet imaginatively enters in poetry. Harrison's identification with the skinhead, however, is not only an imaginative exercise. In *v.* he wanted to 'take on my own

---

[38] Letter to Georges Izambard (13 May 1871), the famous *Lettre du Voyant* ['The Prophet's Letter'], *RCWSL*, 370-71.

[39] Bruce Woodcock also observes that in *v.* Harrison adapts Rimbaud's '*Je est un autre*' to say not just that the skin is who he 'might have been' but 'more subversively' who he is, a 'sublimated vandal'. See Bruce Woodcock, 'Classical vandalism: Tony Harrison's invective', *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 2 (Summer 1990), 50-65, 60. As noted in Chapter 1, I have adopted Woodcock's description of Harrison's poetry as 'classical vandalism', as it appears in the title of his article, and I have extended the phrase to Rimbaud's poetry.

instinct to vandalize my own art.'[40] The Rimbaudian poet is the hoodlum speaking the language of assault in rhyming quatrains.

v. discloses an essential sameness between Harrison, a lumpenproletarian skinhead, and a canonical nineteenth-century French poet. *v.*'s poet expects that a half-savage, unemployed skinhead in Leeds 'wouldn't know' Rimbaud. But he evokes Rimbaud as a poet the skin *could* 'know,' and identify with. Rimbaud was born into the lower classes in the Ardennes region of France and, when he lived in Paris and London, was usually unemployed and was regarded by most of the literati as a half-civilized 'little peasant' and 'a brutish little vagrant.'[41] In his life, Rimbaud became someone else many times. He famously lived many lives including those of a poet, factory worker, tutor, sailor,[42] a gun-runner and arguably a slave-trader,[43] a Communard and certainly a vagabond.[44] In *The Eighteenth Brumaire* Marx observed the poor of Paris roughly twenty years before Rimbaud was begging on the city's streets. The chronic unemployed and petty criminals like the skin, the depraved poor, beggars, literati, gypsies, and vagabonds like Rimbaud are listed amongst the spectacle of the lumpenproletariat.[45] *v.* suggests there are shades of Rimbaud discernible in a *dole-wallah* skin in 1980s England, whose obscene eloquence suggests a Rimbaudian lineage, and in the poet Harrison. *v.* boldly reclaims Rimbaud for what it suggests is his true constituency, and Harrison's: not the bourgeoisie, or the cultural elite who appropriated Rimbaud after his death, but 'outsider' regional rebels like the skin and Harrison.

---

[40] Tony Harrison quoted in Maya Jaggi, 'Beats of the Heart', *The Guardian* (Saturday 31 March 2007). At: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/mar/31/poetry.tonyharrison> [accessed 1 July 2008].
[41] Graham Robb, *Rimbaud* (London: Picador, 2000), 117 and 442.
[42] See for example Robb, *Rimbaud*, xiii; 244-245; and 278-80.
[43] Enid Starkie, *Arthur Rimbaud in Abyssinia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), 112-13.
[44] Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 56-7.
[45] Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, 75.

Like the young Harrison's Leeds accent, Rimbaud's provincial Northern accent 'was thick and distinctive, with emphatic working-class vowels.'[46] Rimbaud's roots were a mixture of 'urban and rural, bourgeois and peasant.'[47] His use of regional accents and rhymes, and low diction and subjects in his poetry are attempts to solve a problem that is also central to Harrison's poetic project: 'if literature is a bourgeois institution, how can it be used to convey an anti-bourgeois ideology?'[48] Harrison responds to this question, and to the skin's charge that the bourgeois poet can no longer represent '*the class yer were born into*' (*CP*, 273), by having the lumpenproletarian express his alienation from poetry in his own voice in a poem: *'A book, yer stupid cunt, 's not worth a fuck!'* (*CP*, 271).

The poet-as-skinhead is, like Rimbaud, a classical vandal defacing high cultural forms with regional idioms, aggressive slang, shocking subjects and unacceptable sentiments. Harrison, like Rimbaud, mastered classical forms and the rhythms and prosody of their respective native tongues. Rimbaud's earliest verse was composed in perfect Latin.[49] His earliest poetry in French was written in alexandrine verse and rhyming couplets, but 'while observing the classical mould Rimbaud perversely fills it with the most unseemly content.'[50] Robb observes that some of Rimbaud's subsequent poetry is criticized for 'incorrect rhymes' which 'are perfectly harmonious when pronounced with what Verlaine called Rimbaud's '*parisiano-ardennais*' accent.[51] Similarly, Harrison has been criticized for incorrect rhymes that instead require a Leeds pronunciation.[52] Harrison's and Rimbaud's poetry also shares the inclusion of non-aesthetic elements and disturbing

---

[46] Robb, *Rimbaud*, 57 and 119. Robb does not refer to Harrison.
[47] Robb, *Rimbaud*, 95.
[48] Robb, *Rimbaud*, 162.
[49] Robb, *Rimbaud*, 27-8.
[50] LeRoy C. Breunig, 'Why France'? in *The Prose Poem in France*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws and Hermine Riffatere (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 3-20, 7-8.
[51] Robb, *Rimbaud*, 162.
[52] For a discussion of the mixed critical responses to Harrison's metrical 'irregularities' see Chapter 1, 36-8.

experience. Rimbaud brought revolution and pack rape into verse such as 'What does it matter' and 'The Stolen heart.' Rimbaud and Verlaine co-authored 'Sonnet to the Arsehole' and contributed to the ribald communal scrapbook called *The Album Zutique*. Violent emotions and masturbation feature prominently in Rimbaud's early metered verse. In *Loiners* in particular Harrison also uses traditional verse forms to convey explicitly sexual and violent experiences, including masturbation, sodomy and rape. In like manner *v.* strikingly transgresses bourgeois aesthetic and political boundaries in its use of obscenities, which appear in capital letters to resemble graffiti and to create the visual appearance that the high cultural form has been vandalized by the poet-as-skin: 'SHIT'; 'PISS'; 'CUNT'; 'FUCK'; 'YID'; 'NIGGER.'

v. is Harrison's most explicit and sustained appropriation of neoclassical verse for language and subjects shocking to the sensibility of the assumed bourgeois reader, and this is part of why it is in *v.* that Rimbaud appears in the guise of the classical vandal. In *v.* the poet recalls being called a 'damned vandal' as a boy because he sprayed a soprano with a fire-hose, a symbolic sexual assault against her art and its 'prick-tease of the soul' (*CP*, 272). Harrison's poetry shows that his instinct is still to vandalize the traditional transcendent art that the soprano represents. Rimbaud 'trampled the flower-beds of French poetry with an expert boot,'[53] and Harrison-as-skinhead vandal has taken his aerosol to English poetry. Even as late in Rimbaud's trajectory towards a revolutionary aesthetic as *A Season in Hell* his contradictory mixture of the old fashioned and the revolutionary resonates with Harrison's poetry, and specifically with *v.* where he adopts the traditionally reconciling form of the elegy but has the skin within rebel against it. However, by contrast with Rimbaud's seeking a new form, Harrison's sustaining of classical forms appears

[53] Robb, *Rimbaud*, 442.

deeply conservative. Unlike Rimbaud, Harrison does not reject classical forms but instead occupies them on behalf of the excluded, especially 'uz.'

Rimbaud's early subversion of traditional verse forms is comparable to Harrison's poetics but in the last stage of his poetic life Rimbaud wrote prose poems. LeRoy Breunig notes that Rimbaud took breaking the rules of French prosody and rhyme as far as he could before 'doing away with it all altogether.'[54] One received view is that the prose poem genre originated in nineteenth-century France with Aloysius Bertrand.[55] Other poets of the period were also breaking the rules of French prosody, and some such as Stéphane Mallarmé wrote prose poems. Baudelaire, an important influence upon Rimbaud, developed the prose poem but it remained for him 'a kind of sideline, an experiment', whereas for Rimbaud the prose poem was 'the only form of expression that remained after the rejection of the conformities imposed by the meter and rhyme of the French poetic language.'[56]

A fundamental difference between Rimbaud and Harrison is that the iambic pentameter remains essential to all Harrison's work whereas Rimbaud with his prose poems and other works aimed to destroy the alexandrine, the formal line of much French poetry, from as early as 1869 with 'The Sleeper in the Valley.' Similarly in England at the start of the twentieth century Ezra Pound and others aimed to break the pentameter line of English verse. Rimbaud like Pound sought a new form where Harrison clearly works within received traditional forms. Rimbaud's movement towards free verse and the largely new form of prose poetry anticipated the future movement of poetry at large whereas Harrison is

---

[54] Breunig, 'Why France?', 9.
[55] Marvin N. Richards, 'Famous Readers of an Infamous Book: The Fortunes of *Gaspard de la Nuit*', *The French Review*, vol. 69, no. 4 (1996), 543-555, 543-46. See also David Lehmann, 'The Prose Poem: An Alternative to Verse', *The American Poetry Review*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2003), 45-9, 46.
[56] Breunig, 'Why France?', 3- 4.

in formal terms a very conservative, even anachronistic poet. The breakdown of regular versification has been a major development in twentieth-century European poetry, and this is an aspect of Rimbaud's great significance for later poets.[57] By contrast, it remains to be seen whether Harrison's work will significantly influence subsequent poets and, as observed in Chapter 1, he is a singular presence to date.

The connection forged in *v.* between Rimbaud and the skin implicitly observes an historical contrast and irony in the ostracization of Thatcher's 'scrounger', the skin who desperately wants work, and of nineteenth-century vagabonds like Rimbaud, who were often provincial youth who refused work and fled to the city.[58] Vagabonds were defined under the French penal code of 1810 as those without a home and without a trade or profession.[59] In contrast to the skin, who laments that he will *'croak / doing t'same nowt ah do now as a kid'* (*CP*, 270), it was not unemployment but alienated labour that Rimbaud regarded as worse than death. In a letter Rimbaud declares his rejection of work: '*Travailler maintenant, jamais, jamais; je suis en grève.*' ['Work now? - never, never, I am on strike.'][60]

Rimbaud describes his idleness and freedom in *A Season in Hell*: '*Sans me servir pour vivre même de mon corps, et plus oisif que le crapaud, j'ai vécu partout.*'['Without making use of my body in any way, and lazier than a toad, I have lived everywhere.'][61] Kristen Ross explains that before Rimbaud gave up poetry he rejected employment in favour not of bourgeois leisure but 'laziness', which in this context means the refusal to turn the body

---

[57] Breunig, 'Why France?', 11.
[58] Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space*), 56.
[59] Ross, *The Emergence of Social* Space, 58.
[60] Letter to Georges Izambard (13 May 1871), *RCWSL*, 370-71.
[61] '*Mauvais Sang*' ['Bad Blood'], *Une saison en enfer* [*A Season in Hell*], *RCWSL*, 266-67. A different translation of these lines is quoted in Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space*, 59.

into a tool or to surrender mobility.[62] Ross discusses the politics of Rimbaud's refusal of employment partly through a reading of *A Season in Hell* and argues that it has a double in the field of political theory, *The Right to be Lazy* (1880) by the nineteenth-century French Marxist political writer Paul Lafargue.[63] *The Right to be Lazy* parodies *The Right to Work* (1848), the document that elevated work 'to the status of a revolutionary principle.'[64] Lafargue observed the wretchedness of the industrial proletariat and regarded factory work as 'the end of all that makes life worth living.'[65] *The Right to be Lazy* advocated that workers abandon 'the miseries of compulsory work.'[66] Lafargue's comic concluding appeal to 'Laziness, mother of the arts and noble virtues'[67] is ostensibly antithetical to Harrison's personal need for poetry 'to be hard work.'[68] Harrison though may well sympathize with Lafargue's more serious arguments that if the hours of labour were reduced, and if the economy and wealth distribution were more sanely organised, workers could enjoy the pleasures of life reserved for the affluent.[69]

v. protests against unemployment but Harrison's distance from the miner's strike in *v.* may manifest an ironic sadness that it is an exploitative and dangerous industry the working class are placed in the position of fighting for. He likens the mines to Hell in the 1984-85 production of *The Mysteries,* where the only light in Hell comes from the miners' pit-helmets. As Bernard O'Donoghue notes, in this production of *The Mysteries* there is an implicit commentary on the 1984 Miners' Strike, where the miners and other labourers were devils 'prejudged to damnation. Harrison is of the devil's party; but, unlike Blake's

---

[62] Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space*, 59-60.
[63] Paul Lafargue, *The Right to Be Lazy*, in *Selected Marxist Writings of Paul Lafargue*, ed. by Richard Broadhead and trans. by Charles Kerr (Berkeley: Center for Socialist History, 1984), 425-84.
[64] Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space*, 60.
[65] Lafargue, *The Right to Be Lazy*, 444.
[66] Lafargue, *The Right to Be Lazy*, 438.
[67] Lafargue, *The Right to Be Lazy*, 479.
[68] 'Inkwell', 33.
[69] Lafargue, *The Right to Be Lazy*, 470-72.

Milton, he knows it.'[70] In *v.* the likening of the unemployed to coal dumped on the fire suggests that the dole queue replaces the mines as different forms of victimization of the Northern working class. By contrast, the nineteenth-century artisans are depicted in *v.* as having an autonomous, dignified and organic relationship to their work and to their community in a pre-industrial era. The word 'artisan' means a worker in a skilled trade or a craftsperson, but can also refer specifically to an artist.[71] In *v.* and more widely in his poetry it is the artisans, rather than the working class, with whom the autonomous and egalitarian wordsmith Harrison identifies his linguistic craft.

III

v. is a late twentieth-century urban elegy, and a radical revising, updating and 'vandalizing' of the aesthetics and politics of its literary model of difference, Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751). *v.* and the *Elegy* might be regarded as elegies if we define the genre as 'a poem of mourning occasioned by a specific death.'[72] *v.* and the *Elegy* mourn, respectively, the anticipated and imaginary deaths of their poet-narrators. Also, the initial occasion of *v.* is Harrison tending the graves of his parents, and Gray's residual grief for Richard West is important to the *Elegy*.[73] This discussion focuses upon the public dimension of these elegies and upon the amplification in *v.* 'of pre-existent tendencies in elegy toward what might be termed national critique.'[74] In an eighteenth-century literary manner Harrison speaks through Gray to articulate their shared republicanism, for example, and both elegies honour the 'artless' and lament illiteracy and poverty. However, *v.* adopts Gray's canonical *Elegy* as its poetic vehicle to enter and

---

[70] Bernard O'Donoghue, '*The Mysteries*: T.W.'s Revenge', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 316-23, 323.
[71] 'artisan,' *OED Online*.
[72] Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 133.
[73] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, 133
[74] Kennedy, '"Past Never Found"', 164.

transgress a Whig and liberal literary tradition of political resignation to injustice and to the silence of the poor. As Kennedy comments, Harrison's 'deliberate use of the form of Gray's *Elegy* challenges not only the received view of the elegy but also deeply embedded assumptions that the English language and English culture are not places of struggle.'[75]

Rick Rylance observes that Gray's *Elegy* is part of 'the persisting tradition of mournful alienation in English writing about the dispossessed ... That tradition sees victims sympathetically, but does not speak in their voice.'[76] Gray's gentleman poet-narrator speaks the language of the eighteenth-century educated class to describe the lives of 'The rude Forefathers' buried in the churchyard of a rural labouring community.[77] Gray's poet 'mindful of the unhonour'd Dead / Dost in these lines their artless tale relate.'[78] Less reverently, and in contemporary street vernacular, *v.*'s educated bourgeois poet tells the skin that he is writing the poem 'to give ungrateful cunts like you like a hearing!' (*CP*, 271). In Gray's *Elegy* the language and worldview of the poet are also placed in the mouth of the unlettered Swain. In *v.* too the unlettered skin speaks, but not simply the language or perspective of the poet. Although the skin is the poet's alter-ego he is imaginatively endowed with a distinct voice and vision, through the device of the dramatic dialogue. In this sense, *v.* lets the illiterate skin speak for himself, where in Gray's *Elegy* the educated poet represents the inarticulate, and this is the major aesthetic and political difference between the poems.

The *Elegy* reflects Gray's Whig political persuasions but there are ambiguities in his ultimately conservative portrayal of the peasantry. His famous *Elegy* was a very popular

---

[75] Kennedy, '"Past Never Found"', 173.
[76] Rick Rylance, 'On Not Being Milton', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 114-28, 117-118.
[77] Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard, The Complete Poems of Thomas Gray: English, Latin and Greek*, ed. by H.W. Starr and J.R. Hendrickson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), l. 16, 38.
[78] Gray, *Elegy*, ll. 93-4, 41.

poem which expresses compassion for the 'chill Penury' and illiteracy of the rural poor. To lament injustice inevitably implies the desirability of change but this does not lead Gray to advocate wealth redistribution, nor to admit any alternatives to injustice. Instead, Gray's *Elegy* naturalizes the social order by locating it within the cycles of nature. *v.*'s poet comparably laments injustice only to minimize the social by locating it alongside vast millennial and geological cycles. Gray's and Harrison's poets have, respectively, religious and metaphysical frameworks which here encourage fatalism and occlude questions of political agency. *v.*'s poet locates the historical and political ultimately within a metaphysics of division. The tragedy of an essentially unalterable human condition is to be the ground eternal 'fixtures are fought out on' (*CP*, 266). William Empson observed that Gray's *Elegy* was 'an odd case of poetry with latent political ideas' but that its ultimate acceptance of injustice was disappointing to many readers.[79] The intertextual relationship between the *Elegy* and *v.* suggests that Harrison's intention is to rhetorically expose, two centuries later, essentially the same liberal evasion of the political, as exhibited by the poets in both poems, not to endorse it as Eagleton contends. The *Elegy*'s politics are echoed by *v.*'s poet, but its limitations are exposed by the inclusion of the skin's voice, and by the larger vision of *v.*.

v.'s bourgeois liberal poet is partly modelled on Gray's gentleman Whig poet, while the poor, uneducated Swain is a partial model of antithesis for the skin. The poets in both elegies are solitary observers isolated from their humble communities of origin by their education, a major theme in Harrison. Gray's lone poet is visibly wracked by an internal conversation: 'Mutt'ring his wayward fancies he wou'd rove.'[80] When *v.*'s skin is revealed

[79] William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1935, [1950]), 11-12. Quoted in Sandie Byrne, 'On Not Being Milton, Marvell, or Gray', in *TH: Loiner*, 57-83, 75-6.
[80] Gray, *Elegy*, l. 106, 42.

as the poet's alter-ego it is evident that Harrison is another lone 'Mutt'ring' poet. The idea of the *doppelganger* in *v.* draws upon Gray's *Elegy*. Towards the end of the *Elegy* the lone poet-narrator addresses 'thee' as the author of 'these lines', as if another person had written the poem in an identical voice. Because Gray's poet is alone, it is as if his alter-ego had written the poem. Because Gray's poet is of 'humble birth', it seems that the unlettered Swain is his alter ego, and therefore also the author of the poem. But, again, the key point is that Gray's poem only has one voice and one vision and it is not that of the poor, but the voice of an educated Whig poet who laments but accepts the unjust fate of the poor. *v.* gives the skin, Harrison's alter-ego, a distinct voice and vision, that of a poor man violently protesting against his lowly circumstances.

The politics and aesthetics of giving the skin a distinct voice in *v.* is also clarified by the punning parallels and contrasts between the belligerent skin and the amiable Swain. The Hoary-headed Swain, a grey-haired old servant, silently and affectionately observed Gray's poet from a distance. Harrison is berated by a bald young skinhead. The Swain laments the poet's death. The skin wants to '*boot yer fucking balls to Kingdom Come*' (*CP*, 271). A peasant in the *Elegy* is 'This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd.'[81] The skin refuses to be quietly resigned to his fate, even in death. Like Gray's *Elegy*, *v.* ends with the epitaph of the poet, who is also the skin. The imagined conversation in the *Elegy* between the Swain and the kindred Spirit is paralleled by the poet-as-skin addressing the 'poetry supporter' from the grave in *v.*'s epitaph, which uses the idiom of the skin: 'SHIT.' The epitaph in the *Elegy* asks the kindred Spirit to enquire no further into the nature of the dead poet. In *v.* the epitaph tells the 'poetry supporter' how 'to understand' where Harrison's poetry comes from. The *Elegy* and its epitaph reflect Gray's Christianity while *v.* and its epitaph exhibit

[81] Gray, *Elegy*, l. 86, 41.

Harrison's atheism. The poet-as-skin in *v.* is not silently resting his head in '*The bosom of his Father and his God*',[82] like Gray's poet. In *v.* the epitaph, which will be returned to at the end of this discussion, is that of the poet-as-skin, 'Tony Harrison.' The skin is, in one way, another of Harrison's graceless Palladian figures who will not go down quietly. *v.* gives the skin a stage upon which to speak his wrath and articulate dissent.

The politics of *v.*'s form involves bringing lumpenproletarian and working-class Leeds content and idiom into the iambic pentameter in alternately rhymed quatrains adopted from Gray's *Elegy*. Harrison's characteristically accessible language and dialectic between learned and popular subjects in *v.* follows Gray's *Elegy*. *v.* metrically distinguishes itself from its model by introducing irregularities into the iambic pentameter, which are relatively minor during the monologue of the liberal poet in the first forty-one stanzas.[83] When the skin's voice enters the poem, and when the civilized poet starts using the skin's savage idiom, 'The verse-forms really have to flail around to hold together, and their ironic awareness of this, magnificent in *v*, is part of their meaning.'[84] Rowland observes 'that the aesthetics of the elegy suit the steady rhythms of the poet's philosophizing', and not the anti-literary invective of the skin.[85] The struggle in *v.* between poet and skin is also a metaphor for Harrison's formal struggle to bring a lumpenproletarian Leeds voice into the elegy and the British literary tradition.

Harrison's and Gray's elegies are concerned with silences but only *v.*'s skin disrupts the literary censorship of the uneducated class. *v.*, like 'On Not Being Milton', is preoccupied

---

[82] Gray, *Elegy*, l. 128, 43.
[83] *Poetry TH*, 92-3.
[84] Eagleton, 'Antagonisms', 349.
[85] *TH Holocaust*, 284.

with the *Elegy*'s famous phrase 'Some mute, inglorious Milton',[86] those whose potential was crushed by illiteracy and hard labour. The *Elegy*'s stanza beginning 'Full many a gem of purest ray serene'[87] also seems to say that there are bright inspired geniuses among the poor but they are unseen. In 'On Not Being Milton' a poor man, the honourable artisan and Cato Street conspirator Richard Tidd, has one line. In *v.* the unemployed skinhead has half the dialogue in the middle section of the poem. The poet of Gray's *Elegy* reasons that although the illiterate will never have great achievements they will also never cause great harm, or 'wade through slaughter to a throne.'[88] *v.*'s concern with a skinhead and his political organization, the extreme right National Front (*CP*, 266), presents some grim political potentialities of the downtrodden. 'On Not Being Milton' implicitly asks what the mute Miltons might say if Literature let them speak, and *v.* provides one disturbing answer.

Gray's and Harrison's elegies honour, in different ways, the humble rather than the powerful and this reflects their shared republicanism. Gray is part of the English republican literary lineage in which Harrison located himself, and the republican contempt for poets who court power given expression in Gray's *Elegy* is part of its attraction for Harrison. The *Elegy* evokes the corrupt obsequiousness of poets who 'heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride / With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.'[89] In 'Laureate's Block' (1999) Harrison explicitly identifies with Gray's rejection of the poet-laureateship because he was not prepared to be '*rat-catcher to his Majesty*.'[90] Gray's *Elegy* briefly refers to heroes of the seventeenth-century English republican revolution, Milton, Hampden, and ambivalently to Cromwell. *v.* identifies the monarchy with Capital and an oppressive status

---

[86] Gray, *Elegy*, l. 59, 39.
[87] Gray, *Elegy*, ll. 53-6, 39.
[88] Gray, *Elegy*, l. 67, 40.
[89] Gray, *Elegy*, ll. 71-2, 40.
[90] 'Laureate's Block', *CP*, 330.

quo (*CP*, 268). Modelling *v.* on an eighteenth-century elegy that does not valorize kings but working men also adds historical depth to *v.*'s sense of the unnatural humiliations facing unemployed men in 1980s England, in the masculinist discourse the elegies share.

The poet of Gray's *Elegy*, however, is not a working man but a gentleman, and the *Elegy* reflects Gray's rejection of professional writers like Harrison, who had to earn a living and wanted to do so by being a poet.[91] The *Elegy* reflects Gray's identification with a historically specific form of literary production, that of the literary landed gentry (although Gray had no estate and became a gentleman of letters with chambers at Cambridge University).[92] Gray despised commercial literary production in which the bastions of high culture were invaded by the laws of the market.[93] *v.*'s presentation of the poet as a working man, and one who chooses integrity above 'Broadway' and commercial success, involves a settling of accounts with Gray. In the second stanza of *v.* the poet refers to the graves of Wordsworth and Byron in the local cemetery and notes 'That's two peers already, of a sort' (*CP*, 264). We are then told that Wordsworth was the local man who built church organs and Byron was the Leeds tanner, not the famous poets. *v.* humorously conveys that there were no literary models for a poet of working-class Leeds. The point is also though that artisans like Wordsworth the organ builder are Harrison's models for the poet not as a gentleman or a recipient of patronage, but as an artisan.

The poet William Wordsworth is also important in *v.*. The third stanza of *v.* alludes to Wordsworth's lyric 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud', in which the narrator walking in

---

[91] 'Inkwell', 33.
[92] Suvir Kaul, *Thomas Gray and Literary Authority: Ideology and Poetics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 9-12.
[93] Kaul, *Thomas Gray and Literary Authority*, 26.

nature saw 'A host, of golden daffodils.'[94] *v.* refers to the flowers and also adapts the rhyme on 'Hill's' / 'daffodils' (*CP*, 264), from the first stanza of 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.'[95] In Leeds daffodils are not recognized as symbols in high cultural poetry but are the flowers 'by which dad dignified the family plot' (*CP*, 264). The allusions to 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' signal *v.*'s break with the tradition, still dominant in the 1980s, of writing poetry about nature. There is grim humour in the implicit contrast between the idyllic pastoral landscape Wordsworth's poem recalls, and *v.*'s scene of urban desolation. Wordsworth recollects in tranquility 'What wealth the show to me had brought' and his heart 'dances with the daffodils.'[96] In a political and urban poem like *v.*, the ironic allusions to 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' suggests Harrison's distance from the evasion of the political through a retreat into Nature and personal feelings, as found in the later Wordsworth and the conservative strand of Romanticism.

The Wordsworth of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) adapted 'the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society' to create 'poetic pleasure' for the bourgeois reader.[97] *v.* uses the speech of the lumpenproletariat to confront readers with unpleasant social realities. *v.* also alludes to Wordsworth as an elegist. The line 'Will Earth run out of her "diurnal courses"' (*CP*, 279) quotes from Wordsworth's 'A slumber did my spirit seal.'[98] Like Wordsworth and Gray, Harrison is an elegist preserving a cultural memory of the dead and of a declining way of life, that of his parents and of the industrial Northern working-class in an emerging post-industrial era.

---

[94] William Wordsworth, 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud', *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. with textual and critical notes by E. De Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944), l. 4, 216.
[95] Wordsworth, 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud', ll. 2 and 4, 216.
[96] Wordsworth, 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud', ll. 18 and 24, 216.
[97] William Wordsworth, Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), in *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, ed. by Nowell C. Smith, reissued with a preface by Howard Mills (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1980 [1905]), 1-3, 1.
[98] William Wordsworth, 'A slumber did my spirit seal', *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. by James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), l. 7, 164.

v. also speaks through Wordsworth's 'Upon Epitaphs', and Gray's *Elegy*, to suggest that the memorialization of the dead reflects the character of a civilization. In Wordsworth's first essay from 'Upon Epitaphs' the purpose of an epitaph is 'to guard the remains of the deceased from irreverent approach or from savage violation: and, secondly, to preserve their memory.'[99] Similarly, in Gray's *Elegy* gravestones are frail memorials which serve 'these bones from insult to protect'[100] and to prevent 'dumb Forgetfulness.'[101] Harrison's dad preserves the memory of his parents by tending their graves each week, although he has not read Wordsworth. Harrison has spent the 'odd ten minutes' tending his parents' graves. He is of a generation that has 'gone away / for work or fuller lives, like me from Leeds' (*CP*, 267). The skin has savagely violated the graves. Wordsworth also quotes Camden's view that only savage nations and barbarous peoples neglect their dead,[102] and this idea is intertextually adapted in *v.*. The violation and neglect of the graves in *v.* is a sign of a savage nation where the weakest amongst the living are also abused and neglected, and may become savagely vengeful like the skin.

How Harrison defines his poetic and political identity in *v.* is disclosed by whether he will neglect the ailing place and people he came from and 'go, / with not one glance behind, away from Leeds' (*CP*, 275). This line directly refers to Gray's *Elegy*, whose poet wonders if a dying peasant 'cast one longing ling'ring look behind?'[103] *v.* is a dramatic examination of whether Harrison's connection to his background, symbolized by the skin within him, and his attendant class political loyalties survive. *v.* also contains an ironic allusion to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Adam and Eve are forced to leave paradise without

---

[99] William Wordsworth, 'Essays Upon Epitaphs' (1), in *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, ed. by Smith, 79-98, 79.
[100] Gray, *Elegy*, l. 77, 40.
[101] Gray, *Elegy*, l. 85, 40.
[102] Wordsworth, 'Upon Epitaphs', 79.
[103] Gray, *Elegy*, l. 88, 41.

looking behind.[104] Leeds is not paradise. Asserting that the skin in him dies in the graveyard (*CP*, 274) the poet resolves to return to his wife and to a better life far away from '*fucking Leeds!*' (*CP*, 270).

Byrne argues that in *v.* Harrison concedes 'that familial (and thus, perhaps, class) affiliations are replaced by romantic and sexual ones.'[105] Byrne contends that *v.* 'comes down comfortably' on the ideological 'right' when the skin cries 'Wanker!' to the poet's affirmation of love, because it will entice readers to side with the 'tolerant liberal aspect' of the poem.[106] His relationship to the skin and soprano do symbolize his relationship to their respective social classes. The marriage to the opera star Teresa Stratas, whose surname appears in *v.*, is associated with her performance in *Lulu* and symbolizes the poet's union with high culture and the bourgeoisie (though Stratas, like Harrison, rose from lowly origins to become an acclaimed high cultural artist). The idealization of marriage in the poem is also heavily ironized by having the boys hum the Bridal Waltz, which the poet knows is from a tragic opera about doomed love, *Lohengrin*. The 'united' of his marriage remains a question the poet addresses to his bride and perhaps also to the reader: 'And now it's your decision: does it stay?'(*CP*, 278). The poet's underlying relationship to the skin is involuntary: 'the skin's UNITED underwrites the poet, / the measures carved below the ones above' (*CP*, 278). This line shifts the focus from a chosen love to the place and people that shaped a fundamental and permanent part of Harrison's complex identity. The poet's inescapable union is not with the beautiful soprano (from whom he is now divorced) but the skin and the wider community of 'underdogs' he represents: 'uz.'

---

[104] John Milton, *Paradise Lost, The Poems of John Milton*, ed. by John Carey and Alastair Fowler (Harlow: Longman, 1968), Book XII, ll. 641-50, 1059-60.
[105] Byrne, 'On Not Being Milton, Marvell, or Gray,' 82.
[106] Byrne, 'On Not Being Milton, Marvell, or Gray', 82.

It is the 'ghosts from all Leeds matches humming' that, ironically, the poet remembers when he hears *Here Comes the Bride* and embraces his wife (*CP*, 278). From the moment the poet asserts the death of the skin within him and begins his journey away from Leeds, images and sounds of boy footballers and metonymically their team, Leeds United, occupy his imagination. It is not only soccer hooligans but the local boys and Harrison's dad who are Leeds United supporters. In the later sonnet 'Gaps' a fur hat he brought back from Leningrad for his dad 'got lots of wear / On his Leeds United terrace.'[107] In *v.* references to Leeds United's losing streak in the 1980s symbolize the declining fortunes of the community the team represented. A signification of 'Leeds United' is akin to 'uz' and, however ambivalently, Harrison is still on their side.

[107] 'Gaps', *CP*, 215.

Coda

v. ends with the planned epitaph of 'Tony Harrison', a famous poet whom supporters will honour, to be inscribed upon his tombstone in the Beeston Hill graveyard. In the verse epigraph that introduces *Loiners* a white rose, a symbol of Harrison's native culture, '*grew out of his nose*' from Leeds soil. The epitaph that concludes *v.* tells us that his hybrid cosmopolitan poetry will always have deep roots in Leeds ground. The poem has provoked considerable controversy about Harrison's personal and political identity but, buried on Beeston Hill, he has not left Leeds with 'not one glance behind.' Instead, he tells the poetry supporter to '*look behind*' to Leeds if they want to understand Harrison and his poetry. The epitaph is his account to posterity of who he is:

> *Beneath your feet's a poet, then a pit.*
> *Poetry supporter, if you're here to find*
> *how poems can grow from* (beat you to it!) SHIT
> *find the beef, the beer, the bread, then look behind.* (*CP*, 279)

The epitaph anticipates the bourgeois poetry supporters' incredulity that high cultural poetry could grow from 'SHIT', from working-class Leeds. The epitaph to *v.* reformulates the question posed in 'Heredity', the verse epigraph that introduces *The School of Eloquence*. In 'Heredity' the condescending bourgeois admirer is fathoming the '*mystery!*' of a poet from working-class Leeds: '*Wherever did you get your talent from?*'[1] In 'Heredity' Harrison presents his eloquence as the legacy of his tongue-tied uncles' struggle for articulation. In *v.* the source of Harrison's poetry is still filial and, implicitly, the ghosts of his uncles Joe and Harry are with him in the family plot.

In *v.* the poetry supporter wanting to understand Harrison's work should also look to the wider community of working men he will be buried alongside. The epitaph of the

[1] 'Heredity', *CP*, 121.

'Yorkshire poet who came to read the metre'[2] will be 'chiselled' on the tombstone of the poet as artisan. The poetry supporter should then '*look behind*' to Elland Road, home of Leeds United, and to Leeds Grammar and the conflicting formative influences upon Harrison's poetry. The phrase 'poetry supporter' connects them to the Leeds United supporters in *v.*, as does their swearing. The epitaph wryly points out that poetry supporters curse too when their hopes are dashed, or when confronted with their perceived social inferiors: 'SHIT.' The epitaph mocks the hypocrisy and class prejudice of the genteel poetry reader, including a scatological reminder of our literal and metaphorical 'shit.' The epitaph of an ambivalent poet, it also makes a gesture of fraternity to his readers by pointing to what unites us across the lines of cultural and political divisions, including the capacity to hate and to mourn, our embodiment and our mortality. In *v.* Harrison's faithfulness to his Northern working-class roots hinges on the endurance of the skin within him. Critically, the aggressive slang in the epitaph, the idiom of the skin, signals that the skin is with Harrison to the grave. The skin is constitutive of his identity and his iconoclastic poetics of classical vandalism. There will be one man buried in that grave, but Harrison's epitaph witnesses his dual identity as a high cultural poet and the great outsider, the Rimbaud of Leeds.

v. is Harrison's most confrontational transgression of the aesthetic and political boundaries of Poetry, which he consistently presents as a bourgeois institution, because *v.* gives a polyvalent voice to the suffering and inchoate rage of an illiterate, impoverished, lumpenproletarian neo-Nazi thug. The epitaph to *v.* bears no traces of the resignation or reconciliation traditionally found in epitaphs and elegies. Harrison's epitaph articulates the unwavering aesthetic and political battle he intends to wage even from the grave. *v.* charts

[2] 'Preface', *The Mysteries* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 6.

new and familiar territory in Harrison's humanist poetics of inclusion, his continuous effort to open the doors of Poetry: '*Fling our doors wide! all, all, not one, but all!*'[3]

***

The political meanings of Harrison's imaginative works and the political character of the poet, the importance of history for understanding the poetry and the haunting presence of Rimbaud in the poems have been the primary concerns of this dissertation. The poet's political convictions and loyalties are essentially unchanging across the fifteen year span of the poetry selected for examination, and indeed to the present day. He is a cultural hero of the left but he has no party-political allegiances and is critical of established political parties in Britain. He seems influenced by certain political theorists, notably by Marx and also by Raymond Williams's particular emphasis upon the relationship between class and place, but Harrison is a creative thinker and an iconoclast skeptical of orthodoxies. A cosmopolitan Leeds poet, his ideological commitments are consistent in the different historical and social contexts that the poems take as their subjects, or that are opened up by the densely allusive fields of the poetry. The dialectical relationship between the class, anti-colonial, republican and humanist aspects of the poetry, and his literary elective affinities, are essential for understanding the aesthetics and the politics of the Rimbaud of Leeds.

[3]'Wordlists, III,' *CP*, 129.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Harrison's Works

Published Books and Pamphlets

Collected Poems (London: Viking, 2007)

Earthworks (Leeds: Northern House, 1964)

Newcastle is Peru (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Eagle Press, 1969)

The Loiners (London: London Magazine Editions, 1970)

The Misanthrope (London: Rex Collings, 1973)

Newcastle is Peru, second edn with introductory essay by Tony Harrison (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Northern House, 1974)

Palladas: Poems (London: Anvil Press, 1975)

Phaedra Brittanica (London: Rex Collings, 1975)

Phaedra Brittanica, third edn, with introductory essay by Tony Harrison (London: Rex Collings, 1976)

Ten Poems from 'The School of Eloquence' (London: Rex Collings Christmas Book, 1976)

Bow Down (London: Rex Collings, 1977)

From 'The School of Eloquence' and Other Poems (London: Rex Collings, 1978)

Continuous: Fifty Sonnets from 'The School of Eloquence' (London: Rex Collings, 1981)

A Kumquat for John Keats (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1981)

The Oresteia (London: Rex Collings, 1981)

U.S. Martial (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1981)

Selected Poems (London: Penguin Books, 1984)

Dramatic Verse 1973-1985 (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1985)

*The Fire-Gap (*Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1985)

The Mysteries (London: Faber and Faber, 1985)

v. (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1985)

Theatre Works 1973-1985 (London: Penguin Books, 1986)

Anno 42 (Scargill Press [private press]), 1987)

Selected Poems, second edn (London: Penguin Books, 1987)

Ten Sonnets from 'The School of Eloquence' (London: Anvil Press, 1987)

*v.: New Edition with Press articles (*Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1989)

v. and Other Poems (New York: Farrar Straus Girroux, 1990)

The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus (London: Faber and Faber, 1990)

A Cold Coming (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1991)

The Common Chorus: A Version of Aristophanes' Lysistrata (London: Faber and Faber, 1992)

The Gaze of the Gorgon (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1992)

Square Rounds (London: Faber and Faber, 1992)

Black Daisies for the Bride (London: Faber and Faber, 1993)

Poetry or Bust (Saltaire, Bradford: Salts Mills, 1993)

Permanently Bard: Selected Poetry, ed. and with annotations by Carol Rutter (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1995)

The Shadow of Hiroshima and other film poems (London: Faber and Faber, 1995)

Plays 3: Poetry or Bust, The Kaisers of Carnuntum, and The Labourers of Herakles (London: Faber and Faber, 1996)

*The Prince's Play (Le Roi s'amuse) (*London: Faber and Faber, 1996)

*Prometheus (*London: Faber and Faber, 1998)

Laureate's Block and Other Occasional Poems (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000)

Hecuba (London: Faber and Faber, 2005)

Under the Clock (London: Penguin, 2005)

Collected Film Poetry: Arctic Paradise, The Big H, Loving Memory, The Blasphemer's Banquet, The Gaze of the Gorgon, Black Daisies for the Bride, A Maybe Day in Kazakhstan, Prometheus, Metamorpheus, Crossings (London: Faber and Faber, 2007)

FRAM (London: Faber and Faber, 2008)

with James Simmons, *Aikin Mata* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1966)

with Philip Sharpe, *Looking Up* (Malvern: Migrant Press, 1979)

Translations in Peter Jay, ed., *The Greek Anthology* (London: Allen Lane, 1973)

Poems Published only in Periodicals

'When Shall I Tune my "Doric Reed."?', *Poetry and Audience*, vol. 4, no. 11 (25 January 1957)

'When the Bough Breaks', *Poetry and Audience*, vol. 4, no 15 (22 February 1957), 5

'Plato Might Have Said', *Poetry and Audience,* vol. 4, no. 22 (22 May 1957), 4-5

'Prologue', *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3 (Autumn 1986), 69-70

'Piazza Sannazaro', *London Review of Books*, vol. 32, no. 20 (21 October 2010), 27

'Cornet and Cartridge', *London Review of Books*, vol. 33, no. 4 (17 February 2011), 19

Prose

'Preface', *Aikin Mata* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1966), reprinted in *Bloodaxe 1*, 84-7

'English Virgil: *The Aeneid* in XVIII Century', *Philologica Pragensia*, X (1967) 1-11 and 80-91

'Dryden's *Aeneid*', in *Dryden's Mind and Art*, ed. by Bruce King (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969), 143-67

'Shango the Shaky Fairy', *London Magazine*, new series, vol. 10, no. 6 (April 1970) reprinted in *Bloodaxe 1*, 88-103

'New Worlds for Old', review of four collections of Latin-American poetry, *London Magazine*, new series, vol. 10, no. 6 (September 1970), 81-5

'Beating the Retreat', review of poems by Clifford Dyment, PJ Kavanagh, George Macbeth, Hugh MacDiarmid and Donald Davie, *London Magazine*, new series, vol. 10, no. 8 (November 1970), 91-6

'All Out', review of *The Penguin Book of Socialist Verse*, *London Magazine*, new series, vol. 10, no. 12 (March 1971), 87-91

'The Inkwell of Dr Agrippa', in *Corgi Modern Poets in Focus: 4*, ed. by Jeremy Robson

(London: Corgi, 1971), but without its title, reprinted with title in *Bloodaxe 1*, 32-5

'Black and white and red all over: the fiction of Empire', *London Magazine*, new series, vol. 12, no. 3 (August/September 1972), 90-103

'Preface', *The Misanthrope*' (London: Rex Collings, 1973), longer version reprinted in *Bloodaxe 1*, 138-153

'Introduction', *Newcastle is Peru*, second edn (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Northern House, 1974), unnumbered

'Preface', *Palladas: Poems* (London: Anvil Press, in association with Rex Collings, 1975), reprinted in *Bloodaxe 1*, 133-7

'Preface', *Phaedra Brittanica*, third edn (London: Rex Collings, 1976), reprinted in *Bloodaxe 1*, 174-191

'Author's Statement', in *Tony Harrison,* Contemporary Writers Series (London: Booktrust, 1987), reprinted in *Bloodaxe 1*, 9

'Facing up to the Muses', Presidential Address to the Classical Association, April 1988, reprinted in *Bloodaxe 1*, 429-454

'Fire & Poetry', introduction to *Prometheus* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), vii-xxix

'The Tears and the Trumpets', Presidential Address to the Virgil Society, 3 June 2000, in *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, third series, vol. 9, no. 2 (2001), 1-22

'Egil & Eagle-Bark', *Arion*, vol. 9, no. 3 (2002), 81-113

'Flicks and This Fleeting Life', in *Collected Film Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007) vii-xxx

'The Poetic Gaze', *The Guardian* (24 October 2009). At: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/oct/24/tony-harrison-speech-pen-pinter [accessed 15 December 2009]

Manuscript Sources

'Newcastle is Peru', Mss. Misc., the Robinson Library, Newcastle-upon-Tyne [dated 1968]

Northern Arts Ms. Collection Vol. 6, 'Tony Harrison', The Literary and Philosophical Society, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Notebook: Poems 1984: *v.*, uncatalogued, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds

Tony Harrison's Papers and Correspondence

23 letters to Jon Silkin/*Stand* editors (4 December 1962 – 8 August 1980), in BC MS 20c Stand/3/HAR-11, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds

Tony Harrison papers relating to *Loiners*, 73 uncatalogued and unnumbered items (which includes 33 letters to Alan Ross between 28 January 1967 - 8 December 1973), Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds

18 letters to Alan Ross (7 Mar 1972 – 14 Dec 1980), the Alan Ross Collection, in BC MS 20c London Magazine, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds

4 letters to Vivienne Lewis (11 October 1972 – 2 May 1974), in BC MS 20c London Magazine, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds

13 letters from Tony Harrison to Jeffrey Wainwright (24 October 1973 – 31 October 1984), in BC Ms 20c Wainwright

Papers relating to radio programs on Harrison by Rodney Pybus, including 2 letters from Harrison to Pybus (31 August – 28 October 1977; 4 October 1978), in BC MS 20c Pybus/4/4

1 letter to Jon Silkin (29 September 1980), in BC MS 20c Silkin/8/HAR-4, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds

Interviews and Poetry Readings

'Tony Harrison in interview with John Haffenden' (1983), in *Bloodaxe 1*, 227-246

Tony Harrison: Poets and People, a Freeway Films Production for Channel 4 (1984)

Them & [uz]: A Portrait of Tony Harrison, *Arena*, BBC TV (15 April 1985)

'Tony Harrison in conversation with Richard Hoggart' (1986) in *Bloodaxe 1*, 36-45

'Tony Harrison in interview with Paul Bailey', *Third Ear*, Radio 3 (23 February 1988)

'Tony Harrison in interview with Clive Wilmer', 'Poet of the Month', BBC Radio 3, (February 1991), transcript published in *Poets Talking: The 'Poet of the Month' Interviews from BBC Radio 3*, ed. by Clive Wilmer (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994), 97-103

'Tony Harrison in conversation with Michael Alexander', in *Talking Verse: Interviews with Poets*, ed. by Robert Crawford and others (St Andrews and Williamsburg: Verse, 1995), 82-91

'Tony Harrison in interview with Melvyn Bragg', *The South Bank Show*, London Weekend Television (28 March 1999)

'Tony Harrison in interview with John Tusa', BBC Radio 3 (March 2008) <http://wwwbbccouk/radio3/johntusainterview/harrison_transcriptshtml> [accessed 31 June 2010]

Winder, Robert, 'Robert Winder meets Tony Harrison', *The Independent Weekend* (5th August 1995), 3

Wroe, Nicolas, 'Man of Mysteries', *The Guardian* (1 April 2000). At: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2000/apr/01/poetry.theatre> [accessed 20 August 2009]

Jaggi, Maya, 'Beats of the Heart', *The Guardian* (25 March 2004). At: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/mar/31/poetry.tonyharrison> [accessed 1 July 2009]

Glover, Michael, 'Tony Harrison: Not to be read quietly', *The Independent* (1 April 2007). At: <http://news.independent.co.uk/people/profiles/article2411634.ece> [accessed 2 June 2010]

'Tony Harrison', 'Poets on Screen', At: <http://lion.chadwyck.com/poetsonscreen/showclip.jsp?TYPE=poetsonscreen&ID=ON0921> [accessed 4 March 2010]

'Tony Harrison', *Poetry Quartets*, <http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts-literature-publications-poetryquartets-harrison.htm> [accessed 11 November 2010]

Other Primary Sources

Achebe, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational, 1996 [1964])

Auden, W. H., *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969 [1966])

with Louis MacNeice, *Letters From Iceland* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967 [1937])

verse text for *Nightmail* (1936), in *We Live in Two Worlds: The GPO Film Unit Collection*, vol. 2, British Film Institute

Baudelaire, Charles, *Flowers of Evil*, trans. by James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993 [1857])

Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, ed. and with an Introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969)

Betjeman, John, *Summoned by Bells* (London: J. Murray, 1960).

Blake, William, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V Erdman, commentary by Harold Bloom, newly rev. ed. (Berkley: University of California Press, 1982 [1965])

Bronte, Emily, *Wuthering Heights*, an authoritative text, with essays in criticism, ed. by William M. Sale, Jr. (New York: Norton, 1972 [1963]

Browne, Thomas, *Religio Medici*, ed. by Jean-Jacques Denonain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953)

Burroughs, Edgar Rice, *Tarzan of the Apes*, Jason Haslam, ed. and Introduction, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010 [1914])

Césaire, Aimé, *Aimé Césaire: The Collected Poetry*, trans. with an Introduction and Notes by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983)

Discourse on Colonialism, trans. by Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972)

'Interview with Aimé Césaire', in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. by Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 65-79

'The Liberating Power of Words: An interview with the poet Aimé Césaire', interviewed by Annick Thebia Melsan, *Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol. 2, no. 4 (June 2008), 1-11

Cicero, Marcus Tullius, *The Poems of Cicero* (New York: Garland, 1978).

Conrad, Joseph, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, vol. 2, ed. by Laurence Davies and Gene M. Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

Heart of Darkness: Background and Criticisms, ed. by Leonard F. Dean (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1960)

Dunn, Douglas, *Selected Poems 1964-1983* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986)

Fracastorius, Heironymus, *Syphilis: Or, A Poetical History of the French Disease*, written in Latin by Fracastorius, and now attempted in English by N.Tate (London: J. Tonson, 1686)

Gide, André, *Corydon* (New York: Octagon Books, 1977 [1950])

If it Die: An Autobiography, trans. by Dorothy Bussy (New York: Vintage Books, 2001 [1935])

The Immoralist, trans. by Dorothy Bussy (New York: Alfred. A Knopf, 1948 [1930])

Gray, Thomas, *The Complete Poems of Thomas Gray: English, Latin and Greek*, ed. by H.W. Starr and J.R. Hendrickson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966)

Heaney, Seamus, *New Selected Poems 1966-1987* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990)

Hoffman-Donner, Heinrich, *Struwwelpeter, or, Merry Rhymes and Funny Pictures* (London: Blackie, 1900)

Hugo, Victor, *Les* Misérables, trans. by Lee Fahnestock and Norman MacAfee (New York: Signet, 1987)

Notre-Dame de Paris, trans. and with an Introduction by Alban Krailsheimer, 2nd edn (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999)

Ibsen, Henrik, *Ghosts; A Public Enemy; When We Dead Awake*, trans. by Peter Watts (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964)

Letters of Henrik Ibsen, trans. by John Nilson Laurvik and Mary Morison (New York: Fox, Duffield and Co, 1905)

Joyce, James, *Dubliners: An Illustrated Edition with Annotations*, ed. by John Wyse Jackson and Bernard McGinley (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995)

Stephen Hero: part of the first draft of 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man', ed. by T. Spencer, rev. edn (London: Jonathon Cape, 1969)

Ulysses, ed. by Gabler, Hans Walter, Steppe, Wolfhard and Melchior, Claus (New York: Garland, 1984)

Juvenal, *Satyrae* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979)

Khayyam, Omar, *Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayyam*, trans. by Edward Fitzgerald (London: Bernard Quaritate, 1859)

Kipling, Rudyard, *Complete Verse* (New York: Anchor Press, 1989 [1940])

MacNeice, Louis, *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay*, with an Introduction by Walter Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968 [1938]

Selected Poems, ed. by Michael Longley (London: Faber and Faber, 1988)

Marvell, Andrew, *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. by Nigel Smith (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2003)

Masefield, John, *The Collected Poems of John Masefield* (London: William Heinemann, 1923)

Meredith, George, *Modern Love*, with an Introduction by C. Day Lewis (London: Rupert Hart Davis, 1948)

Milton, John, *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 2, 1643-48, ed. by Ernest Sirluck (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and Oxford University Press, 1953)

The Poems of John Milton, ed. by John Carey and Alastair Fowler (London and Harlow: Longman, 1968)

Moore, Marianne, *The Complete Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968)

Neruda, Pablo, *Canto General: 50th Anniversary Edition*, trans by Jack Schmitt with an Introduction by Roberto González Echevarria, Latin American Literature and Culture, vol. 7 (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000 [1991])

Olsen, Tillie, *Silences* (New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1978 [1965])

Orwell, George, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, foreword by Victor Gollancz (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937)

Pound, Ezra, *The ABC of Reading* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968)

The Cantos of Ezra Pound (London: Faber and Faber, 1975)

Selected Poems 1908-59 (London: Faber and Faber, 1975)

Raleigh, Walter, *Sir Walter Raleigh: Selected Writings*, ed. by Gerald Hammond, (Manchester: Carcanet, 1984)

Rimbaud, Arthur, *Arthur Rimbaud: Selected Poems and Letters*, trans. with an Introduction by Jeremy Harding and John Sturrock (London: Penguin Books, 2004)

I Promise to be Good: The Letters of Arthur Rimbaud, trans., ed. and with an Introduction by Wyatt Mason (New York: Modern Library, 2004)

Rimbaud: Complete Works, Selected Letters, trans. with an Introduction and notes by Wallace Fowlie, updated, revised and with a foreword by Seth Whidden (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005 [1966])

Shelley, Percy Bysshe, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. with and Introduction and Notes by K.N. Cameron (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1951)

Shelley's Prose, or The Trumpet of a Prophecy, ed. with an Introduction and Notes by D.L. Clark (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1988 [1955])

Stewart-Young, JM, [O Dazi Oka] *The Seductive Coast: Poems Lyrical and Seductive from Western Africa* (London: Ousley, 1909)

Tacitus, Cornelius, *Agricola*, trans. by William Peterson, in *Agricola, Germania, Dialogus*, trans. by William Peterson and Maurice Hutton rev. ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970 [1914])

Thoreau, Henry, *Walden and Other Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, ed. by Brooks Atkinson (New York: Modern Library, 1937)

Toland, John, *Hypatia: or, the History of a Most Beautiful, Most Vertuous, Most Learned, and Every Way Accomplish'd Lady; Who was Torn to Pieces by the Clergy of Alexandria* (London: M. Cooper; W. Reeve; and C.A. Sympson, 1753)

Verlaine, Paul, *Paul Verlaine: Selected Poems*, trans. by Martin Sorrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)

Williams, Raymond, *Loyalties* (London: Hogarth Press, 1985)

Wordsworth, William, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. with textual and critical notes by E. De Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944)

Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800, ed. by James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992)

The Prelude: the Four Texts, 1798-99, ed. by Jonathon Wordsworth (London: Penguin, 1995)

Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, ed. by Nowell C. Smith, reissued with a preface by Howard Mills (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1980 [1905])

Yeats, W.B., *The Collected Poems*, 2nd ed. (London: MacMillan, 1950)

Critical Studies on Tony Harrison

Astley, Neil, ed., *Bloodaxe Critical Anthologies 1: Tony Harrison* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1991)

Barker, Jonathon, 'Peru, Leeds, Florida, and Keats', in *Bloodaxe 1*, 46-53

Berkan-Birz, Carole, 'Public or Private Nation: Poetic Form and National Consciousness in the Poetry of Tony Harrison and Geoffrey Hill', in *Intimate Exposure: Essays on the Public-Private Divide in English Poetry Since 1950*, ed. by Emily Taylor Merriman and Adrian Grafe (London: McFarland & Co., 2010), 174-190.

Bragg, Melvyn, '*v.* by Tony Harrison, *or* Production No 73095, LWT Arts', in *Tony Harrison: Loiner*, ed. by Byrne, 49-56

Burton, Rosemary, 'Tony Harrison: An Introduction', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 14-31

Butler, Christopher, 'Culture and Debate', in *Tony Harrison: Loiner*, ed. by Byrne, 93-114

Byrne, Sandie, *H, v. & O: The Poetry of Tony Harrison* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998)

'On Not Being Milton, Marvell, or Gray', in *Tony Harrison: Loiner*, ed. by Byrne, 57-83

Tony Harrison: Loiner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997)

'Introduction: Tony Harrison's Public Poetry', in *Tony Harrison: Loiner*, ed. by Byrne, 1-27

Chillington-Rutter, Carol, 'The Poet and the Geldshark: War and the Theatre of Tony Harrison', in *Acts of War: The Representation of Military Conflict on the British Stage and Television since 1945*, ed. by Tony Howard and John Stokes (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), 145-163

Cluysenaar, Anne, *Stand*, vol. 12, no 1 (1970), 73-4

Crucefix, Martyn, 'The Drunken Porter Does Poetry: Metre and Voice in the Poems of Tony Harrison', in *Tony Harrison: Loiner*, ed. by Byrne, 161-170

Douglas Dunn, 'Abrasive Encounters', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 346-47

'Acute Accent', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 212-215

'Formal Strategies in Tony Harrison's Poetry', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 129-132

'The Grudge', *Stand*, vol. 16, no. 4 (1975), 4-6

'"Importantly Live": Tony Harrison's Lyricism', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 254-57

Eagleton, Terry, 'Antagonisms: Tony Harrison's *v*', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 348-50

'Metre v madness', *Poetry Review*, vol. 82, no. 4 (winter 1992/3), 53-4

Eyre, Richard, 'Such Men are Dangerous', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 362-66

'Tony Harrison the Playwright', in *Tony Harrison: Loiner*, ed. by Byrne, 43-48

Forbes, Peter, 'The Bald Eagles of Canaveral', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 486-95

'In the Canon's Mouth: Tony Harrison and Twentieth-Century Poetry', in *Tony Harrison: Loiner*, ed. by Byrne, 189-199

Garner, Brent, 'Tony Harrison: *The School of Eloquence*', *Transactions of the Yorkshire Dialect Society*, 17: 87 (1988), 24-31

Garofalakis, Mary, 'The American Versus/ Verses', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 331-7

Graham, Desmond, 'The Best Poet of 1961', in *Tony Harrison: Loiner*, ed. by Byrne, 29-41

'Review of *From 'The School of Eloquence' and Other Poems*', *Stand*, vol. 20, no. 4,

(1979), 79-80

Grant, Damien, 'Poetry *Versus* History: Voices Off', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 104-13

Hall, Edith, 'Classics, Class, and Cloaca: Harrison's Humane Coprology', *Arion*, vol. 15, no. 2 (2007), 111-36

'Tony Harrison's *Prometheus*: A View from the Left,' *Arion,* vol. 10, no. 1 (2002), 129-40

Hargreaves, Raymond, 'Tony Harrison and the Poetry of Leeds', in *Poetry in the British Isles: Non-Metropolitan Perspectives*, ed. by Hans-Werner Ludwig and Lotar Fietz (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), 231-52

Hélie, Claire, 'Private Voice and Public Discourse: A Poetics of Northern Dialect', in *Intimate Exposure: Essays on the Public-Private Divide in English Poetry Since 1950*, ed. by Emily Taylor Merriman and Adrian Grafe (London: McFarland & Co., 2010), 160-173

Huk, Romana, 'Poetry of the Committed Individual: Jon Silkin, Tony Harrison, Geoffrey Hill, and the Poets of Postwar Leeds', in *Contemporary British Poetry: Essays in Theory and Criticism*, ed. by James Acheson and Romana Huk (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 175-219

'Postmodern Classics: the Verse Drama of Tony Harrison', in *British and Irish Drama Since 1960*, ed. by James Acheson (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), 202-226

'Tony Harrison, *The Loiners* and the "Leeds Renaissance"', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 75-83

Jenkins, Lee M., 'On Not Being Tony Harrison: Tradition and the Individual Talent of David Dabydeen', *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 32, no. 2, (2001), 69- 88

Kelleher, Joe, *Tony Harrison* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1996)

Kennedy, David, 'Ideas of Community and Nation in the Poetry of the "Middle Generation": Douglas Dunn, Tony Harrison and Seamus Heaney' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1999)

New Relations: The Refashioning of British Poetry1980-94 (Bridgend: Seren, 1996)

'"Past Never Found": Class, Dissent and the Contexts of Tony Harrison's *v*', *English*, vol. 58, no. 221 (Spring 2009), 162-181

'"what does the fairy DO?" The staging of antithetical masculine styles in the poetry of Tony Harrison and Douglas Dunn' *Textual Practice*, no. 14, vol. 1 (2000), 115-136

Lamb, Catherine, 'Tony Harrison', in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Poets of Great Britain and Ireland Since 1960, ed. by Vincent B Sherry, Jr., vol. 40, part I (Columbia, SC: Bruccoli Clark – BC Research, 1985), 158-9

Larkin, Philip, 'Under a common flag', *Observer* (14 November 1982), 23

Levi, Peter, 'Pagan Idioms: *Palladas*', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 136-7.

'Tony Harrison's Dramatic Verse', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 158-66

Lucas, John, 'Speaking For England?', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 351-361

Marshall, Cécile, '"Inwardness" and the "quest for a public poetry" in the Works of Tony Harrison', in *Intimate Exposure: Essays on the Public-Private Divide in English Poetry Since 1950*, ed. by Emily Taylor Merriman and Adrian Grafe (London: McFarland & Co., 2010), 147-159.

McGuirk, Kevin ' "All Wi' Doin": Tony Harrison, Linton Kwesi Johnson, and the Cultural Work of Lyric in Postwar Britain', in *New Definitions of Lyric: Theory, Technology and Culture*, ed. by Mark Jeffreys (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1998), 49-75

Merten, Kai, 'Scholastic Performances: Seamus Heaney and Tony Harrison (Back) at School', *Critical Survey*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2002), 101-12

Mills, Paul, 'Poetry in the Hands of the Receivers: Tony Harrison's *v.*: Class and Language in 1980's England', in *Britishness and Cultural Studies: Continuity and Change in Narrating the Nation*, ed. by Knauer, Krzysztof & Murray, Simon (Katowice: Slask 2000), 125-14

Morrison, Blake, 'The Filial Art', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 54-60

'Labouring: *Continuous*', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 216-220

Mortimer, Anthony, ed., *Poetry and Audience 1953-60* (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1961)

Murray, Oswyn, 'Tony Harrison: Poetry and the Theatre', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley , 262-274, 265

Nicholson, Colin, *Fivefathers: Interviews with late Twentieth Century Scottish Poets* (Tirril: Humanities-Ebook, 2007)

'"Reciprocal recognitions": race, class and subjectivity in Tony Harrison's *The Loiners*', *Race & Class*, vol. 51, no. 4 (2010), 59-78

'Towards an "Other Sense" of Identity: Political Subjectivity in Margaret Atwood's Poetry', in *Identity Issues: Literary and Linguistic Landscapes*, ed. by Vesna Lopičić

and Biljana Mišić Ilić (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 71 -94

O'Brien, Sean, 'Tony Harrison: *Showing the Working*', in *The Deregulated. Muse: Essays on Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1998), 51-64

O'Donoghue, Bernard, '*The Mysteries*: T.W.'s Revenge', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 316-23

Peach, Linden, 'Them and Uz: Tony Harrison's Eloquence', in *Ancestral Lines: Culture & Identity in the Work of Six Contemporary Poets* (Bridgend: Seren, 1993), 111-133

Porter, Peter, 'In the Bosom of Family', *London Magazine*, vol. 10, no. 5 (1970), 72-8, 74-6

Poster, Jem, 'Open to Experience: Structure and Exploration in Tony Harrison's Poetry', in *Tony Harrison: Loiner*, ed. by Byrne, 85-91

Roberts, Neil, 'Poetic Subjects: Tony Harrison and Peter Reading', in *British Poetry from the 1950s to the 1990s: Politics and Art*, ed. by Gary Day and Brian Docherty (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997), 48-62

Rowland, Antony, *Holocaust Poetry: Awkward Poetics in the Work of Sylvia Plath, Geoffrey Hill, Tony Harrison and Ted Hughes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005)

Tony Harrison and the Holocaust (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001)

Rusbridger, Alan, 'Tony Harrison and the Guardian', in *Tony Harrison: Loiner*, ed. by Byrne, 133-136

Rylance, Rick, 'Doomsongs: Tony Harrison and War', in *Tony Harrison: Loiner*, ed. by Byrne, 137-160

'On Not Being Milton' in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 114-28

Silver, Jonathon, 'Poetry or Bust: Tony Harrison and Salt Mills', in *Tony Harrison: Loiner*, ed. by Byrne, 185-187

Smalley, Rebecca Emily, 'The Role of Memory in the Poetry of Douglas Dunn and Tony Harrison with Specific Reference to Elegy' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Durham, 1991)

Spencer, Luke, *The Poetry of Tony Harrison* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994)

Taplin, Oliver, 'The Chorus of Mams', in *Tony Harrison: Loiner*, ed. by Byrne, 171-184

Thompson, N.S., 'Book Ends: Public and Private in Tony Harrison's Poetry', in *Tony Harrison: Loiner*, ed. by Byrne, 115-132

Wainwright, Jeffrey, 'Something to Believe In', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 407-15

Whitehead, Anne, 'Tony Harrison, the Gulf War and the poetry of protest', *Textual Practice* vol. 19, no. 2 (2005), 349-372

Widdowson, H.G., 'Person to Person: Relationships in the Poetry of Tony Harrison', in *Twentieth Century Poetry: From Text to Context*, ed. by Peter Verdonk (London: Routledge, 1993)

Woodcock, Bruce, 'Classical vandalism: Tony Harrison's invective', *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 2, summer 1990, 50-65

'"Internal colonialism": Is Tony Harrison a post-colonial poet?', *New Literatures Review*, no. 35, summer 1998, 76-94

Worpole, Ken, 'Scholarship Boy: The Poetry of Tony Harrison', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 61-74

Young, Alan, 'Weeds and white roses: the poetry of Tony Harrison', in *Bloodaxe 1*, ed. by Astley, 167-73

Bibliography

Kaiser, John R., ed., *Tony Harrison: A Bibliography 1957 – 1987* (London: Mansell Publishing, 1987)

Other Secondary Sources

Achebe, Chinua, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness', in *Heart of Darkness: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism*, ed. by Robert Kimbrough, third ed. (New York: Norton, 1988) 251-61

*Morning Yet On Creation Day: Essays (*London: Heinemann Educational, 1975)

Acheson, James, ed., *British and Irish Drama Since 1960* (London: Macmillan, 1993)

Achinstein, Sharon, *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994)

Addy, Sidney Oldall, *A Glossary of Words used in the Neighbourhood of Sheffield*, vol.1 (London: Trubner, 1888)

Adorno, Theodor, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged. Life*, trans. by E.F.N. Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974)

Ahmadu Bello University, Charter. At: <http://www.abu.edu.ng/alumni/html/mission.php> [accessed 5 October 2011]

Anderson, Ewan W, *International boundaries: A Geopolitical Atlas* (New York: Routledge, 2003)

Anderson, Frank Maloy, ed., *The Constitution and Other Select Documents Illustrative of the History of France, 1789-1907* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1908)

Arendt, Hannah, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951)

Armitage, Simon, and Crawford, Robert, eds., *The Penguin Book of Poetry from Britain and Ireland Since 1945* (London: Viking, 1998)

Boubacar Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998),

Behrman, Lucy, 'The Political Significance of the Wolof Adherence to Muslim Brotherhoods in the Nineteenth Century', *African Historical Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1968), 60-78

Bello, Ahmadu, *My Life* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962)

Bernstein, Basil, *Class, Codes and Control: Theoretical Studies Towards a Sociology of Language* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003 [1971])

Berresford Ellis, P., *The Cornish Language and its Literature* (London and Boston: Routledge, 1974)

Bhabha, Homi K., *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2005 [1994])

Blanning, T. C. W., *The French Revolutionary Wars, 1787-1802* (London and New York: Arnold, 1996)

Bradbury, Malcolm, *The Modern World: Ten Great Writers* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1988)

Bradshaw, Brendan and Morrill, John, eds., T*he British Problem, 1534-1707: State Formation in the Atlantic Archipelago* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1996)

Brantlinger, Patrick, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830 - 1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988)

Breunig, LeRoy C., 'Why France'? in *The Prose Poem in France: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws and Hermine Riffatere (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 3-20

Brombert, Victor, *Victor Hugo and the Visionary Novel* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984)

Broom, Sarah, *Contemporary British and Irish Poetry: An Introduction* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

Bush, Barbara, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919-1945* (London: Routledge, 1999)

Carey, John, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992)

Carroll, Robert and Prickett, Stephen, eds., *The Bible: Authorized. King James Version*, with an Introduction and Notes by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)

Champlin, John Denison, 'The Discoverer of the Philippines' *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society*, vol. 43, no. 8 (1911), 587-597

Cheng, Vincent *Joyce, Race and Empire* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

Cheyfitz, Eric, *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991)

Corcoran, Neil, *English Poetry since 1940* (London and New York: Longman, 1993)

Cowan, Ruth Schwartz, *Sir Francis Galton and the Study of Heredity in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Garland, 1985)

Crawford, Robert, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992)

Crowley, Tony, *Standard English and the Politics of Language* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989)

Curtin, Philip, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975)

Daudet, Alphonse, *In The Land of Pain*, ed. and trans. by Julian Barnes (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002)

Davidson, Peter, *The Idea of North* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005)

Diamond, Larry, 'Class, Ethnicity, and the Democratic State: Nigeria, 1950-1966', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 25, no. 3 (1983), 457-89

Dibua, J.I., 'Citizenship and Resource Control in Nigeria: The Case of Minority Communities in the Niger Delta', *Africa Spectrum*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2005), 5-28

Diop, Samba 'The Wolof Epic: From Spoken Word to Written Text', *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 37, no. 3 (2006), 120-132

Dodd, Philip, 'Lowryscapes: Recent Writings About the North', *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 32,

no. 2 (Summer 1990), 17-28

Dudley, B. J, *Parties and Politics in Northern Nigeria* (London: Frank Cass and Co.,1968)

Eagleton, Terry, *Exiles and Emigres: Studies in Modern Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970)

'The God that Failed', in *Re-membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Traditions,* ed. by Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), 342-49

Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture (London: Verso, 1995)

Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989)

Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism (London: New Left Books, 1981)

Easthope, Antony, *Poetry as Discourse* (London: Methuen, 1983)

Ellis, Alexander J., *On Early English Pronunciation: with especial reference to Shakespere and Chaucer, containing an investigation of the correspondence of writing with speech in England from the Anglo-Saxon period to the present day*, vol.1 (London: E.E.T.S., 1869-1936)

Empson, William, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1935, [1950])

Engels, Friedrich, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, trans. by E Untermann (Chicago: C.H Kerr, 1902)

Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967 [1952])

The Wretched of the Earth, trans. by Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965 [1961])

Fraser, Robert, *West African Poetry: A Critical History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)

French, John, *The Art of Distillation Or, A Treatise of the Choicest Spagyrical Preparations Performed. by Way of Distillation, Being Partly Taken Out of the Most Select Chemical Authors of the Diverse languages and Partly Out of the Author's Manual Experience together with, The Description of the Chiefest Furnaces and Vessels Used. by Ancient and Modern Chemists also A Discourse on Diverse Spagyrical Experiments and Curiosities, and of the Anatomy of Gold and Silver, with The Chiefest Preparations and Curiosities Thereof, and Virtues of Them All*, London. Printed by Richard Cotes, 1651

Furlong, Patrick J, 'Azikiwe and the National Church of Nigeria and the Cameroons: A Case Study of the Political Use of Religion in African Nationalism', *African Affairs*, vol. 91, no. 364 (1992), 433-452

Galton, Francis, *Essays in Eugenics* (London: Eugenics Education Society, 1909)

Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry Its Laws and Consequences, 2nd edn (London: MacMillan, 1892)

'Hereditary Talent and Character' (1865), *The Occidental Quarterly*, vol. 2, no.3 (August 2002 [1865]), 45-68

Narrative of an Explorer in Tropical South Africa (London: John Murray, 1853)

Gareth, Owain Llŷr ap, *Welshing on Postcolonialism: Complicity and Resistance in the Construction of Welsh Identities* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wales Aberystwyth University, 2009)

Genette, Gerard, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

Genova, Ann, 'Nigeria's Biafran War: State, Oil Companies, and Confusion', *XIV International Economic History Congress*, Helsinki, 2006

Gikandi, Simon 'Chinua Achebe and the Invention of African Literature', in Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational, 1996 [1994], ix-xxvii

Gimson, A.C 'The RP Accent', in *Language in the British Isles*, ed. by Peter Trudgill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 45-54

Gökyiğit, Emel Aileen, 'The Reception of Francis Galton's "Hereditary Genius" in the Victorian Periodical Press', *Journal of the History of Biology*, vol. 27, no. 2 (Summer, 1994), 215-240

Gray, J.M., *History of the Gambia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940)

Greene, Roland, *Unrequited. Conquests: Love and Empire in the Colonial Americas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999)

Griffin, Dustin, *Regaining Paradise: Milton and the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Griffiths, Richard, 'Another Form of Fascism: The Cultural Impact of the French "Radical Right" in Britain', in *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain*, ed. by Julie V. Gottlieb, Thomas P. Linehan (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 162-181

Hackett, Cecil, *Arthur Rimbaud: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981)

Hall, Stuart and Jacques, Martin, eds., *The Politics of Thatcherism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983)

John Hardy and Nicholas Brown, 'Shelley's "Dome of Many-Coloured Glass"', *Sydney Studies*, 103-106

Hassan, Salah D, 'Inaugural Issues: The Cultural Politics of the Early *Présence Africaine*, 1947-55', *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 30, no. 2 (1999), 194-221

Hill, Christopher, *Milton and the English Revolution* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977)

Hiro, Dilip, *Black British, White British* (London: Eyre Spottiswoode, 1971)

Hofman, Heinz, '*Adveniat tandem Typhis qui detegat orbes*: Columbus in Neo-Latin Epic Poetry', in *The Classical Tradition and the Americas*, ed. by Wolfgang Haase and Meyer Reinhold, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Berlin and New York: W de Gruyter, 1994)

Hoggart, Richard, *The Uses of Literacy: aspects of working- class life, with special reference to publications and entertainments* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957)

Hughes, Arnold, and Perfect, David, eds., *Historical Dictionary of the Gambia* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008)

Humphreys, Emyr, *The Taliesin Tradition: A Quest for the Welsh Identity* (London: Black Raven Press, 1984)

Humphries, Rolfe, *Green Armor on Green Ground: poems in the twenty-four official Welsh meters* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956)

Hunt, Lynn, ed., *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History* (Boston: Bedford Books of St Martin's Press, 1996)

Hynes, Samuel, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in the 1930s* (London: Bodley Head, 1976)

Irele, Abiola, '*Négritude* or Black Cultural Nationalism', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1965), 321-348

Isichei, Elizabeth Allo, *A History of African Societies to 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

Jones, Daniel, *The Cambridge English Pronouncing Dictionary*, rev. edn, ed. by Peter Roach, James Hartman and Jane Setter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006 [1909])

Kahaner, Larry, *AK-47: The Weapon That Changed the Face of the War* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2007)

Kaul, Suvir, *Thomas Gray and Literary Authority: Ideology and Poetics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992)

Kearney, Hugh, *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989)

Kelman, James, *Some Recent Attacks: Essays Cultural and Political* (Stirling: AK Press, 1992)

Kenner, Hugh, *Dublin's Joyce* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1955)

Killick, Rachel, *Victor Hugo: Notre-Dame de Paris* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1994)

Kirk, John "Class, Community and 'Structures of Feeling' in Working-Class Writing from the 1980's", *Literature and History*, vol. 8, no. 2, 44-63, 1999

Kirke-Greene, A.H.M., 'His Eternity, His Eccentricity, or His Exemplarity? A Further Contribution to the Study of H.E. the African Head of State', *African Affairs* (1991), vol. 90,163-187

Klein, Martin A., 'Social and Economic Factors in the Muslim Revolution in Senegambia', *Journal of African History*, vol. 13, no. 3 (1972), 419-41

Korieh Chima J. and Nwokeji, G. Ugo, eds., *Religion, History and Politics in Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Ogbu U. Kalu* (Maryland: University Press of America, 2005)

Lackey, Michael, 'The Moral Conditions for Genocide in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', *College Literature*, vol. 32, no. 1 (winter 2005), 20-41

Lafargue, Paul, *The Right to Be Lazy*, in *Selected Marxist Writings of Paul Lafargue*, ed. by Richard Broadhead and trans. by Charles Kerr (Berkeley: Center for Socialist History, 1984), 425-84

Lang, George, 'Ghana and Nigeria', in *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*, vol. 1, ed. by Albert S. Gérard (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986), 108-115

Lehmann, David, 'The Prose Poem: An Alternative to Verse', *The American Poetry Review*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2003), 45-9, 46.

Leonard, Tom, *Reports from the Present: Selected Works1982-94* (London: Cape, 1995)

Lilly, Gweneth, 'The Welsh Influence in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins', *Modern Language Review*, vol. 38, no. 3 (July 1943), 192-205

Lindqvist, Sven, *"Exterminate All the Brutes"*, trans. by Joan Tate (New York: New Press, 1996)

Machel, Samora, *Establishing People's Power to Serve the Masses* (Toronto: Toronto Committee for the Liberation of Southern Africa, 1976)

Mozambique: Revolution or Reaction? Two Speeches (California: LSM Information Center, 1975)

Macherey, Pierre, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. by Geoffrey Wall (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan, 1978)

Maquet, Jacques *Africanity: the Cultural Unity of Black Africa*, trans. by Joan R. Rayfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972)

Marx, Karl, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, ed. by C.P. Dutt (New York: International Publishers, 1975)

Mercer, John, 'The Canary Islanders in Western Mediterranean Politics', *African Affairs*, vol. 78, no. 311 (1979), 159-176

Miles, William F. S., 'Partitioned. Royalty: The Evolution of Hausa Chiefs in Nigeria and Niger', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2 (1987), 233-258

Mill, John Stuart, 'Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties', in *Dissertations and Discussions: political, philosophical and historical*, 2nd ed., vol. 1(London: Longmans, 1867), 63-94

Miller, Christopher L., *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985)

'Unfinished. Business: Colonialism in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Ideals of the French Revolution', in *The Global Ramifications of the French Revolution*, eds. Joseph Klaits and Michael H. Haltzel (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 105-126

Minahan, James, *Encyclopaedia of Stateless Nations: Ethnic and National Groups Around the World* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002)

Momoh, Abubakar, 'Popular Struggles in Nigeria 1960-1982', *African Journal of Political Science*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1996), 154-175

Morrison, Blake and Motion, Andrew, eds., *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982)

Munslow, Barry, *Mozambique: The Revolution and its Origins* (New York: Longman, 1983)

Neserius, Philip George, 'Ibsen's Political and Social Ideas', *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1925), 25-37

Newell, Stephanie, *The Forger's Tale: The Search for Odeziaku* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006)

Nicholl, Charles, *Somebody Else: Arthur Rimbaud in Africa 1880 – 91* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1997)

Noble, David Cook, 'Sickness, Starvation, and Death in Early Hispaniola', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 32, no. 3 (winter 2002), 349-386

with George W. Lovell, eds., *'Secret Judgements of God: Old World Disease in Colonial Spanish America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992)

Nolan, Emer, *James Joyce and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1995)

Norbrook, David, '*Areopagitica*, Censorship, and the Early Modern Public Sphere', in *The Administration of Aesthetics: Censorship, Political Criticism, and the Public Sphere*, ed. by Richard Burt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 3-33

Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics 1627 –1660 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

Nyquist, Mary, and Ferguson, Margaret W., eds., *Re-Membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Tradition* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987)

Oliveira, Ricardo Soares de, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007)

Oloruntimehin, B. Olatunji, 'Resistance Movements in the Tukulor Empire', *Cahier d'Études Africaines*, vol. 8, *Cahier* 29 (1968), 123-43

Onimode, Bade, 'Imperialism and Multinational Corporations: A Case Study of Nigeria', *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1978), 207-232

Oyowe, A, 'The Canary Islands Sing out for Freedom', *New African* (May 1978), 45-6

Palmer-Fernandez, Gabriel, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and War* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004)

Panter-Brick, SK, ed., *Nigerian Politics and Military Rule: Prelude to the Civil War* (London: Athlone Press, 1970)

Park, Mungo, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa,* Appendix and Illustrations by Major James Rennell (London: W Bulmer & Co, 1799)

Parras, John, 'Poetic Prose and Imperialism: The Ideology of Form in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Nebula, vol. 3., no. 1 (2006), 85-102

Payton, Philip, *Cornwall* (Fowey: Alexander Associates, 1996)

Pittock, Murray G.H., *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999)

Inventing and Resisting Britain: Cultural Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1685-1789 (Basingstoke and New York: MacMillan Press and St Martin's Press, 1997)

Porter, Bernard, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism 1850 – 2004*, (London: Pearson Longman, 2004)

Rabasa, José, *Writing Violence on the Northern Frontier: the Historiography of Sixteenth-Century New Mexico and Florida and the Legacy of Conquest* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000)

Raglan, Lord, 'Canute and the Waves', *Man,* vol. 60 (1960), 7-8

Ramazani, Jahan, *The Poetry of Mourning: the Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994)

Rawson, Claude, 'Family Voices', *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 January 1985, 10

God, Gulliver and Genocide: Barbarism and the European Imagination, 1492-1945 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)

Recorde, Robert, *The Grounde of Artes* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969 [1542])

Redhead, Steve, *Subculture to Clubcultures: An Introduction to Popular Cultural Studies* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1997)

Reed, Michael C., 'Gabon: a Neo-Colonial Enclave of Enduring French Interest', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2 (1987), 283-320

Rhodes, Enid H., 'Under the Spell of Africa: Poems and Letters of Arthur Rimbaud inspired by the Dark Continent', *The French Review*, Special Issue, no. 2, Studies in Nineteenth-Century French Literature (winter 1971), 20-8

Richards, Marvin N., 'Famous Readers of an Infamous Book: The Fortunes of *Gaspard de la Nuit*', *The French Review*, vol. 69, no. 4 (1996), 543-555

Robb, Graham, *Rimbaud* (London: Picador, 2000)

Victor Hugo: A Biography (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997)

Robinson, David, 'France as a Muslim Power in West Africa', *Africa Today*, vol. 46, no. 3 (1999), 105-127

'French "Islamic" Policy and Practice in Late Nineteenth-Century Senegal', *Journal of African History*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1988), 415-435

The Holy War of Umar Tal: The Western Sudan in the Mid-Nineteenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985)

Ross, Kristin, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988)

May '68 And Its Afterlives (London: University of Chicago Press, 2002)

'Rimbaud and Spatial History,' *New Formations*, no. 5 (Summer 1988), 53-68

Sacks, Peter M., *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore

and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985)

Said, Edward, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993)

Sartre, Jean Paul, 'Black Orpheus', trans. by John MacCombie, *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 6, no. 1 (autumn 1964 –winter 1965) 13-52

'Preface', Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched. of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963[1983])

What is Literature?, trans. B. Frechtman (London: Methuen, 1967 [1948])

Searing, James F, *West African Slavery and Atlantic Commerce: The Senegal River Valley, 1700 – 1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

Searle, Chris, 'The Mobilization of Words: Poetry and Resistance in Mozambique', in *Marxism and African literature*, ed. by Georg M Gugelberge (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1985) 150-164

Senghor, Léopold, 'What is "*Négritude*'"?', in *The Idea of Race*, ed. by Robert Bernasconi and Tommy Lee Lot (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2000)

Sheppard, Robert, *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and its Discontents 1950-2000* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005)

Smith, Olivia *The Politics of Language 1791-1819* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984)

Snell, K.D.M., 'The Regional Novel: Themes for Interdisciplinary Research', in *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1990*, ed. by K.D.M. Snell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

Soyinka, Wole, *Conversations with Wole Soyinka*, ed. by Biodun Jeyifo (Jackson: University Press of Missouri, 2001)

Sprinchorn, Evert, 'Syphilis in Ibsen's Ghosts', *Ibsen Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2004), 191-204

Stallybrass, Peter, 'Marx and Heterogeneity: Thinking the Lumpenproletariat', *Representations*, no. 31 (Summer 1990), 69-95

Starkie, Enid, *Arthur Rimbaud* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1947 [1938])

Arthur Rimbaud in Abyssinia (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1937)

'On the Trail of Arthur Rimbaud', *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 38, no. 3 (1943), 206-16

Stern, Hans Heinrich, *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching* (Oxford and New

York: New York University Press, 1983)

Still, Judith, 'Not Really Prostitution: The Political Economy of Sexual Tourism in Gide's *Si Le Grain Ne Meurt'*, *French Studies*, vol. 54, no. 1 (2000), 17-34

Stoyle, Mark, 'The Dissidence of Despair: Rebellion and Identity in Early Modern Cornwall', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 38, no. 4 (1999), 423-444

Taylor, A.J.P., *Essays in English History* (London: Hamilton, 1976)

Taylor, Stan, *The National Front in English Politics* (London: Holmes & Meier, 1982)

Thatcher, Margaret, Address to the 1922 Committee in the House of Commons, 19 July 1984, reported in 'Thatcher makes Falklands Link', *The Times* (20 July 1984). At: http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/105563 [accessed 3 July 2010]

Thompson, E.P., *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1991 [1963])

'Revolution', in *Out of Apathy*, ed. by E.P. Thompson and others (London: New Left Books, Stevens and Sons, 1960), 287-308

Thwaite, Anthony, *Poetry Today: A Critical Guide to British Poetry 1960-1984* (London and New York: Longman, 1985)

Touray, Omar A, *The Gambia and the World: A History of the Foreign Policy of Africa's Smallest State, 1965-1995* (Hamburg: Institute of African Affairs, 2000)

Uche, Chibuike, 'Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War', *Journal of African History*, vol. 49, no. 1 (2008), 111-35

Wales, Katie, 'North and South: An English Linguistic Divide?', *English Today* 61, vol. 16, no. 1 (2000), 4-15

Northern English: A Social and Cultural History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

Walker, George, *The Costume of Yorkshire*, 2nd ed. (Sussex: Caliban Books, 1978[1814])

Ward, Dave, 'Liverpool Says Sorry for Flooding Welsh Valley', *The Guardian* (13 October 2005). At: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2005/oct/13/water.society>

Watt, Ian, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980)

Weiler, Hans, ed., *Education and Politics in Nigeria* (Freiburg: Verlag Rombach, 1964)

Wildgen, Kathryn E. 'Romance and Myth in *Notre-Dame de Paris*', *The French Review*, vol. 49, no. 3 (1976), 319-27

Williams, Raymond, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976 [1983])

Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism, ed. by Robin Gale (London: Verso, 1989)

Who Speaks for Wales: Nation, Culture, Identity, ed. by Daniel Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003)