

# The Speech of the Speechless in Harrison`s Selected Poems

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## Abstract:

The research tackles the power of language in creating racial conflict. The research tries to prove the importance of self-expression regardless of the means. Everyman should be granted opportunities to express themselves by using any language. There is no main language or minor one. Tony Harrison grants his articulate voice to his tongueless people to convey their suffering. He wants to explain their dilemma to the responsible people. He uses dialect in his poetry to reveal the beauty and activity of this language. The research traces Harrison's ` steps in granting his voice to his people to depict their experiences. He wants to make the dumb majority speak through his poems. His voice is granted to the exploited and oppressed people of the lower class. He grants them his articulate voice to explain to the prestigious class their untold suffering and marginalization because of nothing, save their modest origin. He mirrors the dilemma of his northern England where he was born. The voice and 'proper English' turn to be an obsession in Harrison`s poetry.

Key words: dialect, proper language, self- expression, Harrison, marginalization .

## كلام الصامتين في اشعار هارسن

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### المستخلص :

يتناول البحث دور اللغة في توحيد النفوس ودورها في خلق التميز العنصري بين الناس، فاللغة سلاح ذو حدين وحسب نية المتكلم ، وهذا البحث سلط الضوء على ضرورة منح الآخرين فرصة للتعبير عن الذات بغض النظر عن اللغة التي يستعملونها، وأثبت عدم وجود لغة اساسية ولغة ثانوية. منح هارسن لغته للناس البسطاء من اجل التعبير عن معاناتهم، وبهذا يكون قد وضح مأساتهم للمسؤولين. استخدم هارسن متفصدا اللغة العامية في شعره من

اجل كشف مواطن الجمال والحياة في تلك اللغة. تابع البحث خطوات هارسن لمنح قدرته اللغوية للغير لوصف معاناتهم. أراد هارسن منح الطبقة الفقيرة موقعا لمخاطبة الطبقات العليا بلغتهم ولهجتهم، لان التهميش بواسطة اللغة لا يختلف عن أي تهميش آخر.

Tony Harrison (1937 - ) reflects the suffering of his people in his poetry . His modest origin enriches his poetry with new themes and new attitudes towards dialects. He shoulders his pen the responsibility of granting voice for depraved working class people. He wants to make the dumb majority speak through his poems. His voice is granted to the exploited oppressed people of the lower class. He grants them his articulate voice to explain to the prestigious class their untold suffering and marginalization because of nothing save their modest origin. He mirrors the dilemma of his northern England where he was born. The voice and 'proper English ' turn to be an obsession in Harrison`s poetry. It is worthy to explain the source of this call.

A good accent and a suitable language stand against Harrison`s wish to gain a scholarship. His Yorkshire dialect and his accent in reading poetry make the responsible prevent him from joining this scholarship. Harrison as a poet cannot forget the cruelty in correction of his accent and the mocking of his pronunciation that leave their impact on his future decision to rise the dialect to be equal to the received pronounced English (Spencer 95) .He makes his best to learn ' proper English' to use it later on against the speakers of this language since " language plays an important role in distribution of power within the society and sustains class divisions" (Andersen 236). Harrison puts new illumination on the effect of linguistic distinction on people and on the language itself, he:

Investigated the significance of native sounds and native Roots...more particularly he is a poet of industrial North of England who has explored the cultural rift that divides his Educated adult eloquence and ' sophistication ' from the a abrupt reticence of his working- class boyhood.(Sanders 609)

He is so loyal to his people when he explains the depression of his people in spite of his ambition to achieve articulation, which creates a wide gap between him and his class. He lacks the old means of communication with them after being eloquent. His new language keeps his parents in their ever-lasting reticence and this is the price of articulation (Harrison 112). He reveals the suffering of tongueless people. His ambition surpasses this wish to use the dialect in his poem to prove that it has certain creativity and power. He writes part of his poems using non-standard English, its oral sounds with diction, syntax, unstable explosive compound and grammar of regional speech he treasures even the spirit and immediacy of working class language. His approximation of standard alongside with no- standard is dared action and his:

Attributing to the working- class of the north of England a 'richer engagement, a more sensual engagement ,with language, he brings that sensual vigor , wit, and immediacy of working-class Yorkshire speech into exciting a magma with literary English (Greenbelt 2531) .

Harrison learns the proper English so as to be able to write poetry and to translate the suffering of the lower class who lose the means of communication with high class due to their language at the same time " Harrison`s expert polysyllabic and colloquial rhymes give the firm impression of a common man expressing himself in his own voice; his lexicon is that of a conversation rather than that of an orator"(Thorley 4). The modest class chooses silence to be the best means of communication with their oppressor. Harrison adopts this noble role of reflecting the dilemma of the tongueless people. He is one of the writers of the working class. When he imposes his control over the language, he wants to show the high class their grave fault in dealing with the working class. He tries to take revenge from his oppressors who impede his people free use of their dialect. When they control the artistic power; he tries to impose the poetic rules of what they call' the wrong world':

Working- class writers, those 'of the wrong world' take control of the means of artistic production specifically the elaborate formalities offered by the English verse tradition. In their hands, expertise is means boot of memories revenge and

of triumphant asserting ...they fashion 'oppositional meanings out of fundamental bourgeois establishment of poetic forms.(Roberts 571)

Harrison in his " Heredity" (1978) explains the dilemma of his two uncles who suffer from obstacle in their language. His first uncle is a stammer and the second is dumb. Harrison on purpose selects the physical cripple to be related to self-expression. The poet starts his poem with a grave question that is raised by his eloquent oppressors regarding the source of his genius as a poet. Harrison seems to remember his dilemma with language when he is humiliated by his teachers who mocks his northern accent and this leads to stop his study because his failure to speak properly. He seems to have dual views over language. Though he achieves full control over language, his new power will serve his oppressor not his people who again will not understand their son's language. He wants his father to understand his language.

Harrison is confronted with an appalling question mark: how can he show his genius in language and at the same time be understood by his lower people. Harrison shows the effect of language in destroying familial ties. Articulation make Harrison understood from his eloquent and lose the means of communication with his people (Sara 30) .The same power that raises him in art will separate him from his people. His two uncles seem to suffering from the very situation. Harrison cleverly proves that any inarticulate can be improved and be a poet and from such a class, great poets can be born. Harrison via his uncles seems to learn the first language ' silence'. His short prefatory lyric shows the dilemma of his people and himself:

How you became a poet's mystery!  
Wherever did you get your talent from?  
I say: I had two uncles, Joe and Harry-  
One was a stammer, the other dumb. (Luke 111)

Harrison uses his English to reveal the pains of his people who do not speak properly and he understands the "power and the word... the city of Leeds remains imprinted if not on the loom then

at least in the mind`s eyes" ( Kellher 4) . In his "National Trust" (1978) Harrison decides to grant the tongueless people an opportunity to reveal their oppression publically with a language that can be understood by the pergeoestic class. In this poem he advises the historical and social association to care for the lower silent class and reveal their crisis. The lower people receive no response save " hush- hush" from their warders when they try to say their word in their language. Now with the support of Harrison they succeed to pronounce their suffering in standard language. Harrison wishes to direct the search for historical and architectural specifically to the mine in Cornwall or the coalfield because there they can find the real treasures of people who are the unknown soldiers who build the society. Harrison says:

Bottomless pits. There`s one Castletone,  
and stout upholders of our law and order  
one day thought its depth worth wagering on  
and borrowed a convict hush-hush from warders  
and winched him down; and back, flogging ,grey, mad, dumb.  
Not even a good flogging made him holler! (Greenbelt 2531) .

Harrison in this poem re-emphasizes the importance of offering the working class more respect because they are the real national trust. In the second stanza, he reveals the process of killing the language of the working class by the gentlemen. He draws the attention of his society to the important role of the working class in building the strong economic system that the rich enjoy their fruits. He explains this when he says:

O gentlemen, better way to plumb,  
the depth of Britain`s dangling a scholar,  
Say, here at the booming shaft at Taiwan road  
These gentlemen who silenced the men`s oath,  
And killed the language that they swore it in. (Greenbelt 2531)

Harrison again emphasizes the role of the working class in building society .Their sole problem that the upper class marginalizes them because of their modest origin. They achieve their roles silently because they are forbidden to speak their modest accent. In spite of

not appearing in the history because of their poverty that is regarded by Harrison as the vital way of self- expression. They achieve their role faithfully, he says that: "The dumb go down in history and disappa And not one gentlemen`s been brought to book: the tonguless men gets his land look" (Greenbelt 2532).

The right to use language regardless whether dialect or standard occupies a large part of Harrison's poems. In his " Book Ends", he decides to step forward in his mission when he intends to write in his Yorkshire dialect to force his gentlemen to read the language that they refused. Now the lower is in need to study the dialect so as to have full comprehension of his poems. His aim is the marriage of the two languages when he writes the same poem with standard and non-standard language. He aims to expose the flexibility of the regional language that is rich with terseness. He says:

Shocked into sleepiness you `re scared of bed  
 We never could talk much, and now do`nt try.  
 You are like book ends the pair of you, she`d say  
 Hog that gate, say nothing, sit, sleep, stare...  
 The " scholar" me, you , worn out on lower pay,  
 Only our silence made us seem a pair.

.....  
 A night you need my company to pass  
 And she not here to tell us we`re alike.  
 There scarcely room to carve the FLORENCE, on it –  
 Come on, it`s not as if we`re wanting verse.  
 It`s not as if we`re wanting a whole sonnet!

.....  
 You said you`d always been a clumsy talker  
 And couldn't find another, shorter word  
 For " beloved" or for "wife" in the inscription,  
 But not too clumsy that you can`t still cut:

..... (Greenbelt 2532)

Harrison is so enthusiastic to show the vitality of his regional language that he shows in his " Book Ends". He injects in his writing the standard and non-standard. His enthusiasm for linguistic union appears in his " Long Distance". Harrison writes three stanzas in

this poem with the dialect of north England. He switches between dialect and standard. He wants to defy and solve the chains that separate the two languages. Perhaps Harrison wishes more than this via the marriage between the two languages. He seems to make the eloquent fall in amiss because of their ignorance in the non-standard language. He silence them for the first time to taste the bitterness of his low class. The dialect is injected with values and experiences of its speakers ( Gregason 5) Harrison does not use the two languages only ,but he:

Creating juxtaposition, tension, and new relationships between languages that have traditionally been kept hierarchically discrete, they linguistically embody their interstitial experience of living between metropolis and margin, canon and creol, schoolbooks and street( Greenbelt 1462)

He refuses the racialism between languages to specialize certain language with workers and the other with employee. The unity between the two can fruit. If there are stylistic mistakes in the original languages, there is also limitless love and passion. One cannot neglect the talkers of this dialect. Though " Long Distance" does not refer directly to the silence of northern English, it confronts the linguistic crises when it brings dialect and slang face to face and make historical reconciliation between the two. The poem carries autobiographical element. It talks about the departure of his mother and the continual grief of his father. He writes:

Carrots choke us wiou`t your mam`s white sauce!  
Them sweets you brough me you an have e`m back.  
Ah`ndiabetic now. Got all the facts.  
Ah`ve allus liked things sweet! But now ah push  
food down mi throat! Ah`d sooner do w`iout.  
And t`only reason now for beer`s to flush  
(sof` dietician said mi kidneys out.) (Greenbelt 2533)

Harrison selects a representative from the working class to show the extent of horror that language achieves on him. He selects his father to be the sample. His father is a reticent baker who is so loyal to his society. He lives his entire life in silence and dies without

release. He wishes to gain a release from his oppressor so as to free his tongue that turns to be as heavy as lead. Harrison blames England for such injustice and humiliation via the marginalization of their accent to be like "ash". It neglects its faithful members who have modest demand of free self-expression. Harrison writes in the last stanza of the poem:

I get it all from earth my daily bread  
But he lingered for release from mortal speech  
That kept him down. The tongue that weighted like lead.  
The barker`s man that no-one will see rise  
And England made to feel like some dull loaf  
Is smoke, enough to sting one person`s eyes  
And ash(not unlike flour)for one small loaf. (Greenbelt 2535)

Harrison grants his eloquence to his people to say their words. He accepts to be a voluntary interpreter of the blight of his class. Language in spite of being a vital means of expression; it can be a vital means of oppression. It is proved to be a deadly weapon that has the power to kill other minor accent and its speakers` spirits. The war of languages has its victims and punishments to silence the losers and provide the victorious with a scourge to wipe any other languages. . Harrison enjoys the merit and demerit of both languages so he has certain authority to reveal the attitudes towards the two. He finds a wonderful product of collecting the two in one mould. There is no language that is superior to another and there is no inferior language. There is no exclusive language for the king and other for the beggars. Every language has its value, people, generation , religion and location. Harrison tries to solve the barriers between standard and accents. Harrison shows loyalty not only to his uneducated people, but also to his first language. He shows courage in initiating his campaign to gain respect for his people`s accent and to all types of dialects.



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