

Class and Language: The Two Competing Markers of Identity in Tony Harrison's "Iraqatrain"

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Abstract

This study handles the conflict of class and the power to master words in the poetry of Tony Harrison (1937-). It is a critical study of his poetic experience especially in his poem "Iraqatrain." The study is divided into an introduction, three sections and a conclusion. The first section is devoted to the political and historical background of the poem. The second section deals with Harrison's life with an illustration of his shift from a working class life towards articulacy and culture. The third section illustrates the conflict of class in the form and theme of the poem. The conclusion contains a summary of the findings of the research. . In short, Harrison attempts to dramatize his feelings of sorrow that societies are still dominated by class distinctions as well as money which still exist nowadays; and education as well as mastering language are just artificial markers of people's position in society.

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I-Introduction

One of the main themes in Harrison's poetry is the clash of classes in society; it is worth noting that the poet himself suffers from such confrontations, as he has become alienated from his working-class background in order to get hold of the language he now uses rebelliously to help individuals who are socially excluded and left speechless. Many people in Britain now try to generalize the idea that class no longer matters, though they are sure that it really still plays an important role in society. In Britain, social class is a catalyst to social discrimination because individuals from higher classes are treated better than the poor people who are deprived and lost in society. Hence, Harrison's alienation gives special importance to his voice, as he writes at a time in which money is the scale that specifies people's responses to social and individual wants. An important point to stress here is that Harrison is aware of the fact that his education has moved him far away from his working-class origins; however, his background is still of great importance to him. He defends working-class people and frequently speaks in colloquial language and sometimes, to unite himself with such people, he uses vulgar words. More importantly, he intentionally keeps the actual form of working-class voices in his poetry to preserve their individuality and identity.

Harrison rejects the idea that there is only one correct accent for reading poetry aloud. In the kind of education he has received, all dialects and accents are not accepted in reading poetry. He touches upon conflict and division, the tension between the ruling classes and working-class people as well as class division in terms of language and literature. Accent and dialect of the ruling class, together with its ideas of a literary heritage, are initially shown as predominant over the regional non-standard varieties and uneducated notions of the working class. He boldly affirms his right to use his own creative language. As Lenka Filipova states:

By using different registers he emphasizes the contrast between the world of his parents and the world of his education, the world of the working class and the middle class. At the same time, he makes the tone of his poetry more striking. This quality also adds to the poems' immediacy as well as incorporating different voices. (21)

In other words, Harrison stresses the difference between his original language and the new language he has acquired after pursuing his education by using everyday language and formal language alternately according to the role he plays in a poem. Having a refined language, he has moved from a working class member into a middle class one. In such a way, he makes his poems sound unusual, immediate and multipersonal. Filipova adds:

Harrison deliberately uses an odd sonnet form. He avoids the established, traditional form of fourteen-line sonnet that is one of the oldest verse forms in English. Instead, he uses an unusual form - the sixteen-line sonnet, firstly introduced by the Victorian poet George Meredith in his collection *Modern Love*. By using this form, Harrison shows his distant position from the established form of literary manner. (21)

In other words, Harrison tries to detach himself from conventional literary forms by using a peculiar sonnet form. He avoids the traditional form of fourteen-line sonnet and uses a sixteen-line sonnet form. In other words, he experiences a kind of contradiction in which he tries to compromise the old with the new. He tries to use classical forms after appropriating them to what he wants to say and the kind of language he wants to use. By doing so he tries to prove that language, and not class, is the real marker of identity.

II-Political and Historical Background

For a better understanding of Harrison's poetry and its revelation of the idea of class and language as markers of identity, an attempt, will be made to handle it from a Marxist perspective. According to Karl Marx, a social class is determined by the source of its individuals' income in relation to labor and production. In his own words,

Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated by law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labor, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and their mode of acquiring it. (qtd. in Lenin "A Great Beginning" 421)

In the light of the above quotation, one argues that Marxists divide the 19th century British society into three classes: the proletariat or working class, the bourgeoisie or capitalist class and the landlord class. The Landlord Class is that which holds land and draws income from its rental fee. (Marx *Critique* 824-25) Later on, the landlord class gradually becomes less important than the bourgeoisie and is termed petty bourgeoisie. The Bourgeoisie is defined by Marxists as "...the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour" (Marx *Manifesto* 12). As for, the capitalist class, it includes persons who receive salaries like the directors of large companies. It also includes persons who are not employers, but who serve the capitalist class in high administrative positions and part of the intellectuals, the high military and civil officials, etc (Lenin *Collected Works* 504). Finally, The Proletariat (or working class) are defined by Marxists as "...that class of modern wage laborers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labor power in order to live" (Marx *Manifesto* 12).

The mid-seventies and the eighties were marked by Margaret Thatcher's political attitude which created a sense of isolated "culture," "history" and "social understanding" (Corcoran 195-204). She considered nationalizing industries as inefficient and a reason for exhausting her resources. She was opposed by workers in nationalized industries by going on strikes, marches and organized industrial disputes. However, she conducted a harsh attack on the power of trade unions. Hence, British citizens led a dull life that was dominated by social complications and class distinctions. Mozzato's study is very important to enrich the historical background. He talks about the British socio-political context from the eighties to the nineties. John Hill highlights the situation in the eighties and early nineties during the Thatcher era saying:

The polarization along lines of class, of race, of religion, of nationality and language recalled similar breakups elsewhere in Europe. [This makes] the 1980s a period of momentous social shifts well beyond Thatcherism and supports the view that violent social tensions are often the best soil for the flowering of resilient, contesting, and confrontational arts, obliging artists to rediscover themselves as social counterforces and moral consciences. (56)

I strongly agree with Hill that conflicts took place in the 1980s in Britain as a result of the variation of classes, languages, religions and races. Consequently, a new revolutionary kind of poetry appeared. Each poet attempted to support and defend his group. Mozzato points out that this "socio-cultural shift" is established through embracing diverse genres and literal bias. The poetry of Harrison at that critical interval of time, led to contradictions which echoed through the following epochs (12).

Political and social situation in Britain was also affected by the "Cold War." The term "Cold War" often dated from 1947 to 1991 indicates the forty-year political and military hostility between the Western Bloc, led by the United States with Nato, and the Eastern Bloc led by the Soviet Union with the Warsaw Pact. This war began after the success of their temporary wartime alliance against Nazi Germany, leaving the USSR and the US as two superpowers with profound economic and political differences. The term "late Cold War" refers to the period lasting from the late seventies to the late eighties. It marks the international and European growth following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the nuclear rearrangements during the Reagan era on the one hand, and the control of the solidarity movement in Poland on the other hand. (Hobsbawm 67-9) It is worth mentioning that solidarity is an unofficial public association that supports workers' rights and social change. The government did not approve that association at the beginning and tried to abolish it in the early 1980s, but at last it was unwillingly accepted. (Smolar 127-43)

Mozzato believes that in Great Britain, there were two ways to become free of the effects of the Cold War: either by redefining socio-political relations within a post-industrial, post-national and multi-cultural milieu; or by ruining the vision of class and national ethnic conflicts. As an act of faith, writers who were born during or soon after the Second World War redirected their talents toward the post-war context that framed their cultural and social identity. It was impossible to recognize any possible division from communitarian loyalties, which had emerged so strongly in the seventies, because of the radical discourse on class and national belonging of the Thatcher age. Such act led to limiting the scope of poetry in those years when the borders between classes were

destroying the very notion of “Britishness”. However, national concerns obstruct awareness raising which was necessary to widen the perspectives on British verse. The poets who avoided any direct support of political, communal stances were also displaying an extraordinary awareness of their inner standstills, as the interplay of regional or working class language and the Standard English adopted by Harrison clearly shows. They resisted narrow-mindedness through the recognition of a wider, and first of all European, dimension where internal conflicts could be reconstructed. (13)

From the mid-nineties, a harsh political verse emerged and brought about an interest in poetry as public expression, and as political activity. In keeping with European and world-wide cultural currents, common opposition with governmental foreign policies and British involvement in military action stimulated commitment in the arts. This was intensified by many events like the reaction to the Yugoslavian conflict, the Gulf War and the protest raised by the Labour leadership’s alliance with the USA in Afghanistan and in Iraq. (Woodcock 54) Britain’s alliance with USA was important because it influenced the nature of poetry produced. A close reading of Harrison’s poems show that he tries to demonstrate his historical-social consciousness and individual experience by writing about human individuals who suffer not only in his society but internationally. He was affected by the internal socio-political confusion and the international tensions which would emerge more clearly in the following decades. I share Mozzato's point of view that Tony Harrison was politically influential as he has been regarded as the representative of left-wing resentment since the eighties in Britain. His poetry framed the contradictions of his generation and he hardened his firm anti-government attitude since New Labor dominated. He is a middle-class poet who originally belongs to the working class. His work brought about the genre of classical attack again as he takes the readers from the seventies and eighties implicit resistance to the protest climate of the nineties and twenties. (22) Consequently, his poems dealt mostly with criticizing the political situation in Britain and the British political reaction towards the political situation in the world as expressed it in his poem “Iraqutrian.”

A careful reading of Harrison's poetry shows that it represents the regional sociopolitical scene of Western Yorkshire as well as his working class milieu and he regarded language as a tool for attacking sociopolitical cruelty. His sympathy with his regional working class people made him form a "controversial English and European stance." He was greatly concerned with the consequences of the Second World War, the ghost of Nazism and that of the moral bombing" on Northern Germany in 1945. He also rejected the Thatcher and post-Thatcher official culture. (Mozzato 8) Consequently, most of his poems are concerned with political reformation, sympathy with the oppressed while attacking sociopolitical injustice. In her article, "Wealth, poverty and class in Britain today," Cox states that British society in the nineties is marked by an increasing consciousness of the big difference between rich and poor. Anger at the enormous salaries and 'share option schemes" awarded to those who run various industries has become ordinary. Cox asks the question "what are the class relations, the power relations, which allow the rich to ride the waves of incredulity which have accompanied each new exposure of their fantastic wealth?" In other words, Cox wonders about the criteria that decide the class relations and power relations. (2) The answer is that power and high class are attributed to the already wealthy since social status in the nineties in Britain depends on impersonal elements that affect the economic status.

In the nineties, class in Britain, is considered to be the most important issue among all socio-political issues. Members of the British society fight class discrimination in a country associated with its royal family. He is greatly conscious of his own class and also of the importance of language as a symbol of class struggle because he belonged to a working class but as a result of his study at grammar school and university he has become a famous poet. Most of his poetry criticizes the society that reserves poetry for the upper, educated classes. His poems includes examinations of language, expression and poetry. Harrison's attitude towards the conflict of social classes in Britain is interesting. Actually his poetic ability came from a reaction against the political system there. His poetry is mainly concerned with sympathizing with the lower classes, standing by them while criticizing the upper classes and ridiculing them.

III- Harrison's Life and Literary Career

Liang states that Harrison is the most important public poet and the best defender of the working class as well as oppressed people in the world. (103) This idea is also affirmed by Neil Roberts who points out that in modern British poetry, “class has continued to be a ground of contention in contemporary English poetry, and the most significant protagonist has been Tony Harrison. (1) Harrison fights against discourse supremacy and cruelty through his verbal weapons. In his poetry, there are different voices speaking from different social backgrounds. (Liang 103) In other words, sometimes he uses the elite educated accent and sometimes he uses the working-class accent in his poetry.

It is impossible to ignore Harrison’s own biography, and the constant persistent power of language innate in it when considering the power of language, particularly in relation to class. Tony Harrison (1937-), who lives in Newcastle upon Tyne, is considered as the leader of British film and theatre poets. He has written many political and social works like a play for the National Theatre in London, operas for the New York Metropolitan association, the BBC and Channel 4 television. He studied at Classics in Leeds Grammar School and Leeds University, and finished his diploma in Linguistics. He has been awarded many prizes for his great achievements. His first collection of poems, *The Loiners* (1970), was awarded the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize in 1972, and his acclaimed version of Aeschylus's *The Oresteia* (1981) won him the first European Poetry Translation Prize in 1983. *The Gaze of the Gorgon* (1992) won the Whitbread Poetry Award (Kelleher 1).

Tony Harrison is famous for his controversial works. His poetry has had a great impact on public audience. He has built a notable work which encompasses poetry for books and newspapers, for theatre and opera, and for film and television. (Kelleher 1) Harrison's main concern with conflicts of class is really surprising. But it might be explained through a close look at his life. His background especially his shift from working class life towards the elite and educated people class can be a reason behind many of his poetic preoccupations. A minor event in his life had a great impact on him. He was once mocked by his English teacher for his thick Yorkshire accent.

He fights for his own dialect as well as for his identity since "each social group---- each class, profession, generation, religion, region ---- has its own dialect. Each dialect reflects and embodies a set of values and a sense of shared experience." (Bakhtin 5) Harrison is keenly alienated from his family because the education he received has cut him off from his parents. His family cannot understand him and his books, though he tries to "create new wholes out of that disruption" via poetry.(Haffenden 246) His education has created a block into the family. He dramatizes his inner conflicts, his tentative attitudes towards his education and literature. Harrison himself confesses:

Originally I was drawn to metrical verse because I wanted to 'occupy' literature, as I said in 'Them and [uz]'. Now that I've occupied it in the sense that I could do it, I learned it as skillfully as I could in order that people would pay attention ... I don't feel happy in the world of literature, and nor do I feel happy—with my education and my identity as a poet---- in my old working class background: I'm in a way alienated from both. (qtd. in Haffenden 236)

Harrison explores this feeling in many poems in an ongoing sequence called 'The School of Eloquence'. In "Book Ends", the irony of how sitting with his father on the night of his mother's death, each unable to talk to the other is emphasized. The poet reflects:

Back in our silences and sullen looks,
for all the Scotch we drink, what's still between's
not the thirty or so years, but books, books, books. ("Book
Ends" 1)

His poetry dramatizes his conflict between two cultures, two dialects and two systems of worth decision. He has occupied literature and applies his pen as a weapon to speak for his parents but unable to go back to his class. At the same time, due to his working-class origin he is unable to be accepted by the elite culture even if he is a well-educated poet. He has experienced the double alienations, tortured by the tension of identity recognition. (Astley 229) In other words, he gained a good reputation among his working class people and among the public by defending the oppressed and rejecting class differences. Consequently, his poetry has been filled with social and realistic

significance. In short, he has been widely acknowledged and accepted as one of the most important public poets today in contemporary English poetry circles.

IV-Conflict of Class in the Theme and Form of "Iraqatrain"

Harrison examines the conflict of class and language in "Iraqatrain" through theme and form. In this section, this conflict will be examined from a Marxist point of view. As for the theme, "Iraqatrain" is a hugely influential long poem which was published in 2003. It is divided into six sections that represent the stages of the Iraqi invasion. It is a multi-layered treatment of many class-related issues during the time of Iraqi War. This poem has been triggered by the political situation in Britain during that war, citizens' reaction against Tony Blair the Prime Minister when he participated in that war and his involvement in the issue of "Operation Ore". According to Mike James' article "Alleged Pedophiles at Helm of Britain's War Machine, Massive Cover-Up," Operation Ore is a child-sex scandal that was about to destroy Tony Blair's government, but it was strangely removed from the front pages of British newspapers. It is the United Kingdom's most systematic and wide-ranging police investigation of crimes against children. It has revealed details that are not accepted politically as the British high classes believe. (1)

The first stanza is entitled "SHOCK & ORE." This section shows the situation of Britain before the war. Harrison starts to reflect on some contradictions within the society and he gives an account of the social issues of that time. He says:

Go round to Downing St, get Tony Blair's hard disc
Here's certainly a man from whom children are at risk.
Blair's a 'risk to children' with his Iraqi war.
I trust he's being fingered by Operation Ore. (Harrison 1)

James proves his words with Neil Mackay's report in *The Sunday Herald*. The latter exaggeratedly says that higher members of Tony Blair's government were being investigated for children's sexual abuse and the "enjoyment of child-sex pornography." He said:

The Sunday Herald has also had confirmed by a very senior source in British intelligence that at least one high-profile former Labor Cabinet minister is among Operation Ore

suspects. The Sunday Herald has been given the politician's name but, for legal reasons, cannot identify the person. There are still unconfirmed rumors that another senior Labor politician is among the suspects. The intelligence officer said that a 'rolling' Cabinet committee had been set up to work out how to deal with the potentially ruinous fall-out for both Tony Blair and the government if arrests occur. (1)

In fact, the claims were greatly severe, but they were gradually softened when it included Tony Blair and other members at the highest level of the British government. The story has been completely removed from the area of open discussion.

With regard to the same issue, Mike James believes that Tony Blair's reputation was spoiled and states that a freelance journalist called Bob Kearly has said:

Operation Ore is still being reported, but not in regard to government ministers and it's taking up very few column inches on the third or fourth page. Don't forget that the intelligence services are involved here, and Blair is anxious to ensure that the scandal does not rock the boat at a time when the country is about to go to war.

You can imagine the effect this would have on the morale of troops who are about to commit in Iraq. In fact morale is reportedly quite low anyway, with service personnel throwing their vaccines into the sea en route to the battlefield and knowing how unpopular the war is with the British people. And a lot of squaddies I've met think there's something weird going on between Bush and Blair. If you're then told that the executive responsible for the conduct of the war is staffed by child-molesters ... well, then Saddam suddenly looks like the sort of bloke with whom you can share a few tins [beer]." (1)

Kearley agrees with James and adds that the scandal has not been completely removed; rather it emphasized social class differences as those who belong to the government were rescued but others who were involved in the same issue were disgraced. He also shows the effect of this issue on the soldiers who have left their country and went to Iraq. They no longer respect Blair who sent them there and

started the war. Consequently all morals and hopes are lost. T. Stokes speaks about the same issue in "Operation Ore and the Jersey Care Home." He agrees with Kearly and James and talks about Downing Street that is mentioned in the poem. He says that political leaders' names were deleted from these documents and one newspaper included the name of a bodyguard who assured Tony Blair's involvement in this scandal because some of the deleted names were associated with him and caused him to resign. Moreover, *The Sunday Herald Newspaper* heightened the issue by digging Tony Blair's history and affirming that, as a student, he was named Miranda and some of his close friends who were mentioned in the scandal have had bad reputation and queer sexual tendencies, but the British newspapers were prevented from revealing such facts. (3)

Accordingly, Harrison starts his poem with this incident to emphasize the idea of class differences and contradictions in life. He actually highlights the fact that the government which is supposed to be a source of social justice and security for citizens turns to be a reason behind the oppression that is placed on the working classes and those citizens who do not have any position in the government. Harrison addresses the readers referring to the bodyguard at Downing Street and the scandal of Tony Blair who has been accused of child abuse. He criticizes the contradictions in the British society that hides the crime of Blair because it might affect the situation of Britain in the Iraqi war. People will not trust the government if the Prime minister is morally accused. Soldiers will think that why do they share in a war that might cost them their lives for such a government that does not care about them.

Lenin's article "Three Sources & Three Component parts of Marxism" greatly explains the story of Operation Ore. He says:

Just as man's knowledge reflects nature (i.e., developing matter), which exists independently of him, so man's *social knowledge* (i.e., the various views and doctrines - philosophical, religious, political, and so forth) reflects the economic system of society. Political institutions are a superstructure on the economic foundation. We see, for example, that the various political forms of the modern

European states serve to fortify the rule of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat. (21)

In the light of the above lines, and from a Marxist point of view, Blair's political position is regarded as a kind of "social knowledge" or rather a "man's knowledge" that mirrors nature. Consequently, Blair's political position explains his economic position in society and his superiority over the public. Hence, his scandal is deleted from newspapers and magazines. Contradictorily enough, if any working class member commits such a crime he, would be punished.

Besides, Harrison states that the second stage is called "PAYLOAD." He is really shocked at Britain's attitude and expresses his astonishment through Iraqi people's shock. He refers to the passengers, crew, equipment and cargo carried from Britain to Iraq during the war. He claims that the Secretary of State for International Development in the government of Prime Minister Tony Blair Clare Short (1946-) was among the goods sent to Iraq which makes the situation more humiliating. She was an important British politician, and member of the Labor Party who worked as a secretary from 3 May 1997 until her resignation from that post on 12 May 2003. Iraqis suffer, are shocked at the war and are losers as they are humiliated as well as deprived of their identity. Ian M. Johnson describes the bad situation in Iraq after the invasion as "huge looting." In other words, public organizations and institutions like hospitals and ministries were not secured and needed good protection. However, the American troops were only able to protect few sites and other important sites were left unprotected. It was reported also that the National Museum of Iraq was attacked and robbed. In such a way Iraq starts losing its identity. (212)

Iraq War is described by Harrison as a massive unstoppable force, campaign, movement, or object that crushes whatever is in its path. Another struggle is added to the list in the previous stanza is the struggle between values and benefits when Harrison dramatizes the shock and pain caused to Iraqi people during the war. Harrison stresses the contradictions during the war through mentioning Clare Short:

The Iraqis now are truly shocked and awed

at the inevitable Bushkrieg Juggernaut
all the more humiliating since it's got on board
the broad Brum bum and bosoms of Clare Short. (Harrison 1)

Blair was greatly in favor of the foreign policy of George W. Bush, participating in the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and 2003 invasion of Iraq from the start of the War on Terror in 2001. The War of Iraq was particularly controversial, as it attracted widespread public opposition and 139 of Blair's MPs opposed it. Consequently, he faced criticism over the policy itself and the circumstances in which it was decided upon. ("The rise and fall of New Labour" 1) In other words, Blair knew that people were against the war, but he did not care about their opinion or their sufferings. Besides, he thought only of his own benefits not the benefit of the citizens.

In 2009, Blair arrogantly and carelessly declared, in a press conference, that he would have supported killing Saddam Hussein and removing him from power even if it has been proved that he had no such weapons of mass destruction. He said he believed the world was safer as a result of the invasion. He also said that there was "no real difference between wanting regime change and wanting Iraq to disarm: regime change was US policy because Iraq was in breach of its UN obligations."(Blair 1) The poem also takes in the impact of the Operation Ore scandal and the Iraqi War on British as well as Iraqi citizens. However, both were unhappy as they discovered that they were sacrificing themselves for the sake of a fake government that did not give weight to their lives; and that Blair cared about his own benefits not about the benefits of people although he should care about mass unemployment and social problems in the British society.

Later in the third section, "The Hearts and Minds Operation", Harrison asks who is to blame for the death of British soldiers and Iraqi citizens. He concludes that the reason behind all these irrational acts is the political and social discrepancy in Britain caused by Blair. As a British citizen, he expresses his feeling of guilt. However hard the poet tries to find something to justify these political acts, he always has to refuse the absurdity and the implicit political benefits for Britain behind the war. This stanza shows that even though Harrison is aware of the sufferings of people and sympathizes with

them, nothing can excuse the start of the war. Harrison projects the issue of using "Decapitation" as a way of killing people in Iraq. He says:

'Decapitation' to win minds and hearts,
a bombing bruted surgical, humane, 's
only partially successful when its start 's

a small child's shrapnelled scalp scooped of its brains. (Harrison 1)

"Decapitation" is beheading people with a sword or axe and it has its roots in in history. The Greeks and Romans considered beheading a less dishonorable and less painful form of execution than other methods in use at all times. Beheading continued in Britain up to 1747. All the European countries that previously used beheading have now abolished the death penalty. According to Johnson, "the direct intentional military targeting of the leadership of an enemy organization is called decapitation." The term can also be applied to getting rid of a terrorist leader or a great governmental official who is supposed to be ill-treated by military force to terminate the role of his association like the decapitation of Saddam Hussein. (Johnson, James Turner 72) Harrison mentions the act of decapitation to emphasize the contradictions in the British society. Britain is supposed to have participated in Iraq war to save the world from chemical weapons, but it turned out to be that it actually has sacrificed young soldiers who died there. Consequently, families have been broken and children have become orphans. He calls the act of participating in the war "THE HEARTS AND MINDS OPERATION" as Britain tried to change citizens' minds and to convince them of the reasons behind the war. At the same time, they have to be with cold hearts and with no feelings to accept the deaths of British soldiers and the innocent Iraqi citizens. Iraqis are treated savagely as they were beheaded. This war is compared to an operation of separating a child's scalp from its brain. Harrison also refers to the slaughtering and torturing of Iraqi people by the British army and vice versa.

Harrison extends the tale of the war in the fourth section as he calls it "THE BODY RE-COUNT." He sympathizes with the Iraqi people who are killed and tortured as he says:

Dead Iraqis vote BUSH after all!

Florida's Bushibboleth 's become Baghdad's.

He's re-elected by them as they fall

with flayed off human flesh like hanging chads. (Harrison 1)

They have no other choice except voting for Bush to rule Iraq as they have lost their president who has been killed. Consequently, Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, has become like Florida. There is a racial discrimination in Iraq between Americans and Iraqis. Although Iraq is originally the Iraqi's country, yet they are treated as strangers and the American soldiers live there as if it were their country. He refers to that class distinction by the word "Bushibboleth's" which is a pun with the word "shibboleth." The latter is:

derived from a story reported in the Bible. After a battle in which Gileadites had defeated Ephraimites, some of the Ephraimites were trying to slip away across a river, but the Gileadites were stopping strangers and making them say "shibboleth". Ephraimites pronounced the word as "shibboleth" and thus betrayed their identity. (qtd. in Sharwood-Smith 46)

Gileadites and Ephraimites are members of two Hebrew tribes who used the word to identify their "shibboleth" identity. In other words, "shibboleth" is a password that is shared by a group of people and can only be pronounced by them and cannot be pronounced by strangers. Hence, it is used to identify those who belong to the same group from those who do not. Similarly, Harrison believes that the name of Bush is like a password that could only be said by Americans, and Iraqis who cannot say it are killed as they do not belong to the same group.

Iraq is compared to Florida because a large number of soldiers from Florida came there to participate in the war. They live there and practice all their activities as if Iraq is their state Florida. In her article "Forget the Weekend, They Are Full-Fledged ... Warriors", Keating talks about the massive number of soldiers in Iraq saying:

The Americans engaged in brutal combat were not full-time active-duty troops; rather, they were activated members of the Florida National Guard. In March 2003, 3,729 Guardsmen from the 53rd (Fla.), 76th (Ind.) and 41st (Ore.) brigade combat teams (BCT) fought in the initial invasion of Iraq. It is a significant

phenomenon. In the manpower-intensive Operation Iraqi Freedom, reserve and National Guard troops have been heavily mobilized. By the end of 2003, nearly 30,000 were serving in Iraq, many from the 30th (N.C.), 39th (Ark.) and 81st (Wash.) BCTs. For the first time since the Korean War, National Guard troops - otherwise known as "citizen-soldiers" who spent the bulk of their lives pursuing civilian careers - are shouldering a hefty burden in combat. (4)

Keating surprises the reader with her article as she states the fact that the number of American soldiers who participated in Iraqi War is massive. They were not only regular professional soldiers in the army but also part-time nation's soldiers and others from the Florida National Guard, who were extensively trained. 30,000 American soldiers, who are trained to be ready to defend their state or U. S. A. when they are needed, were taken to Iraq and ordered to stay there and share in war.

Instead of "shibboleth", Harrison uses "Bushibboleth" to create a political allusion. He also uses the plosives from 'b' to create alliteration. In this stanza, he emphasizes the contradiction in the Iraqi society during the war. Although they have been invaded by Bush who caused their sufferings, yet they had to elect him as he constituted the authoritative power in Iraq at that time. There is a reference here to the power of language over class. American soldiers are treated better than Iraqi citizens because of the power of their language as they speak the language of Bush which is the high authority in Iraq during the war.

Harrison includes "ROSE PARADE" as one of the stages of the war. He compares the Iraqi war to California's yearly Rose Parade festival. According to LA Tourism & Convention Board website, the Tournament of Roses Parade was initiated in 1890 in Pasadena, California. It is based on the idea of holding a festival for showing California's nice winter weather as it is characterized by flowers blooming during all the year. Later on, the festival was developed, consisted of electrical glides and parading groups that impressed spectators and become nationally popular. ("Rose Parade History" 1) The sight of the battlefield with all scenes of killing, injuring and destroying is comparable to that California celebration of New Year. He writes:

Sorry they're shriveled your liberators' petals!
There's no water here to keep the flowers fresh
though your laser-guided shower of shattering metals
sown these damp red roses in our flesh. (Harrison 1)

Instead of red roses like those shown in the celebration, Baghdad is spread with the blood of killed and injured people. He feels sorry because the USA soldiers, who are supposed to rescue Iraqi people and help them, are the cause of misery and distraction. The roses cannot be kept fresh for there is no water in Iraq. In other words, there is nothing that cures the wounds of the Iraqi people. On the contrary, the USA army caused wounds in the flesh of Iraqi people by the weapons they used. The war is, ironically, watched by millions of people like a celebration.

After that celebration held by USA, the sixth stage of the war, as Harrison believes, is executing criminals. The poem is concluded with the sad lines that tells the reality of the war. The last stanza is entitled "LEADING THE BLIND." Here, he shows that those who are considered by them as criminals are actually the victims and the Iraqi poor citizens. The war starts with the assumption that there are weapons in Iraq. People are deceived or rather in Harrison's belief they are made "unaware". He says:

Once executioners would kindly bind
the victims' eyes, so they died unaware.
Now Death's open-eyed as all the blind-
folds have been bagged by Bush and Blair. (Harrison 1)

However, by the end of the war, all people were aware of this trick and Bush and Blair were discovered but they do not care about others. Now they kill Iraqi citizens in public and all people know that there are no weapons. They do not even try to cover their crimes. As Harrison says it is a kind of "Death's open-eyed." Now people are aware of all the crimes of Bush and Blair. In fact, Harrison's concern, is less with "mortality" than with "frustrated human potential".

In the light of Marxism, the last stanza explains the trick of the weapons of mass destruction played by Bush. According to Lenin's article, "The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism":

People always were and always will be the stupid victims of deceit and self-deceit in politics until they learn to discover the *interests* of some class behind all moral, religious, political and social phrases, declarations and promises. The supporters of reforms and improvements will always be fooled by the defenders of the old order until they realize that every old institution, however barbarous and rotten it may appear to be, is maintained by the forces of some ruling classes. And there is only one way of smashing the resistance of these classes, and that is to find, in the very society which surrounds us, and to enlighten and organize for the struggle, the forces which can and, owing to their social position, must constitute a power capable of sweeping away the old and creating the new. (21)

It is actually true that people are always deceived by politicians and cannot decide where the truth is. The trick of mass destruction weapons of course hid the political interests of Bush and Blair who constitute the "ruling classes" and "the defenders of the old order." They wanted to get rid of Saddam and consume the Iraqi oil. However, their power cannot be defeated until another a new system is created and destroy the old one.

V-Conflict of Class in the Form of "Iraquatrains"

In fact, Harrison depends on the use of classical forms to make his poetry easily accessible. He clearly highlights the issue of the power of language, with his use of particular, suitable and available forms of poetry – quatrains, ABAB rhyme patterns, particularly rhyming couplets – in order to attain wider readership. Harrison makes his poetry more powerful simply by trying to reach more people. Indeed, the consideration of the power of language is "double-sided" as it can be authoritative, prominent and important, but only if it is read by people. There is a limited trialing in Harrison's work as he is satisfied with allowing the form to hail readers, and the language to influence them. In other words, Harrison uses simple form and simple language to come close to the readers' hearts, and influence their minds.

From a Marxist point of view, a work of art should be international and should contribute to world art. Blunden comments on Marx's interest in the "internationalist approach to literature and art" saying:

Characteristic of Marx and Engels was their profoundly internationalist approach to literature and art. They paid equal attention to the art of all nations, European and non-European, large and small, believing that every people makes its own unique contribution to the treasure-house of world art and literature. Their interests included the development of art and literature in England, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Russia as well as the artistic and cultural treasures of the East or of such small countries as Ireland, Iceland, and Norway. Judging by their notes, the ancient cultures of the indigenous inhabitants of the New World also came within their field of vision. (1)

Hence, Harrison's poem "Iraqatrain" is made available to a wide readership as a result of its presentation on that easy form. It is a simple poem in its structure, and thus is a simple, straightforward poem to hear or read. There are no wild shifts in meter, narrative voice or rhyme, and this increases the power of the language and makes it more special. "Iraqatrain" is a poem that explodes into a tirade of harsh, violent exclamations during a heated argument about class differences and injustice in Britain during the Iraqi War, the harsh divisions in British society and the dull, evil power of words. Indeed, the setting of the poem itself can be seen as a metaphor representing Harrison's view of Iraqi war – a battlefield, dominated by anger and violence.

Harrison expresses the conflict between class and language through the form of the poem also. He uses the quatrain form and includes it in the title of the poem as "Iraqatrain" is composed of "Iraq" and "quatrains". The poem is composed of six four-line stanzas rhyming "abab." They are called alternating quatrains. "Iraqatrain" is written in iambic pentameter featuring six quatrains in an ABAB rhyme scheme, like the sonnets in *The School of Eloquence*. The loud voice of the speaker who tells the story from the British point of view is strongly emphasized and it frequently breaks the regularity of the meter when it speaks in the dialogue. The poet speaks in pentameters most of the time when he speaks on the tongue of the Iraqi people whose speech plays against the classicism of the meter. By the different rhythms of the two voices, Harrison successfully underlines the discrepancy of the characters' attitudes. This is apparent in the

fifth stanza which is spoken the Iraqi people. Whereas the fifth stanza is smooth and casual, the sixth stanza is complex and rough as it shows the brutality of the invaders and is more suitable for the tyranny of the invaders.

Harrison defines himself and his alienation by his use of language. He uses the common language of the working class not only to show how his thinking has been inhibited by his poverty of language, but also to voice the frustrations of his class. There are many examples of his use of common language like the words "fingered", "Brum bum," "bombing bruted surgical" and "shrapnelled scalp." The power of the language is that it creates the class. In a complete reversal of the norm, and indeed of Harrison's poetry, it is language that controls class, rather than the upper classes controlling the language. He clearly conveys the power of language through his poetry as he uses his poetry to rage against the literary dominion of the educated elites. For example, he uses words of the educated like, "Decapitation", "Bushibboleth's" and "Bushkrieg Juggernaut". In such a way, Harrison forces his audience to examine issues of class and language by making his words impossible to ignore. Moreover, the poem reflects Marx's ideas of alienation from other classes of the society. By using different voices, different accents as well as confused fragmented discussions, he criticizes the society and the class distinctions in it.

The poem brings an interesting point of view although Harrison does not give any concrete suggestions for solving the social situation. Harrison concludes the poem with the following lines:

Now Death's open-eyed as all the blind-
folds have been bagged by Bush and Blair. (Harrison 1)

Besides, he starts the poem with the following lines:

Go round to Downing St, get Tony Blair's hard disc
Here's certainly a man from whom children are at risk.
(Harrison 1)

Both the beginning and end of the poem indicate that Harrison's poem belongs to some other working class roots and thus point to the fact that his working class background enables him to see the situation from the point of view of working class people as well as that of the middle class. As mentioned earlier, the middle class includes persons

who are not employers, but who serve the capitalist class in high administrative positions and part of the intellectuals, the high military and civil officials, etc. Hence, Harrison belongs to the middle class as he is an intellectual who has tried to command the language to be a member of the middle class. He was originally from the working class because his father and grandfathers were laborers who sell their labor power in order to live. He has tried to prove his theory that language is the element that determines people's position in society, but after considering the events in Iraq and in the world in general, he comes to realize that class distinction still dominates societies and categorizes people.

VI-Conclusion

This paper has attempted to explore the conflict of class and the power to master words in the poetry of Tony Harrison, precisely, in his poem "Iraqatrain". At the very beginning, I've tried to focus attention on the clash of classes in society which stands as a main theme in Harrison's poetry. Then, an overview of the political and historical background of "Iraqatrain" has been given. The situation of the British society today as marked by an increasing consciousness of the big difference between rich and poor has been tackled. The second section has dealt with Harrison's life with an illustration of his shift from a working class life towards articulacy and culture. The third section of this paper has illustrated the conflict of class in the form and theme of the poem. To Conclude, Harrison's "Iraqatrain" is a poem that has a strong social concern. For further research, one recommends exploring the social element in Harrison's "Iraqatrain". Another important issue is modern political implications in Harrison's "Iraqatrain". Finally, a point worth researching is the linguistic features in Harrison's "Iraqatrain".

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