Facultad de Filología

GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES

TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

CURSO: 2021-2022

Título: Tony Harrison's Poem *V.* (1985): A Reading. / El Poema *V.* (1985) de Tony Harrison: Una Lectura.

Alumno: Pablo Rodríguez Zambrana

Firmado:

Tutor: Miguel Juan Gronow Smith

GRONOW SMITH MIGUEL JUAN - 52695645T

Firmado digitalmente por GRONOW SMITH MIGUEL JUAN - 52695645T
Fecha: 2021.10.22 12:33:56 +02'00'

Table of contents

[*] The formatting and style of this document have followed the Author-Date system of *The Chicago Manual of Style* (17th edition).

1. Preliminary Remarks and Objectives

The present Project, keeping in mind the inevitable limitations of space which prevail at such moments, aims to provide as comprehensive an analysis as possible of Tony Harrison's most influential poem, *V.*.[1] Its main objective is to examine thoroughly the different 'discursive strands'[2] that go into the making of Harrison's long, complexly structured composition, so as to bear witness to the intricate interaction of four such pivotal strands, identifiable, in terms of this Project's postulates, as the sociolinguistic, the elegiac, the historical-diachronic, and the metapoetic, a challenging combination detectable on many occasions throughout Harrison's oeuvre, while also constituting a phenomenon which, likewise, academic and critical sources also tend to confirm.

This study emerges out of the fascination of its author with the figure of Tony Harrison as an immensely versatile and socially committed poet, capable of combining a sublime literary talent and an arresting style with the impact-laden denunciation of political-social issues on a range of scales and via a gamut of formats (theater, live spectacle, poetry, television ...). For example, a first contact with Harrison's poetry was through "A Cold Coming," an intense long-poem on the Gulf War of 1991, commissioned by *The Guardian* newspaper and published as the conflict was actually unfolding; which was followed by the discovery of the 1974 poem "Them & [uz]," with its much more exclusively personal tone and content, on the subject of linguistic discrimination, something which Harrison suffered as a schoolboy at the hands of his teachers, given his very marked Yorkshire accent; to end up fortuitously viewing the film version of *V.*, available on the internet,[3] an occasion which confirmed it was a poem worthy of being analysed in greater depth. *V.* is, therefore, a key option when it comes to acquiring a detailed vision of some of the crucial elements inherent to Harrison's poetry, especially within the monumental tradition of the long poem in English during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, besides confirming the role played by the four already-mentioned discursive strands in the consolidation of this same class of poetry.

[1] The poem, first published in 1985, became a massive media phenomenon when a film version of it, directed by Richard Eyre, was broadcast by Channel 4 television on November 4, 1987, reaching an audience of several million according to Neil Astley, editor of Bloodaxe Books (Harrison 1989, 35).
[2] Following Brown and Yule's *Discouse Analysis*, the analysis of discouse is basically understood here as "the analysis of language in use" (1983, 1). This way, linguistic forms are seen as dependent on "the purposes or functions which those forms are designed to serve in human affairs" (ibid.).
[3] An option to watch it is this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FA3AL14d05k&t=1376s

2. The Figure of Tony Harrison

Tony Harrison was born on April 30, 1937 in Leeds, West Yorkshire, England. He was the first son of Harry Ashton Harrison, a baker, and Florrie Harrison. He has one younger sister (Guardian Media Group 2000). He grew up in a working-class, post-war environment, and received an education at Leeds Grammar School thanks to a scholarship. Later, he studied Classics at Leeds University and also took a Diploma in Linguistics there, all of which entailed a distancing from his austere background, a situation made even more palpable by his later professional success as a writer (The Editors of Poetry Foundation 2021).

The uneasiness felt by this irreconcilable division has marked his career as poet, translator, dramatist, and filmmaker (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2008). In an interview for *The Guardian*, Harrison stated the following: "They [Harrison's parents] felt if you're launched on a path of education, it would take you completely away from them, and it does" (Guardian Media Group 2000). He published his first collection of poetry, *Earthworks*, in 1964. When it came to press, his first full-length book of poetry, *The Loiners*,[4] in 1970, won him a certain degree of notoriety, while, at the same time, his artistic progress further undermined his relationship with his family, borne out by what he also had to say in the same interview: "My mother hated my early poems. I didn't give her *The Loiners* because I knew she would find it upsetting" (ibid.)." In his review of *The Loiners* for the BBC cultural magazine, *The Listener*, English writer John Fuller remarked: "The sheer vigour and intelligence of Harrison's poetry is as heady as young wine, and should produce great things when it matures" (The Editors of Poetry Foundation 2021), thus affirming Harrison's literary potential.

However, more significant in his early career as a writer was his incursion into drama. He wrote *Aikin Mata*, a version of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, in 1964, and set the action of the play in Nigeria, where Harrison had been a lecturer in Ahmadu Bello University. According to Rachel Bower, this play contains "three strands (…) [that] become cornerstones in his wider oeuvre: the celebration of idiom, non-standard, local and spoken forms of language; the commitment to inter-linguistic and cross-cultural translation and collaboration; and the developing of theatrical works for (…) once-only

[4] The term 'Loiner' is a slang demonym for an inhabitant of Leeds, West Yorkshire. "Loiner." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. https://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/109882 (accessed June 6, 2021).

performances" (2018). In 1973, London National Theatre director John Dexter invited Harrison to translate Moliere's *Le Misanthrope*. As in his previous play, he set his version of *The Misanthrope* in 1966 France, in this case (The Editors of Poetry Foundation 2021).

Harrison went on to have a successful career. Among his wide-ranging work there are other noteworthy plays such as his *Phaedra Britannica*, a 1975 adaptation of Racine's *Phèdre*, together with *The Trackers of Oxyrhyncus* (1990) and *Fram* (2008); his collection of poetry entitled *From the School of Eloquence and Other Poems* (1978), while not forgetting other poetic works such as *V.* (1985) and *Laureate's Block and Other Occasional Poems* (2000). Harrison is also known for his contribution as a pioneer in the genre of the film/poem, of which Richard Eyre's rendition of *V.* for Channel 4 television in 1987 is an example, alongside other critically acclaimed film/poems such as *The Blasphemers' Banquet* (1989), *The Gaze of the Gorgon* (1992) and *Prometheus* (1998). In the British Council's entry for Tony Harrison, Susan Tranter has made the following remarks:

> Harrison's influence has been considerable, discernible in the work of poets as different as Simon Armitage, Sean O'Brien and Paul Farley. His reappropriation of regional voices in the palaces of high culture, and his efforts to interpret that culture accessibly for a wide audience, using it to enlighten, enrich and make sense of modern life, has been of lasting significance. (n.d)

Likewise, a string of prizes in Harrison's career illustrates further this significance. His work has received awards such as the PEN/Pinter Prize 2009, the European Prize for Literature 2010, the David Cohen Prize for Literature 2015, the Premio Feronia 2016, amongst others, while he has also been the recipient of a UNESCO fellowship. Harrison has been a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature since 1984 and now resides in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England (The Editors of Poetry Foundation 2021).

3. Harrison's *V.*

3.1. Brief Overview

Tony Harrison wrote *V.* in the year 1985, during the 'Miners' Strike' that pitted the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) against the National Coal Board (NCB) in Britain, marking the first real sign of the inevitability of an imminent industrial reconversion within the British Isles. The poem opens with an epigraphic quote by Arthur Scargill, leader of the NUM: "My father still reads the dictionary every day. He says your

life depends on your power to master words." Keeping in mind how words and language constitute the raw material of the poem, as the equivalent of the coal dug from the ground over centuries, it is this long poem's voice that constitutes a cultural workface upon which poetry itself is mined and explored in the penultimate decade of the twentieth century. Poetry here, in fact, is revealed as being in a constant state of reconversion, discursively speaking.

In terms of content, the composition is about the visit of a poet to the grave of his parents at Holbeck Cemetery in Leeds. It is in this scenario that he finds the gravestones of his parents vandalised by numerous rude graffiti scrawls, a situation which prompts him to reflect upon the power of poetry to transform those desecrations into something worthwhile; until he is interrupted by a brutish skinhead, with whom he holds a conversation. This postmodern literary work unfolds via the exploration of subjects as diverse as the subsidence of the cemetery ground, the writer's emotional conflict as an ex-working class Loiner turned man of letters, the sociopolitical and historical implications of 'the versuses of life' (*V*), all set within the context of that same historical Miners' Strike of 1984-85, amongst others.

3.2. Introduction to the Analysis

The analysis of *V.* carried out here will be divided into a number of sections. The first section will consist of a commentary on the basic formal aspects of the text, followed by another brief section that will outline the connections of the poem with epic poetry and with Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." Following this, there will be a section dedicated to the analysis of the poetic voice and the poem's structural set-up, and then a final one dedicated to the more extensive analysis of what may be called its discoursive strands, that is, the sociolinguistic, the elegiac, the historical-diachronic, and the metapoetic strands.

3.3. Poetic Form

As mentioned above, at the outset the relevant formal aspects of the poem need to be dealt with before delving into it in more detail. To do so, this Project draws on *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Harrison's poem is seen to be made up of 112 elegiac stanzas, also known as elegiac quatrains or heroic quatrains, i.e., iambic pentameter quatrains rhymed abab (Preminger and Brogan 1993, 321), if traditional terminology may be cited. Given its considerable extension, its multi-faceted contents,

and date of composition, the 20th century, it is possible to affirm that *V.* is fully entitled to the label of 'modern long poem' (ibid., 721). In this same sense, and a subject to be discussed in more detail later, it is also necessary to confront the text's condition as a product of the postmodern era with the fact that *V.* adheres to a somewhat rigorous and classical poetic form, a point on which authors have commented (Haberkamm in Barfoot 1994, Thurston 2010, Fogarty 2020).

3.4. Connection to Epic Poetry

At the very beginning of its entry for 'modern long poem,' *The Encyclopedia* highlights Ezra Pound's definition of the epic genre as "the speech of a nation through the mouth of one man" (791). It is easy to see how this would apply to Harrison's poem, given its assessment of the state of a nation, or more widely, of humankind and the planet, besides, in metapoetic terms, the state of Poetry itself. The political atmosphere during the years of the 'Miners' Strike,' always with the Troubles in Northern Ireland[5] in the offing, seemingly splitting up the UK, becomes the backcloth to how the poetic voice comes to explain the antagonisms within his own local sociopolitical milieu, while also enabling the setting of the composition within a much larger time-scale. Given the constant allusions to geological and mining terminology in *V.*, the social schism that Thatcherism[6] brought about is mirrored in the rifts wrought in the very ground supporting Holbeck cemetery, while the cycle of coal is seen as a sort of explanatory principle for all kinds of social phenomena.

3.5. Connection to "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"

Gray's famous elegy clearly constitutes a presence at the base of Harrison's text. While an exhaustive analysis of *V.* would account for this connection, since this is not a comparative essay on both works, this subject will only be touched on briefly. In his analysis of *V.*, Michael Thurston remarks: "Setting and stanza have led critics to read *v.* as a variation on Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (2010, 148). Not in vain, Gray's use of this stanza is what seems to have popularized the term 'elegiac

[5] See Wallenfeldt, Jeff. 2019. "The Troubles | Summary, Causes, & Facts." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/event/The-Troubles-Northern-Ireland-history.

[6] Margaret Thatcher, prime minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990, and one of the spearheads of the spread of economic liberalism worldwide, managed to dismantle the Miners's Strike of 1984-85 without granting a single concession to the workers (Young 2019).

stanza' (Preminger and Brogan 1993, 321). The intertextual resonance of Gray's poem within *V.*, however, is evident not only from a stanzaic perspective but also with regard to the lexical content of certain lines. The following lines would seem to make this clear: "For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn" (l21, Gray) / "Listening to *Lulu*, in our hearth we burn" (377, Harrison). These other lines, which also echo one another in terms of rhythm and intonation may also be cited: "And froze the genial current of the soul" (52, Gray) / "It seemed a sort of prick-tease of the soul" (236, Harrison).

In terms of the literary, social, artistic, and historical aspects of these two compositions, Thurston again points out a list of common-ground elements which also highlight the epic dimension of Harrison's text, as already mentioned: **"**[B]oth ponder mortality, monuments, and memory. Most important, both are poems of vocational inquiry, meditations on the conditions of possibility that underwrite the individual poet and poetry itself in a specific historical moment" (148). Nonetheless, in this End-of-Degree Project all such aspects will be analysed within the complexly structured poem *V.* itself and not as contact points between it and Gray's composition. Even so, further references to Gray will naturally emerge at times.

4. The Poetic Voice and Basic Structural Set-up

The procedure that has been chosen as a means of carrying out this reading of *V.* is to give major relevance to the poetic voice, namely, to the interaction between its many-sidedness (a feature ubiquitous in the genre of the long poem), on the one hand, and its autobiographical character, on the other. This interaction is best understood thanks to the notion of 'implied author,' a concept coined by narratologists[7] to refer to "the governing consciousness of the work as a whole, the source of the norms embodied in the work" (Rimmon-Kenan 2005, 89). By taking into account the concept of poetic voice an overall understanding of the text may be achieved, while also facilitating the gathering together of the different discursive strands that go into the making of the poem, the analysis of which will be preceded by a brief explanation of the basic structural set-up of the poem as a whole, offered at the end of this fourth section. So, with regard to this long poem, implied author is the theoretical framework term as has just been defined. Within that framework, the poetic voice that operates throughout the poem consists of the interaction of the figure of Harrison as a person (autobiographical identity) and Harrison the poet,

[7] The term 'implied author' was coined by American literary critic Wayne Clayson Booth in his book *The Rhetoric of fiction*, originally published in 1961 by The University of Chicago Press.

who likewise is the poetic voice that operates throughout the long poem. That poetic voice, moreover, interacts as a kind of protagonist who comes into conflict with the figure of the skinhead. Throughout this Project, for convenience, the voice that represents the poet will be referred to as the poet-protagonist, whilst the one that represents the skinhead will be referred to simply as the skinhead.

But first, as a starting point, it is necessary to establish that the importance of the interplay between the two different voices in *V.* can be seen as a counterbalance to the fact that it is a composition written in a traditional poetic form, which demands the consistent application of syllabic and rhyming patterns (as was mentioned in section 3.3). In other words, in the case of this work, the modernist endeavour resides in its content and not in its form. The aftermath of the fierce contest among voices that is found within *V.* is the birth of a modernist voice, or, as it has also been called, a "barbaric" voice (Taylor 2015). Taylor claims the following: "The barbarian voice in British poetry is typified by the use of a politicised nonstandard idiolect which celebrates 'deviant' diction, taboo language, humour, and a range of dialectal or regional accents" (ibid, 38-39), situating this voice in the legacy of W.H. Auden and the generations that followed him. Indeed, there is support for the use of the "barbaric" label for some of Harrison's poetry, at the very least to the extent that he is the author of the poem "The Rhubarbarians," whose first stanza reads: "Those glottals glugged like poured pop, each / rebarbative syllable, remembrancer, raise / 'mob' *rhubarb-rhubarb* to a tribune's speech / crossing the crackle as the hayricks blaze."

Now, as William Fogarty explains when analysing the above stanza, citing the *OED*, one of the meanings for the word *rhubarb*, apart from the plant, is "murmurous background noise, an indistinct conversation, *esp.* the repetition of the word 'rhubarb' by actors to represent such a conversation or the noise of a crowd" (2020, 228). Furthermore, this is echoed in the third stanza of *V.* with the use of the word *rabblement* (11)[8] which, following the *OED*, in the first place, leads on the noun 'mob' mentioned in "The Rhubarbarians," while, in the second place, generating the following meaning; I.1.a: "A class or category of people conceived of as forming a mob," but also to a form of babbling

[8] Throughout this Project poetic lines are indicated parenthetically by numbers as indicated in this case. Regarding spelling, capitalisation and italicisation, lines from *V.* are reproduced exactly as they appear in the Bloodaxe edition used as primary source for this Project.

speech; II.b: "A rambling, disjointed discourse or speech."[9] It is important to bear this in mind because, from the beginning of the poem, the poet-protagonist claims that he is wondering how he fits amongst his relatives' tombs, being the 'bard' he is, while ultimately being concerned with the subsidence of the cemetery ground. This, in turn, is worsened by the decadence in values represented by the football fans' desecration of the place, i.e., the actions of a 'mob' unable to express themselves coherently unless it is with hate and rage. It should not be forgotten that one important issue raised within *V.* is the tension between the patronising poetic task of the poet-protagonist, and what the second, definitely more 'barbaric' voice, has to say about such a task:

> 'The only reason why I write this poem at all
> on yobs like you who do the dirt on death
> 's to give some higher meaning to your scrawl.' (209-211)
> ……
> *Yer've given yerself toffee , cunt. Who needs*
> *yer fucking poufy words . Ah write mi own.* (269-270)

The poet-protagonist seeks articulation, believes he can make sense of the world and elevate the status of lesser cultural manifestations, or look at them through his particular lens. As a cultural critic, he regards the graffiti sprayed on the graves as a "repertoire of blunt four-letter curses" (51) that he can turn into art, "and make the thoughtless spraying of his team / apply to higher things, and to the nation" (131-132).

He is sickened by the whole state of affairs but makes a calm and reconciliatory analysis of this state of affairs nonetheless. This is because he aims to be didactic and exemplary. Since he is educated, while having his roots in a working-class neighbourhood milieu, he feels entitled to occupy the place of a 'common sense' figure, similar to that of an enlightened intellectual.[10] A good example of how he shows himself capable of getting down in the mud is the sportscaster moment, discursively speaking: "Then, pushed for time, or fleeing some observer, / dodging between tall family vaults and trees / like his

[9] "Rabblement, n." *OED Online*. Oxford UP. https://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/156998 (accessed June 6, 2021).

[10] Within the context of the British Enlightenment, the concept of 'common sense' (understood broadly as truth-reaching social debate on a wide-ranging number of subjects) was centrally advocated by the Philosophical Society of Aberdeen, formed in 1758, otherwise known as the Wise Club "for its concentration of very smart men," under the premise that "sharing knowledge and reasoning in common would ultimately benefit the common good, producing intellectual, moral, medical, and even economic betterment on a collective as well as individual scale" (Rosenfeld 2011, 66).

team's best ever winger, dribbler, swerver, / fills every space he finds with versus Vs." (53-56). With this he demonstrates that he does not only understand football culture but is also capable of being on the same psychological wavelength as the football hooligans who have ruined Holbeck Cemetery. Thanks to the use of the quotidian expression "pushed for time," he is able to convey the typical false sensation of football fanatics that they truly form part of their team, that they are the twelfth man in the Leeds United first team playing a game of football, as they hastily vandalise the graveyard where the arrangement of the tombstones acts as an obstacle course.

This way, asserting his stance as the espouser of common sense that is aware of the bigger picture, he appeals to the responsibility of society as a whole, of past generations, as well as of a wide range of positions within the political-ideological spectrum. A striking example of this appeal to a shared responsibility codified within the noun phrase 'another hand' may be cited here: "The prospects for the present aren't too grand / when a swastika with NF (National Front)'s / sprayed on a grave, to which another hand / has added, in a reddish colour, CUNTS (77-80)." Soon after those lines, the autobiographical and the sentimental codes at work within the poet-protagonist's speech converge. A narrative unfolds within poetic lines: "When I first came here 40 years ago" (89). It occurs as he unravels his backstory, remembering how his father used to address him as a child: "I helped dad with the flowers. He let me know / she'd gone to join my grandad up in Heaven" (91-92). Then the theme of shared responsibility reappears: "And though I'm horrified just who's to blame / that I find instead of flowers cans of beer / and more than one grave sprayed with some skin's name?" (98-100). Indeed, the question can be read in the same tone as if someone wondered how Adolf Hitler could have possibly ascended to power; it constitutes an invitation to reflect on the role of every person in such a historical-political catastrophe, only that the question is posed in the incipient phase of the process.

This provides, of course, further evidence for the fact that the poet-protagonist has a didactic aim. As someone denouncing society's decadence, he also wishes to be a chronicler of the times, aiming to make these social phenomena so conspicuous that people cannot ignore them: "I look at this word graffitied by some drunk / and I'm in half a mind to let it stay" (11-112). There is also an effort to preserve the dignity of the working class, going hand in hand with an attempt to demonstrate that he shares the same system of values as those dead whose graves are being defiled, through the seriousness and zeal

with which he attends to his own poetic craft: "The dead would want their desecrators caught!" (156). Not in vain, the poet-protagonist includes in his discourse, as well as in his ken, a number of professions: "Pitman" (151), "Grocer" (152), "Haberdasher" (423), etc.

However, the skinhead has an answer that exposes the hastiness in the poet-protagonist's assessment of the oppressive social, economic, and political milieu within the working class of the British Isles in the late 20th century: "*Ah'll tell yer then what really riles a bloke.* / *It's reading on their graves the jobs they did –* / *Butcher, publican and baker. Me, I'll croak* / *doing t'same nowt ah do now as a kid*" (185-188). As a matter of fact, one of the most thought-provoking aspects of *V.* is the give and take between the two voices regarding matters of alienation, class consciousness, oppression, and so on. The phonetic pun with which the poet-protagonist patronises the skinhead, as exemplified in the line "I wish on this skin's words deep aspirations" (173), is quickly counteracted by the skinhead's surprising show of intelligence and sense of humour. Relevant on this sense is the way he consistently avoids pronouncing the aspirated /h/ sound[11] while setting forth his point of view: "*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*" (177-180).

Besides displaying a rather rudimentary discourse (undoubtedly marred by fascist tendencies) which revolves around a key issue in late capitalism, i.e., that of unemployment, the skinhead is also aware of the hypocrisy of older generations, of religious indoctrination to appease the masses, and of the failure of metaphysical explanations for materially-based phenomena: "*When dole-wallahs fuck off to the void* / *what'll the mason carve up for their jobs?*" (198-199). The skinhead is such a tough nut to crack for the poet-protagonist that the latter is in fact put up against the ropes and brought down to his level: "Listen, cunt!" (205, uttered by the poet-protagonist).

The interplay within which both voices are involved reaches a critical moment when the poet-protagonist alludes to one of the 'Poètes maudits', Arthur Rimbaud, and his cryptic expression 'Je est un autre,' from the so-called "Lettres du Voyant," written

[11] More examples of the skinhead's lack of pronounciation of the /h/ sound are "*'er*" (166), "*'ard*" (189), "*'aberdasher*" (192), "*'eavy*" (245), "*'eard*" (249), "*'ow*" (250), "*'oles*" (256), "*'urt*" (267), "*'ere*" (272). Another aspiration-based pun had already appeared in Harrison's poem "Them & [uz]," included in *From The School of Eloquence* (1978), in this fashion: "You can tell the Receivers [RP English speakers] where to go / (and not aspirate it) once you know / Wordsworth's matter/water are full rhymes."

by the French poet in 1871. With this allusion, the poet-protagonist opens up and acknowledges that he is not so different from the skinhead, claiming that he has done his "bits of mindless aggro too" (221). What he means by this is that he also raged against political cynicism, as well as against what he considered highfalutin cultural manifestations, while exemplifying his claim with an anecdote which recounts how he used a fire hose to spray the people attending an opera recital where a soprano was singing at the same time as MP Hugh Gaitskill[12] was holding a political meeting, making fake promises to the crowd. Thurston, who avoids making reference to the theoretical figure of an 'implied author,' directly identifies the poet-protagonist with the figure of Tony Harrison, while providing a psychoanalytic reading of this stage of the poem:

> Harrison responds to being called out as "cunt," "wanker" (masturbatory), and "poufy") by narrating an anecdote in which he aggressively attacks a figure for effeminate high art (the soprano) in retaliation for her artistic "prick-tease of the soul" (…) Threatened by the "wobbly warble" and its "uplift beyond all reason and control," young Tony enhances his phallic authority (by picking up a fire extinguisher) and orgasmically sprays her. (2010, 154)

As outdated as psychoanalyst theories may be, they provide a useful theoretical frame for understanding what the poet-protagonist wishes to foreground in his discourse. Ultimately he is tackling the nature/nurture argument. He is questioning to what extent things that he was unaware of, i.e., subliminal processes, shaped the way he thought and how he interacted with the world around him, with women, as well as with the reality beyond his working-class neighbourhood. The skinhead, though, is tired of the hypocrisy of the older generations who blame the rebel youth for not mending their ways: "*And then yer saw the light and gave up 'eavy!*" (245); "*Ah've 'eard that from old farts past their prime*" (249). Showing off his shrewdness, the skinhead gives closure to the aspiration-based pun from earlier by paraphrasing Exodus 20:17 and Matthew 8:33 from the King James Version. On this occasion the /h/ sound, which he associates with the speech of those old hypocrites, is pronounced effectively: "*Covet not thy neighbour's wife, thy neighbour's riches.* / *Vicar and cop who say, to save our souls,* / *Get thee beHind me, Satan, drop their breeches* / *and get the Devil's dick right up their 'oles!*" (253-256).

[12] Hugh Todd Naylor Gaitskell was a British statesman, leader of the British Labour Party from December 1955 until his sudden death at the height of his influence in 1963 (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica n.d.).

Just further down in the poem comes the poignant realisation that the poet-protagonist was not arguing with a real person, but with a part of himself: "He aerosolled his name. And it was mine" (280). The atmospherics of this scene acts as an objective correlative for the voice's identity split: "the day's already dusk, half dark, half light" (288). From then on, the poet-protagonist is alone again, and everything that he had tried to amend with his craft vanishes: "That UNITED that I'd wished onto the nation / or as reunion for dead parents soon recedes" (289-290).

When the poet-protagonist returns home, he identifies himself prototypically with older generations of men, those who went to serve in the Second World War and lived in a less progressive, more sexist past. "Home, home, home, to my woman" (329), he says, echoing Brewster Highley's poem "My Western Home."[13] It is also the moment for him to empathise with his father, as a widower who spent the last years of his life disoriented in a rapidly transforming world that had left him behind: "The supermarket made him feel embarrassed. / Where people bought whole lambs for family freezers / he bought baked beans from check-out girls too harassed / to smile or swap a joke with sad old geezers" (353-356).

As the poem comes to an end, the poet-protagonist grows more and more inseparable from the biography of Tony Harrison, since he alludes to the name of Harrison's wife at the moment, the Greek soprano Teresa Stratas, known mainly for her recording of Alban Berg's "Lulu": "Alban Berg high D / lifted from a source that bears your name" (381-382). The figure of the poet-protagonist cannot be dissociated from that of Harrison the actual man in the same way as Harrison cannot escape his identity as a poet, since, as Lucie Houdu notes, it features as his profession "even in his passport" (2017, 4). Not only that, Tony Harrison's task as a poet persists beyond the grave. The very ending of the poem is an epitaph for future generations of "*Poetry supporter*(s)" (446). Writing "from the liminal space" (Handley 2016, 288), Harrison wants to teach his tomb's future visitors "about the value of poetic identity constructed out of contrasting elements" (ibid.): "*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*" (446-448). In the end, as the

[13] Highley's poem, originally published in the *Smith County Pioneer* newspaper in 1873, suffered a number of changes until it became the song "Home on the Range," hymn of the state of Kansas, USA. The line of this song echoed in *V.* is the first line of its second stanza: "Home, home on the range" ("USA State Song: Kansas - Home on the Range" 2017).

skinhead adumbrated, the poet's legacy will be a grave inscribed with a crude four-letter word, POET.

Now that the poem has been dealt with here in its full extension, via the study of the poetic voice, it would be useful to present the basic structural set-up of *V.*, while dividing the text into eight main narrative parts; In this way, an overall appreciation of this long poem's layout may be provided before dealing in depth with the discursive strands that go into the making of it.

What may be considered the first part of the poem, between lines 1 to 48, is where the poet-protagonist introduces his quest to find his place as a poet amongst the graves of his dead relatives, while denouncing the precarious state of the cemetery as a physical space which, topographically, is a piece of land within a region linked to the mining industry, while it actually stands above a pit that threatens its structural integrity. The second part ranges from line 48 to line 84 and deals with the poet's noticing of the 'V' letters sprayed by football hooligans all over the graveyard, while also providing his interpretation of them as signs of life's conflicts, the collisions among conflicting political and religious views, etc. The third part comprises lines 85 to 132, where the poet-protagonist grows more autobiographical and speaks in greater detail about his family, telling of his first visit to Holbeck Cemetery with his father to see his grandmother's grave, and the guilt that he feels for not having visited the cemetery more often.

Next, from line 133 to line 164, the fourth part may be sighted, in which the poet-protagonist reflects upon the postmodern urban scenario, filled with neon insignia that symbolise the rule of corporations, together with xenophobic graffiti. Thereafter, the fifth and largest part of *V.* begins once such reflections have been voiced. It is possible to see how this same fifth section can also be subdivided into two subsections: 5.1 and 5.2. The former begins at line 165 and reaches as far as line 220 and is, as commented above, mainly concerned with the confrontation involving the two voices concerning the issue of unemployment as the material reason for the desecration of the graves marked with racial slurs, in this case. The acrid debate between the two voices carries on in subsection 5.2, from line 221 to line 280, where the poet-protagonist recounts the anecdote about the female soprano, while the skinhead rails against the hypocritical and patronising message being transmitted by the poet-protagonist on doing so.

The skinhead's 'disappearance' in line 280 marks the beginning of the sixth part, which continues up to line 332, when the poet-protagonist sees a few kids playing football, and leaves the cemetery with the excuse that he is afraid his mother's ghost will scold him for having used so many swear words. This part also contains further topographical comments on the subsoil of Leeds and its environs, as well as on the poet's own death, and, therefore, on his return to the cemetery once that moment arrives.

Immediately after, the seventh section unfolds, between lines 333 and 368, where the poet describes a typical day in his father's last years of life. He stresses the disorientation that he must have felt as a lonely widower in the late twentieth-century, multicultural Leeds. Finally, part eight, from line 369 to the end, contains the description of the reunion of the poet with his wife at home and the revelation of his planned epitaph. Here the figure of Leopold Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses* inevitably comes to mind.

5. The Sociolinguistic Strand

Something readily distinguishable after establishing the notion of 'barbaric' speech in *V.*, is the employment of two different dialects of English as the scenario within which the struggle can unfold between the two opposing voices, or characters, those of the skinhead and the poet-protagonist. The tension between the two voices, revealed as the poem evolves, is none other than an internal, multifaceted confrontation inside the 'heart' of the voice-as-poet, as implied author, as the poem's 'presiding genius,' that constitutes an example of what linguists and literary critics, after Bakhtin, call *heteroglossia*, defined by philologist Vyacheslav Ivanov as "the simultaneous use of different kinds of speech or other signs, the tension between them, and their conflicting relationship within one text" (1999, 100). As a matter of fact, Terry Eagleton claimed the following:

> Harrison is a natural Bakhtinian, even if he has never read a word of him. No modern English poet has shown more finely how the sign is a terrain of struggle where opposite accents intersect, how in a class divided society language is cultural warfare and every nuance a political valuation. (Liang 2009, 112)

Worthy of note is the interest taken in Harrison not only by critics, but also by theorists.

The voice-as-scenario evolves via a mixture of registers, formal and informal,[14] archaic and contemporary, and which includes words and expressions the use of which is associated largely with the north of England, such as "vexed" (52), "I grant" (81) or "*what really riles a bloke*" (185). Thus, keeping in mind the analysis of discursive strands being carried out in this Project, the composition also becomes a space for sociolinguistic inquiry. The skinhead's Yorkshire accent, properly represented in the printed version's spelling, is but the culmination of the poetic voice's endeavour to come to terms with his social and geographical roots, identified as it is with someone (Harrison himself ultimately) born and raised in a working-class environment in Leeds but educated in the humanities at university.

The socio-cultural milieu associated with this same northern dialect is masterfully introduced throughout *V.* with brilliant subtlety. As an indicator of this same milieu, it seems possible to discern an allusion to a well-known nursery rhyme as early as line 3 of the poem.: *butcher, publican, and baker*. It is probably no coincidence that the enumeration present in "the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker" appeared in a popular songs book from 1812 by John Bell, whose full title reads: *Rhymes of Northern Bards: being a curious collection of old and new Songs and Poems, Peculiar to the Counties of Newcastle, Northumberland and Durham*. The frequent inclusion of unequivocally northern speech features, as well as the attention to detail shown when 'transcribing,' in the case of the written version, or reciting, in the case of the 1987 film version of *V.*, the skinhead's oral interventions, has been analysed by Lindsay Hair as a way of "bringing [the cultural others] under (linguistic) governance," but in consequence as "a justification for the manifest inability to re-possess his [Harrison's] lost roots," connecting this idea with William Labov's discovery that "upwardly mobile people usually lose 'the ability to switch "downwards" to their original vernacular'" (1996, 69).

What is perhaps more important, though, is that the poetic voice has certainly not lost the ability to fathom the evolution and the state of British socioeconomic and political reality in the late 1980s, and to verbalise a concern for the marginalisation of the lower classes, especially in the north of the UK, the sociocultural-sociolinguistic context out of

[14] For example, the formal register in the use of the modifier 'quite' (1) or the expression 'of a sort' (7), and a display of complex syntax at times, as in the case of lines 73-75: "Hindu/Sikh, soul/body, heart v. mind, / East/West, male/female, and the ground / these fixtures are fought on's Man," contrast with colloquialisms such as 'to be in half a mind to [do sth]' (112) or the verb 'nick' (136).

which the 'real author[-poet]' emerged. It is through a meticulous use of language and refined poetry that the skinhead's behaviour and attitude become discernible "as part of a socio-psychological pattern," whilst the skinhead himself, who belongs to a marginalised community of people whose interpersonal relationships revolve around colloquial exchanges, "is powerless to convey the modern phenomena of long-term unemployment within a vocabulary that deals with a conceptually distant past" (ibid, 72). The very allusiveness of the poem's title, an enigmatic *v* letter, and the inclusion of non-standard speech, form part of the modernist legacy that impels Harrison to "dismantle the structures of the conventional world and 'explode language'" in response to the new "urban and fragmentary" social milieu of the 1980s (Taylor 2015, 65).

In a way, the poetic voice's education has enhanced the horizon of his understanding, while how that understanding manifests itself verbally has also become enriched. Therefore, when coming face to face with the marginalised community whose emancipation is advocated by 'him', he is unable to make the skinhead understand his points, "egg[ing] him on" (263) to turn his *v* into a vagina in the graffiti: "he added a middle slit to one daubed V" (264). However, despite *V.*'s poet-protagonist's failure, the real poet Tony Harrison did actually manage to have an impact on his community of origin. Barrie Rutter, an actor who worked closely with and who admires Harrison claims that "[h]e'd taught me the dignity of my own voice, encouraged it" (Rutter 2017, 145). In fact, in 1992 Rutter founded Northern Broadsides, a theatre company "dedicated to the classics using the energy and sound of the 'northern voice'" (ibid.). Moreover, Harrison's concern with linguistic matters started in his childhood, and he has expressed his disquietude with the subject in the following fashion:

> I was aware of a hunger for articulation. And I think in retrospect, it came from not only the fact that I had an uncle who was deaf and dumb and one who stammered but a father who was reticent, shy, unable to express himself. And that the idea of articulation, expression, became for me absolutely vital to existence. (Liang 2009, 107)

Harrison has also acknowledged that he does not feel comfortable either in his place as a poet or in his old working-class background: "I'm in a way alienated from both, and I have to do justice to that alienation in the poem [i.e., *V.*]" (ibid., 112).

William Fogarty argues that when "nonstandard local speech registers" are included in poetry of the likes of *V.*, they "do more than just make memorable language:

they pattern particular marginalised languages into poetic forms that sustain a poem's aesthetic commitment against the conditions that would degrade it" (2020, 209). After all, it is with the inclusion of this Yorkshire non-standard register that, in metapoetic terms, the poem constitutes a space which provides for the representation of "the complicating forces that make poetry aesthetically and politically powerful" (ibid, 210), while confronting that same register with more sophisticated speech and a traditional form of poetry. *V.* generates "aesthetic and sociopolitical tensions, at once creating turbulent sociolinguistic environments and countering that turbulence with iambic pentameter, rhyme schemes and stanza breaks" (ibid.).

In the end, therefore, the very linguistic and sociolinguistic material out of which the poem is constituted bears witness to how alive it is transhistorically, i.e., at any and every moment in which it is read or listened to, as occurs in the case of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Consequently, the poetic voice is that of a social being, as well as that of a literary artist.

6. The Elegiac Strand

In order to pay the necessary attention to another of the dimensions of *V.*, while taking into account T.S. Eliot's pronouncement that we should not disregard "the truth that great works of art are humanistic monuments more beautiful and more meaningful when they are seen in relation to the aesthetic and intellectual tradition they are a part of" (T.S. Eliot cited in Elledge 1966), this current section of the Project in hand is dedicated to the study of the elegiac discursive strand present in the poem, within which variations on the commonplaces inherent to that same tradition emerge. Moreover, in modernist-postmodernist terms, what cannot be ignored metapoetically is that ringing the changes on the commonplace has itself become a commonplace. As an intertextually and interdiscursively complex text belonging to the late 20th century, formally composed in elegiac quatrains, and thus inevitably and consciously inherited from Thomas Gray's masterpiece "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," published in 1751, this Project would need to inquire into the ways in which the literary tradition of the elegy manifests itself in Harrison's long poem.

An eclectic point of reference for the analysis of the elegiac tradition along historical lines is David Kennedy's manual *Elegy* (2007), given that, its comprehensive critical scope builds on previous key studies by critics such as Peter Sacks (*The English*

Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats, 1985), Jahan Ramazani (*Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*, 1994), or Kate Lilley (*To Dy in Writinge: Figure and Narrative in Masculine Elegy*, 1988). However, any endeavour involving the identification and exploration of commonplace features of the elegiac tradition in *V.* inevitably involves the need to recognise their often subtle presence and, as a result, of the need for interpretative effort on the part of literary criticism when considering Harrison's long poem from the perspective of the art of the elegy.

While avoiding the historically-anchored definitions of 'elegy' expressed by Sacks or Ramazani (i.e., the elegy from Spenser to Yeats, or the elegy from Hardy to Heaney), what becomes more useful is the reference to one which is broad enough to justify the inclusion of *V.* within this same literary tradition, especially since what is being focused on are the recurring features within texts belonging to the elegiac tradition in English[15].

One such definition is that provided by *Britannica*: "[M]editative lyric poem lamenting the death of a public personage or of a friend or loved one; by extension, any reflective lyric on the broader theme of human mortality" (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 1999). Taking this definition into account, therefore, *V.* may be considered an elegiac text from the outset given how the poetic voice is found to be reflecting upon his future place amongst his dead relatives' graves: "Next millennium you'll have to search quite hard / to find my slab behind the family dead" (1-2). In Kennedy's words, "the elegist starts by seeking and asserting solitude" (2007, 26), and does so by describing himself as a different kind of man from his forebears. Furthermore, this mention of the next millenium would be thought of as an elegiac feature for the likes of Coleridge, who claimed the following: "As he will feel regret for the past or desire for the future, so sorrow and love become the principal themes of the elegy. Elegy presents every thing as lost and gone, or absent and future." (Kennedy 2007, 4). Moreover, a parallel version of these lines appears near the end of the poem: "Next millennium you'll have to search quite hard / to find out where I'm buried but I'm near / the grave of haberdasher Appleyard / the pile of HARPs, or some new neonned beer" (421-424). Here, the elegist projects an "imagined afterlife" (Kennedy 2007, 109), which may be read as a sort of atheistic

[15] Harrison's poem, of course, could not be fully appreciated if not seen in relation to this tradition. Quoting Eliot again: "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists" (Eliot 1982).

premonition in which the decline in humane, cultural values becomes further exacerbated, while constituting an actual (…post-postmodern?) future.

Following on from this more general point of departure, more specific features of the elegy can be detected in Harrison's long poem. When going through the graves at Holbeck Cemetery, the poetic voice describes the jobs that those buried there carried out when they were alive: "Wordsworth built church organs, Byron tanned / luggage cowhide in the age of steam" (13-14). The elegiac commonplace here precisely consists of remembering what the people mourned used to during their lifetimes. Although in terms of a close relationship with the deceased, in contrast to the distance between the deceased and the *V.*-based elegist at this specific moment in the long poem, these lines from Thomas Hardy's "The Going" (1912-13) do indeed foreground the commonplace concerned: "You were she who abode / By those red-veined rocks far West, / You were the swan-necked one who rode / Along the beetling Beeny Crest."

Another commonplace, more subtly introduced in Harrison's text, is that of the ritual of the scattering of ashes, flowers, petals, etc. It can be found in elegies such as Shelley's "Adonais" (1821), dedicated to Keats: "With which, like flowers that mock the corst beneath, / he had adorn'd and hid the coming bulk of death." Likewise, the Ur-example, as in the case of many elegiac commonplaces, is found in Milton's "Lycidas" (1638): "And every flower that sad embroidery wears; Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed, / And daffadillies fill their cups with tears, to strew the laureate hearse where Lycid lies." It is not surprising that the elegist in *V.*, given the already-mentioned late-twentieth-century cultural milieu that pervades the poem, distorts this convention by lamenting the vandalised, graffitied state of the graveyard: "How many British graveyards now this May / are strewn with rubbish and choked up with weeds" (85-86). Milton's use of the participle "strewn" acquires key importance here. Yet, at the same time, this denunciation of the disgusting appearance of the cemetery as a socio-cultural scenario exists alongside passages that mourn the much more idyllic past condition of the graveyard: "Where there were flower urns and troughs of water / And mesh receptacles for withered flowers / are the HARP tins of some skinhead Leeds supporter" (101-104).[16]The poetic voice even goes on to repair the damage done to his father's grave: "The ground's carpeted with

[16] As an area of analysis which cannot be detailed here, due to limitations of space, the differentiation between pastoral elegy, in terms of the classical tradition of Theocritus and Virgil, and personal elegy, is left unexplored here, while, rather, the tradition of the elegy is explored as an ongoing continuum.

petals as I throw / the aerosol, the HARP can, the cleared weeds / on top of dad's dead daffodils" (321-323). Leaving petals at the scene means that he, the poet-son, is not only dignifying the place but is also, as a self-conscious elegist, adhering to the tenets of the pastoral tradition present in elegy as a category of literature.

Another feature at work with the elegiac tradition is the fact that the elegist, as an act of humility, downplays his creative capacity and the usefulness of his task, namely, "to counter and resist chaos and oblivion" (Kennedy 2007, 26). The elegiac voice in *V.* does so, while underestimating the very phenomenon of the relevance of his poetry: "This pen is all I have of magic wand" (121). Likewise, further on, this same attitude of humility emerges in the acknowledgement that reinterpreting the skinhead's graffiti is 'cheating': "Though I don't believe in afterlife at all / and know it's cheating it's hard *not* to make / a sort of furtive prayer from this skin's scrawl, / his UNITED mean 'in Heaven' for their sake" (125-128). Inevitably, this expression of incapacity also has to do with the elegist's feelings of guilt. As an elegiac commonplace, this sense of guilt is often related to the circumstantial fact of not having been present at the actual moment of the last breath being taken, as it were. This is the case of Douglas Dunn's "Rereading Katherine Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories*," included in his book *Elegies*, originally published in 1985, a very moving elegiac sequence dedicated by the Scottish poet to his deceased artist-wife: "I did not come home that Friday. I flick / Through all our years, my love; and I love you still." Relevant also here is again Hardy's "The Going," dedicated to his first wife Emma: "Unmoved, unknowing / That your great going / Had place that moment, and altered all." In the case of *V.*, guilt is related to the poet-son-elegist's regret that he cannot spend more than a few minutes visiting the graves, due to the stress of his professional commitments: "My dad who came each week to bring fresh flowers / came home with clay stains on his trouser knees. / Since my parents' deaths I've spent 2 hours / made up of odd 10 minutes such as these" (93-96).

Nonetheless, this remorse is alleviated thanks to the notion that there will be a physical reunion of the elegist with his dead relatives in the cemetery once he has lived his life in full, a factor which functions as a reminder of the commonplace of the beatific vision within the elegaic tradition: "I tell myself I've got, say, 30 years. / At 75 this place will suit me fine" (305-306). This moment of alleviation echoes Ben Jonson's "On my First Son" (1616): "Seven years tho'wert lent to me (…) / For why / Will man lament the state he should envy?" Both elegists, as occurs often in the tradition, show that they are

not afraid of death, while even being able to envision it (beatific vision) as a potentially rewarding experience.

Another element of the elegiac tradition identified by Kennedy is that "elegists are always faced with unsatisfactory resurrections, unfinished and unfinishable conversations" (2007, 21). This convention is represented in *V.* when the poet is seen leaving the graveyard as night begins to fall, joking about a possible encounter with his mother's ghost: "Almost the time for ghosts I'd better scram. / Though not given much to fears of spooky scaring / I don't fancy an encounter with mi mam / playing Hamlet with me for this swearing" (293-296). Besides, the fact that it happens near night-time is also typical of elegies, as Kennedy states: "Elegies take place at night because of night's association with melancholy, and because night, such as Heaney's two a.m., is often the time of sleepless grief" (ibid, 26). Nevertheless, as much as feelings of guilt, remorse, impotence, etc., are sensed as driving on the elegist to flagellate himself, Kennedy also explains the way in which Milton's "Lycidas" ends in terms of a contrast:

> Milton's 'Lycidas' begins with its speaker 'the uncouth swain' arriving with 'forced fingers rude' to 'shatter' laurels, myrtles and ivy, which are themselves the ancient emblems of poetic power. It is an image of both the inert uselessness of poetic convention and the impossibility of the elegist's desire for his departed subject. The poem ends, in contrast, with images of poetic achievement, tranquillity and continuance. (ibid, 24-25)

Relevantly so, in the case of the creative reworking of elegiac commonplaces within the tradition, itself a tradition, as indicated above, *V.* ends in a similar fashion.

In this latter sense, the poet's epitaph is an invitation for future poets to reflect upon the power of words, as well as upon the reality that poetry can flourish from the most vulgar and uninspiring of places: "If, having come this far, somebody reads / these verses, and he/she wants to understand, / face this grave on Beeston Hill, your back to Leeds, and read the chiselled epitaph I've planned" (441-444). In the same tone as the first line of Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier" (1915), "If I should die, think only this of me…," the elegist heard in Harrison's poem asserts his relevance, and transforms the poetic effort developed throughout the whole text into a monument for future generations, as well as for the future of poetry itself, in metapoetic terms.

7. The Historical-Diachronic Strand

This section of the analysis places the focus on the time-scale of *V.*, as well as on the treatment of [sociological-]historical processes and events which evolve as the text develops. As established in section 4, where an analysis of the poetic voice was carried out, what needs to be kept in mind in any study of *V.* is the basic notion of the implied author, which is retrieved here so as to facilitate the conceptualisation of time within the text in greater depth. What emerges through any consideration of this concept is the idea that, as a chronicler of his times (the poet-protagonist's), but also the times of the skinhead, of his father, and of planet Earth (no less), *V.*'s implied author is, as it were, not any of these entities as such that fictitiously form part of history, but a more all-encompassing figure who stands apart from the processes and phenomena that constitute the engine of history itself. Ultimately, the implied author is, again as cited in section 4, "the governing consciousness of the work as a whole" (Rimmon-Kenan 2005, 89). Adhering to this view also helps to confirm the didactic ambition of the poem, since the idea that the implied author occupies such a privileged space, as far as the voice's interaction with its contemporaries is concerned (the readers of *V.*, whenever they happen to have access to the poem), validates him not only as a 'historian' but also as an educator, i.e., as the promoter of universal, atemporal, common-sense debate.

From a structural point of view, the way in which time and space are dealt with in *V.* can be conceived of as a journey from the geological to the intimate. In broad terms, the poem is both an assessment of the connection between the forces of nature and the land of Leeds, the phenomenon of the mining industry constituting the mid-point of the chain that links the two; and, on the other hand, a personal search for one's place within one's family history. When analysing Harrison's poem "On Not Being Milton," included in *From The School of Eloquence* (1978), and which deals with similar topics, Agata Handley states the following: "…the movement in the poem is the movement into the past and back to the native land, the place of origin" (2016, 279-80). In *V.*, however, this movement into the past yields revelations that threaten the integrity of the didactic content of the poem: "That UNITED that I'd wished onto the nation / or as reunion for dead parents soon recedes. / The word's once more a mindless desecration" (298-291). These threats to the efficacy of a lesson that possesses nation-wide validity, pave the way for bittersweet resignation within the private sphere (intimacy), which manifests itself in the poet-protagonist's domestic life, with his wife: "I hear like ghosts from all Leeds matches

humming / with one concerted voice the bride, the bride / I feel united to, *my* bride is coming / into the bedroom, naked, to my side" (405-408). As though they were geological strata, the different facets of the figure of the implied author constitute a palimpsest in which all the stages and dimensions of its existence can be discerned: "My *alter ego* wouldn't want to know it, / His aerosol vocab would baulk at LOVE, / the skin's UNITED underwrites the poet, / the measures carved below the ones above" (413-416). The text's temporal scope is, thus, notably ambitious while, moreover, requiring further examination to be fully appreciated.

To be able to envision the bigger picture that the implied author manages to display once the text is conceived of in its entirety, it is necessary to follow the historical itinerary, so to speak, that *V.* sets before its readers. In the first place, and on a millenary scale, as previously mentioned, what needs to be taken into account is the unfolding of the perennial geological processes of which Holbeck cemetery is but a metonymic example in miniature: "…the rabblement of bone and rot, / shored slack, crushed shale, smashed prop" (11-12). As they are described in the text, these processes stand as the governing principle at the centre of human experience, i.e., mortality and degradation. In other words, "Harrison invokes geomorphology as a global and timeless process which, by affecting us all, can be regarded as a species of unifying destiny" (Spencer cited in Thurston 2010, 156). Since this principle is presented in terms of a millenary time-scale (virtually atemporal, therefore, given for its implications here), it escapes cultural, ethnic and national contingencies. The subsoil of the British Isles was there before there were any humans of any kind; the land does not discriminate, given how it turns every organism into black coal.

Radiating from this centre, there is human history, or at least there is *British* history from the 18th century onwards: "Wordsworth built church organs, Byron tanned / luggage cowhide in the age of steam, / and knew their place of rest before the land / caves in on the lowest worked-out seam" (13-16). The "age of steam" inevitably recalls the phenomenon of the Industrial Revolution, not only as an emblematic zone of British and universal history, but also as a period inevitably associated with geomorphology, since, in a fundamental way, it entails digging up massive amounts of coal to be employed as fuel.

The next period in history that the poem deals with is the twentieth century, and more concretely a crucial phase within the history of Humankind: the Second World War.

The poem introduces this episode of history in this fashion: "Half this skinhead's age but with approval / I helped whitewash a V on a brick wall. / No one clamoured in the press for its removal / or thought the sign, in wartime, rude at all" (61-64). A very young poet-protagonist remembers that the V symbol used to stand for 'victory' when the UK had to face the might of the Third Reich in the 1940s. The fact that through the decades and in terms of the passing of a number of generations, but still during the poet-protagonist's lifetime, the symbol has been resignified, or rather has been not only emptied of its original meaning (degraded), but also appropriated by the neo-fascist skinheads and their spray cans, in a stroke of historical irony, serves to justify internally the notion that the implied author constitutes a figure which is entitled to operate within a wide-ranging time-span, and thus one which functions as a chronicle from the consideration of which universal lessons can be drawn.

The influence of historical materialism[17] in *V.* is already visible in these attempts to situate an atemporal phenomenon at the centre of human experience, but it is made explicit in this passage where the subject of the Miners' Strike is introduced: "These Vs are all the versuses of life / class v. class as bitter as before, / the unending violence of US and THEM, personified in 1984 / by Coal Board MacGregor and the NUM" (65-69). Here, the Strike is portrayed as the epitome of class struggle. As usual, geology is at the centre: the incapability of Thatcher's political-economic policies to find a just and satisfactory solution to the crisis of the *mining* industry in the northeast of England "personifies" an "unending" historical process.

Nonetheless, after mentioning the Strike, the poet-protagonist doubles back, again evoking scenes of degradation and death: "The big blue star for booze, tobacco ads, / the magnet's monogram, the royal crest, / insignia in neon dwarf the lads / who spray a few odd FUCKS when they're depressed" (137-140). Reminiscent here of a cyberpunk[18] aesthetic, the late-twentieth-century postmodern world is represented as a jungle of neon symbols that metonymically represent the rule of corporations over mankind. With great

[17] In the introduction to *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific,* Friedrich Engels defined historical materialism as "…that view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all important historic events in the economic development of society, in the changes in the modes of production and exchange, in the consequent division of society into distinct classes, and in the struggles of these classes against one another" (Engels 1892).

[18] The term cyberpunk refers to a subgenre of science fiction typified by a bleak, high-tech setting in which a lawless subculture exists within an oppressive society dominated by computer technology. "Cyberpunk, n." *OED Online*. Oxford UP. https://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/240848 (accessed September 20, 2021).

artfulness, the significance of the neons is drawn upon again to showcase the implied author's ability to connect distant times and places: "Letters of transparent tubes and gas / in Düsseldorf are blue and flash out KRUPP" (141-142). The implication here is not merely the fact that the neon-dominated scenery has taken hold of a range of nations and their cultures, but also that the choice of the company name, Krupp, is not arbitrary. Krupp is the surname of a very prominent dynasty of German businessmen intimately associated with the Nazi regime.[19] With this in mind, the reference to "transparent tubes and *gas* (my emphasis)" illuminating the word Kupp foregrounds a direct link to the Nazi holocaust. In this suggestive way, the implied author manages to link the historical catastrophe identifiable with the multiple clashes involving those who survived and died as a consequence of the Second World War, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the contemporary skinhead groups, who coexist within a historical reality marked by degraded symbols and reminders of death and hate, phenomena which, apparently, nobody anywhere questions anymore: "What is it that these crude words are revealing? / What is it that this aggro act implies? / Giving the dead their xenophobic feeling / or just a *cri-de-coeur* because man dies?" (161-164).

However, as previously indicated, the poem grows more and more local and intimate in scale as it unfolds. At the same time, a historical *contingency* does in fact emerge as a socio-historical phenomenon at the centre of masculine experience: football. Yet, this particular phenomenon does not seem to be projected in terms of a universal paradigm, but becomes applicable, rather, to the immediate reality of the city of Leeds: "2 larking boys play bawdy bride and groom. / 3 boys in Leeds strip la-la Lohengrin. / I hear them as I go through growing gloom / still years away from being skald or skin" (317-320). The ongoing social and urban transformation of Leeds throughout the twentieth century contributed to the weakening of the key institution characterised hitherto by a capacity to attract mass gatherings in the western world, i.e., the Church: "…on both Methodist and C of E billboards / once divided in their fight for local souls. / Whichever house more truly was the Lord's / both's pews are filled with cut-price toilet rolls" (365-368). The disappearance of the different denominational churches left holes in the city's social fabric that were eventually filled by Leeds United FC. The tragicomic image of Leeds' male youth as a collective of individuals who stand dangerously astride

[19] For more information on the Krupp family, see Batty, Peter. 2001.*The House of Krupp : The Steel Dynasty that Armed the Nazis*. New York: Cooper Square Press.

two diametrically opposed life-paths: falling prey to football hooliganism, or, on the other hand, ensuring for themselves a good quality education, summarises the personal experience of the poet-protagonist and, consequently, the most personal lesson-for-life he has to offer within the framework of the poem.

According to *V.*, the disappearance of the churches in Leeds was accompanied by a move towards a more multicultural city due to the growing presence of immigration, especially from India and Pakistan. The new multicultural look of the neighbourhoods of Leeds brought with it new attitudes of untapped racism, represented here in the figure of the poet-protagonist's father and his timid slur captured in free direct speech:[20] "…and every one bought now by 'coloured chaps', / dad's most liberal label as he felt / squeezed by the unfamiliar, and fear / of foreign foods and faces, when he smelt / curry in the shop where he'd bought beer" (340-344). Inevitably, these attitudes constitute the milder expression of large-scale socio-historical tensions upon which neo-fascism fed, while, at the same time, providing nourishment to the emerging skinhead youth of Leeds from this same fare.

Harrison's long poem ends with the poet-protagonist's journey back home and his promise to return to Holbeck cemetery only when it is time for his ashes to be interred: "Home, home to my woman, never to return / till sexton or survivor has to cram / the bits of clinker scooped out of my urn / down through the rose-roots to my dad and mam" (369-372). This section of the text is without a doubt the most intimate in character. However, the geological time-scale remains detectable within it in an essential way: "Listening to *Lulu*, in our hearth we burn, / as we hear the high Cs rise in stereo, what was lush swamp club-moss and tree-fern / at least 300 million years ago" (377-380). Handley's analysis of the already-mentioned composition "On Not Being Milton" continues to be relevant here, since it clearly deals with the exploration of time and space, as occurs in *V.*: "…the usage of a set metaphor 'to go back to one's roots' suggests that the return may be read as a vertical journey, into and underneath; in other words, an inverted growth whose image is strengthened by referencing the blackness of coal as the main natural resource of the English North East." (2016, 279-80).

[20] As described by Geoffrey Leech: "Direct speech has two features which show evidence of the narrator's presence, namely the quotation marks and the introductory reporting clause. Accordingly, it is possible to remove either or both of these features, and produce a freer form, which has been called FREE DIRECT SPEECH" (1981, 322).

V.'s protagonist, as projected through the voice of the implied author, ends his journey in a safe and private space, while the kaleidoscopic conjunction of TV images reveals the overwhelming victory of chaos and degradation in the world outside:

> This world, with far too many people in,
> starts on the TV logo as a taw,
> then ping-pong, tennis, football; then one spin
> to show us all, then shots of the Gulf War.[21]
>
> As the coal with reddish dust cools in the grate
> on the late-night national news we see
> police v. pickets at a coke-plant gate,
> old violence and old disunity.
>
> The map that's colour-coded Ulster/Eire's
> flashed on again as almost every night.
> Behind a tiny coffin with two bearers
> men in masks with arms show off their might (385-396).

As Rowland states concisely: "It becomes clear that Harrison regards the personal (the meditative hearth) and the historical (…) as inseparable, the general is barbaric, and endangers the primacy of the particular" (2001, 250). From the Gulf War to The Troubles, television images seem to reveal that conflict and struggle outweigh any lesson that can be taught through poetry conceived of as a way to jam the horrifying course of the wheel of history.

8. The Metapoetic Strand

As the heading of this analytic section suggests, this strand is concerned with the way in which *V.* reveals its exploration of poetry itself. As emphasised in previous sections, *V.* stands as a poem of significant literary magnitude, insofar as it interacts with the elegiac and epic traditions, besides constituting an example of the major form known as the long poem. This section will consist of two parts. The first will attempt to evaluate briefly the intellectual project carried out by Harrison in reflecting on the role of poetry

[21] A pun can be detected here as the words gulf-golf are near homophones, carrying on with the simile between the BBC TV taw-shaped logo (planet Earth) and the different sport balls in the stanza.

within the total sphere of human activity, while the second part will aim to confirm the rich intertextuality that characterises his long poem.

8.1. Harrison's Conception of Poetry

The metaliterary implications of Harrison's *magnum opus* become detectable even before its first stanza. Arthur Scargill's words for the *Sunday Times* in 1982 act as the work's epigraph: "My father still reads the dictionary every day. He says your life depends on your power to master words." In her study of the poetry that arose out of the Miners' Strike (1984-85) in Britain, Claire Hélie elaborates on this notion by stating the following: "[Katie] Shaw claims that the strike disempowered workers economically but empowered them linguistically […] *Against All the Odds*, a collection of poems published by the NUM in 1984 is proof of this newly acquired linguistic power" (2015). No doubt, the idea that words and poetry should empower the "mute inglorious Milton(s)" of this world, as Thomas Gray had labelled them in his well-known elegy, published in 1751, fuels much of the poetic obligation that *V.* attempts to uphold. The representation of the least eloquent protagonists in Harrison's poetry, such as the skinhead, with his obvious Yorkshire accent, has been interpreted by Rowland as proof of how Harrison's "overriding concern" is to "ventriloquise silent victims" (2001, 268). The imagined social split between the life trajectories of the youth of Leeds, based on whether a good education is received or not, has everything to do with the idea that that words and poetry are emancipatory.

V. was written in 1985, and a great portion of the text is dedicated to the failed poet-protagonist's effort to endow with a higher meaning the term "UNITED" graffitied on his parents' tombstone. Hélie's study again becomes useful when making sense of Harrison's poetic enterprise, from a biographical perspective:

> When poet Laureate John Betjeman died in May 1984, Philip Larkin and Tony Harrison declined the offer to succeed him, because they deemed Little England or class allegiances above the imperialistic claims of Great Britain, because they wanted poetry to be a tool to dismantle the illusions of a united nation, a goal which is hardly compatible with the Laureateship (2015).

Moreover, Penguin Books published Harrison's *Laureate's Block* in the year 2000, after he was offered the laureateship and declined the offer again, following the death of Ted Hughes.

The poet-protagonist's sense of failure, then, is not a pessimistic statement concerning the unsuitability of poetry in political matters. On the contrary, it is evidence that Harrison's poetry does not intend to tolerate disunity and inequality; that, unlike W.H. Auden's claim in his elegy on Yeats about those who believe that "poetry makes nothing happen," as an art form at least it can stir people's consciences. Harrison himself states the following: "This inky digit will always mean I have cast my vote in favour of the dumb or the silenced being given a voice, of totally free speech, and the freedom of poetry, and poets" (2010, 98). Far from being a solipsistic reflection, *V.* strives for reconciliation among generations, genders, social classes, and cultures. Fogarty explains how, in part, it does so by subverting the heroic quatrain structure through its verbal content: "Harrison's scenes of verbal turbulence function as allegories of social division, while the traditional forms of poetry order that turbulence, effectively redressing the deleterious conditions portrayed" (2020, 211). Helmut Haberkamm expands on this point by confronting the different conceptions of poetry as projected by Gray's elegy, on the one hand, and Harrison's long poem, on the other hand:

> Indeed, the two poems are based on two opposing concepts of poetry. The romantic idea of the *vates* (who "waked to ecstasy the living lyre", "muttering his wayward fancies") is echoed by Harrison initially calling himself "bard". In the course of the poem, however, this archaism is dispensed with in favour of a notion of the "poet" as a socially responsive and responsible contemporary (Barfoot 1994, 92).

This, of course, is common to many contemporary poets, Geoffrey Hill and Ted Hughes included.

Such are things that Harrison himself is categorical about: "A poet's rage has as much place in his poetry as the 'emotion recollected in tranquility'" (2010, 84). Thus, in the end, his long poem endeavours to stand as proof of the dignity and power of committed literature which, in this case, includes the empowerment of common people, that is, words dedicated to laudable, rather than *laureate-able*, ends. In this sense, *V.*'s poet-protagonist does not seek a better world in a utopian afterlife, but the betterment of the actually existing one: "I know this world's so torn but want no other" (122).

8.2. The Intertextuality of *V.*

It is the case with poetry of the likes of *V.* (a long poem marked by monumental aspirations, by an eclectic milieu), that even a single word or a particular snatch of rhythm

can evoke an array of intertextual echoes, some explicit, others more subtly present. In order to do justice to this aspect of the poem, and in terms of the metapoetic framework already established, the role of allusions in the enhancement of the enjoyment of it may be highlighted, while likewise facilitating a more enjoyable reading of this text as an eclectic piece of literature.

Firstly, in terms of the presence of more directly explicit allusions, it would seem that their origins may be found in Christian religious texts. It is in this way that the figure of the implied author foregrounds the religious upbringing of both the poet-protagonist and the skinhead. The overtness of their presence emphasises the notion that both of these figures were raised in the same local circumstances, within the same educational system until their paths diverged: "I could run as fast as you then / A good job! / They yelled 'damned vandal' after me that day…" (243-244).

As highlighted in section 4, verses from the King James Version have a presence in Harrison's long poem. Exodus 20:17 and Mark 8:33 have already been dealt with in that same section, but other biblical references may be cited. The most obvious, is linked with the Lord's Prayer via Matthew 6:10: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." It is the skinhead that vulgarises this expression of faith: "*Ah'll boot yer fucking balls to Kingdom Come*" (218). The second, less explicit, alludes to John 15:13: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." The poet-protagonist is reflecting on the kind of epitaphs found on headstones at Holbeck cemetery: "The language of this graveyard ranges from / a bit of Latin for a former Mayor / or those who laid their lives down at the Somme, / the hymnal fragments and the gilded prayer" (41-44). Likewise, "brief chisellable bits from the good book / and rhymes whatever length they could afford, / [have been downgraded] to CUNT, PISS, SHIT and (mostly) FUCK!" (46-48). Similarly, the function of honouring the fallen in the trenches in the First World War linked to the biblical maxim 'to lay one's life down' is also undermined, in a more wryly ironic way, by how, even after death, social division holds sway, as reflected in how holding tenure as mayor deserves a higher grade of cultural projection in contrast to the stark mien of the humbler tombstones in the graveyard. The metapoetic, and even idealistic, lesson to be derived from this, perhaps, is that the poetic discourse that is tracing the graph of all such small-mindedness and degradation does indeed exist in a dimension where humanity, despite its wretchedness, becomes worthy of being honoured by a phenomenon called poetry.

The direct allusions to Christian texts continue with an intimated reference to Christopher Smart's "Hymn xxxix," from *Hymns for the Amusement of Children* (1771). As the poet-protagonist leaves the cemetery, the poem runs thus: "The ground's carpeted with petals as I throw / the aerosol, the HARP can, the cleared weeds / on top of dad's dead daffodils, then go, / with not one glance behind, away from Leeds" (321-324). Smart's hymn, which begins with the lines "Fear God -- obey his just decrees, / And do it hand, and heart, and knees, / For after all our utmost care / There's nought like penitence and prayer," nominally resembles the poet's effort to clean his father's grave as penitence for spending little time visiting it, while sincerely wishing to resignify the graffitied term 'UNITED' as "a sort of furtive prayer" (127). Meanwhile, the phrase 'not one glance behind,' as it appears in Harrison's poem, constitutes a direct allusion to the second stanza of Smart's hymn: "Then weigh the balance in your mind, / Look forward, not one glance behind; / Let no foul fiend retard your pace, Hosanna! Thou hast won the race." Here, the allusion to Christian diligence in the service of God mirrors the Orpheus-like vital journey of the poet-protagonist, whose poetic achievements took him further and further away from Leeds, rendering him unable to go back and find comfort in his native land, his own past, or his family.

The penultimate of these direct allusions is to another Christian hymn, Isaac Watts' "Our God, Our Help" (1708). The conceptualisation of *V.*'s time-scale, that was explored in the previous section, draws on this work by Watts, as can be seen in the passage that references it explicitly: "And there, *'Time like an ever rolling stream*''s / what once I trilled behind that boarded front. / A 1000 ages made coal-bearing seams / and even more the hand that sprayed this CUNT" (361-364). Watts' hymn ponders the return of mortals to dust (coal in *V.*), and thus their escape from historical contingencies while being reunited with their eternal God: "A thousand ages in thy sight / Are like an evening gone / […] *Time, like an ever-rolling stream*, / Bears all its sons away; They fly forgotten, as a dream / Dies at the opening day." What becomes relevant in metapoetic terms is that the hymn is incorporated into *V.* as a text that the poet-protagonist had come to learn by heart and internalised as a child, thus bearing out the initial claim in the introduction to this section that these religiously-based allusions confirm the shared education received by both the poet-protagonist and the skinhead. In those same metapoetic terms, the imponderable question raised ongoingly in *V.* again seems to be whether poetry may be considered a form of hyper, or even hypersensitive, discourse.

The last explicit allusion to be referred to here is linked with Wordsworth's "A Slumber did my Spirit Seal" (1800), through the phrase 'diurnal courses' as such: "Victory? For vast, slow, coal-creating forces / that hew the body's seams to get the soul. / Will earth run out of her 'diurnal courses' / before repeating her creation of black coal?" (433-436). As in the case of the previous allusion, this one expands on the philosophical contemplation on mortality and the return of human beings to the inescapable sphere of geology. In Wordsworth's lyric, the figure of Lucy will be drawn into the cycle of "rocks, and stones, and trees," the equivalent of the geological dimension of *V.*

As far as the presence of more indirect allusions within the sphere of the poem, a division into three categories may be postulated, depending on their subject matter: those related to death, the cemetery, and the question of legacy, those related to personal identity, and those related to time and generational change. Concerning the first of these categories three allusions, amongst others, can be discerned. The poet-protagonist foretells the scenario that his buried ashes will contemplate once buried at Holbeck cemetery: "If buried ashes saw then I'd survey / the places I learned Latin, and learned Greek, / and left, the ground where Leeds United play / but disappoint their fans week after week" (21-24). The choice of the word 'survey' elicits the very first line of William Cowper's "On the Solitude of Alexander Selkirk"[22] (Delphi Classics 2014): "I am monarch of all I survey." Just like Selkirk, the figure of the poet-protagonist can be thought of as a sort of solitary castaway, whose remains, ironically, will be buried in a plot of land that overlooks the places that effectively turned him into a person estranged from his native Leeds, as represented by the education that he had embraced and the football hooliganism he had rejected.

However, becoming a stranger to Leeds seems to be a systemic issue in the poem. Some families, for example, sent their children away to seek better prospects, never to see them return: "Far-sighted for his family's future dead, / but for his wife, this banker's still alone / on his long obelisk, and doomed to head / a blackened dynasty of unclaimed stone" (33-36). The veiled allusion to Shelley's "Ozymandias" (1818) is evoked in the banker's barren mausoleum and in how the phrase "long obelisk" echoes the Romantic poem's reference to Ramesses II's "colossal Wreck." In *V.*, the cemetery acts mainly as a metaphor for family legacy, or, in other words, as a place of secular pilgrimage and

[22] Selkirk (1676-1721) was a Scottish sailor who was the prototype for the marooned traveler in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson* Crusoe, published in 1719 (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.).

meditation on one's heritage. In this sense, a connection may be drawn between certain passages within Harrison's poem and the opening of Charles Dicken's *Great Expectations* (1861). Dickens's Pip gets his "most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things (…) on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening," where and when he "found out for certain that *this bleak place overgrown with nettles* was the churchyard; and that Philip Pirrip, late of this parish, and also Georgiana, wife of the above, were dead and buried." Similarly, *V.*'s poet-protagonist, after visiting both of his parents' graves, and in terms of the elegiac commonplace of premonition, reconciles the two facets of his identity, poet and skinhead, when he is leaving the "[cemetery] choked up with weeds" (86) as "the day's already dusk, half dark, half light" (288).

As far as the subject of personal identity in the poem is concerned, within *V.*'s discourse, the enigmatic presence of Robert Frost's "The Road not Taken" (1916) becomes discernible. As has been repeatedly stated, the identity split affecting the poet-protagonist in Harrison's composition is the result of his having opted for the path of college education. The 'skald/skin' quandary that defines the destiny of Leeds youth in *V.* can be aligned with Frost's image of life's choices as roads that people commit to: "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I — / I took the one less traveled by, / And that has made all the difference." Moreover, Holbeck cemetery in *V.* is explicitly described as a shortcut between Leeds United's stadium and the city: "and taking a short cut home through these graves here / they reassert the glory of their team" (26-27); "next time you take this short cut from the game" (276). This reinforces the idea that the skinheads have always chosen to travel the well-trodden, undemanding life path.

Finally, with regard to the third category of indirect allusions, linked in this case with the concepts of time and generational change, three examples may be cited. The first of these involves Wilfred Owen's 1918 poem, "The Miners," written in response to a mining accident in that same year in which 155 people died. The presence of this work in *V.* can be detected at several moments, while it becomes most discernible late into the long poem. The second stanza from Owen's poem ("I listened for a tale of leaves / and smothered ferns, / frond-forests, and the low sly lives / before the fawns") is recalled towards the end of Harrison's poem in this fashion: "(…) the one we hear decay, the one we see, / the fern from the foetid forest, as brief flame" (383-384). Here, the references to (smothered) "ferns" and the "foetid forest" echo Owen's imagery of suffocation and combustion associated with the mining accident concerned, keeping in mind the context

of the Miners' Strike of 1984-85 as *V.*'s framing mechanism. The "brief flame," of the hearth, moreover, echoes the second stanza of Owen's poem, which goes as follows: "My fire might show steam-phantoms simmer / From Time's old cauldron, / Before the birds made nests in summer, / or men had children." This allusion again evokes a mega-timescale which hyperbolises the subliminary ongoing presence of geology within human life.

The second allusion invokes T.S. Eliot's "Little Gidding" (1942). After giving instructions to find it, the poet-protagonist from *V.* encourages those who would visit his grave in the future to do so preferably in the spring: "But choose a day like I chose in mid-May / or earlier when apple and hawthorne tree, / no matter if boys boot their ball all day, / cling to their blossoms and won't shake them free" (437-440). The implied author at work within Eliot's poem similarly states: "If you came this way, / taking the route you would be likely to take / from the place you would be likely to come from, / if you came this way in may time, you would find the hedges / white again, in May, with voluptuary sweetness." Thus, the visit to the poet-protagonist's tombstone is also regarded as a sort of secular pilgrimage where one, amongst other things, grips the generational baton. Eliot's composition beautifully expresses a similar notion: "(…) the communication / of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living. / Here, the intersection of the timeless moment is England and nowhere. Never and always." Keeping in mind remarks made earlier in this Project, such a timeless, location-less place is where poetry evolves, it is supposed.

Finally, a third indirect, and even more enigmatic allusion may be said to be present in the choice of the word 'feet' for the poet-protagonist's epitaph: "*Beneath your feet's a poet, then a pit*" (445). It would seem that encoded within the poet-protagonist's message to those members of future generations that may literally stand on the poet's grave, is a reference to William Blake's "Jerusalem" (1804): "And did those feet in ancient time / walk upon Englands mountains green." This allusion may seem to empower *V.* as a discursive alternative to decadence and cultural philistinism in the same way that Blake's poem constitutes a challenge to the monstrosities of industrialisation.

9. Conclusions

As set down in the introduction provided, this Project has sought to offer an analysis of *V.* that pays close attention to the four main discursive strands that contribute

to the creative nature of its composition. Considering the framework in which they are found to interact, that is, a modernist long poem that evolves on a highly ambitious social, historical and political scale, it has been possible to put the depth of its literary and cultural impact into perspective. The first key challenge addressed, that is, the dissection of the poetic voice, attempted to make clear that Tony Harrison's literary talent goes beyond a mastery of the traditional forms of poetry, its rhythms and its schemes. A further objective has been to foreground the effectiveness of the composition in giving voice to the poet-protagonist, as well as to the figure of the skinhead, within the same discursive space, thus also revealing an awareness of the sociolinguistic mechanisms that can be used to revitalize the tradtional elegiac stanza, thereby adapting this structure to a new context thanks to the phenomenon of heteroglossia.

In terms of the poem's richly allusive character, due to the exploration undertaken in this study of the elegiac and metapoetic strands woven throughout the composition, it has been possible to offer a critically solid vision of Harrison's work as worthy of inclusion within that same tradition of the long poem, thereby contributing to the enrichment of human culture through an aesthetically satisfying literary creation.

Lastly, the effort undertaken to bring to light the high degree of creativity with which *V.*'s time scale unfolds within its historical-diachronic strand, has attempted to account for the imaginative powers of Harrison, who, born in 1937, and still alive at the time of writing of this Project, has experienced much of the upheaval of the 20th century in his flesh. As emphasized in this study, the specifically British historical circumstances surrounding the Miners' Strike of 1984-85 constitutes one more aspect of the very essence of history as active, unpredictable evolution, and thus since geological times, as Harrison underlines via the projection of the personification of himself as that very nature of history.

In short, the artistic-didactic initiative that entailed not only the printed publication of *V.*, but also its large-scale diffusion, through the filmed documentary version of it, among millions of British households during the final quarter of the last century, and while taking into consideration the critical analysis carried out in this Project, it would seem possible to affirm that this poem has won its place as a key contribution to the history of literature in English.

10. Bibliography

10.1. Primary Sources

Bell, John. 2010. *Rhymes of Northern Bards: Being a Curious Collection of Old and New Songs and Poems (1812)*. Kessinger Publishing.

Blake, William. 1804. "Jerusalem." Poetry Foundation. Accessed June 11, 2021. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/54684/jerusalem-and-did-those-feet-in-ancient-time.

Brooke, Rupert. 1915. "The Soldier." Poetry Foundation. Accessed June 10, 2021. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/13076/the-soldier.

Carroll, Robert P, and Stephen Prickett. 2008. *The Bible : Authorized King James Version*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

Delphi Classics, ed. 2014. *Complete Poetical Works of William Cowper*. Delphi Classics.

Dickens, Charles. 1861. *Great Expectations*. Project Gutenberg.

Dunn, Douglas. 2001. *Elegies*. London: Faber.

Eliot, T.S. 1942. "Little Gidding." www.columbia.edu. Accessed June 11, 2021. http://www.columbia.edu/itc/history/winter/w3206/edit/tseliotlittlegidding.html.

Frost, Robert. 1916. "The Road Not Taken." Poetry Foundation. Accessed June 11, 2021. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44272/the-road-not-taken.

Gray, Thomas. 1751. "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." Poetry Foundation. Accessed July 10, 2021. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44299/elegy-written-in-a-country-churchyard.

Hardy, Thomas. 1912-13. "The Going." Poem Hunter. Accessed June 10, 2021. https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-going/.

Harrison, Tony. 1978. *From the School of Eloquence and Other Poems*. London:

Collings.

Harrison, Tony. 1989. *V.* Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books.

Jonson, Ben. 1616. “On my First Son.” Poetry Foundation. Accessed June 11, 2021. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44455/on-my-first-son.

Milton, John. 1638. “Lycidas.” Poetry Foundation. Accessed June 11, 2021. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44733/lycidas.

Owen, Wilfred. 1918. “Miners.” Poetry Archive. Accessed June 11, 2021. https://www.poetry-archive.com/o/miners.html.

Shelley, Percy B. 1821. “Adonais.” Poetry Foundation. Accessed June 11, 2021. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45112/adonais-an-elegy-on-the-death-of-john-keats.

Shelley, Percy B. 1818. “Ozymandias.” Poetry Foundation. Accessed June 11, 2021. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46565/ozymandias.

Smart, Christopher. 1973. *Hymns for the Amusement of Children (1771).* Menston: Scolar Press.

“USA State Song: Kansas - Home on the Range.” 2017. Www.youtube.com. March 4, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=172fB4CEQ3Q.

Watts, Isaac. 1708. “Our God, Our Help.” Poetry Foundation. Accessed June 11, 2021. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50583/our-god-our-help.

Wordsworth, William. 1800. “A Slumber did my Spirit Seal.” Accessed June 11, 2021. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45553/a-slumber-did-my-spirit-seal.

10.2. Secondary Sources

Barfoot, C.C, ed. 1994. *In Black and Gold: Contiguous Traditions in Post-War British and Irish Poetry*. Rodopi.

Bower, Rachel. 2018. “Tony Harrison in Nigeria: Teacher, Translator and Dramatist.”

English Studies 99 (1): 34–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838x.2017.1405318.

Brown, Gillian, and George Yule. 1983. *Discourse Analysis*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Eliot, T. S. 1982. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." *Perspecta* 19: 36–42. https://doi.org/10.2307/1567048.

Elledge, Scott. 1966. *Milton's "Lycidas" Edited to Serve as an Introduction to Criticism.* New York Harper & Row.

Engels, Frederick. 1892. "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific (Introduction - Materialism)." Marxists.org. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/soc-utop/int-mat.htm.

Fogarty, William. 2020. "The Rhubarbarian's Redress: Tony Harrison and the Politics of Speech." *Twentieth-Century Literature* 66 (2): 207–32. https://doi.org/10.1215/0041462x-8536165.

Guardian Media Group. 2000. "Man of Mysteries." The Guardian. April 1, 2000. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/apr/01/poetry.theatre.

Hair, Lindsay. 1996. "The Right Words in the Proper Places: An Investigation of the Poetry of Tony Harrison, from Text to TV." PhD thesis, University of Sheffield.

Handley, Agata G. 2016. "On (Not) Being Milton: Tony Harrison's Liminal Voice." *Text Matters* 6 (1): 276–90. https://doi.org/10.1515/texmat-2016-0017.

Hélie, Claire. 2015. "From Picket Lines to Poetic Ones: The 1984–1985 Miners' Strike and the Idea of a 'Condition of England Poetry.'" *Études Britanniques Contemporaines*, no. 49 (October). https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.2658.

Ivanov, Vyacheslav. 1999. "Heteroglossia." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 9 (1): 100–102.

Kennedy, David. 2007. *Elegy*. London Routledge.

Leech, Geoffrey, and Michael H Short. 1981. *Style in Fiction.* Longman.

Liang, Xiaodong. 2009. “The Conflicting Voices in Tony Harrison’s Poetry.” *Journal of Cambridge Studies* 4 (4): 103–13.

Oxford University Press. 2021. *OED Online*. https://www.oed.com/

Preminger, Alex, and Terry V F Brogan. 1993. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Rosenfeld, Sophia A. 2011. *Common Sense : A Political History*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press.

Rowland, Anthony. 2001. *Tony Harrison and the Holocaust*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Rutter, Barrie. 2017. “Performing Tony Harrison.” *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 15 (2): 143–48. https://www.jstor.org/stable/29737349.

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan. 2005. *Narrative Fiction : Contemporary Poetics*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

Taylor, Christian J. 2015. “Barbarian Masquerade: A Reading of the Poetry of Tony Harrison and Simon Armitage.” PhD thesis, University of Leeds.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. 1999. “Elegy | Poetic Form.” Encyclopedia Britannica. September 17, 1999. https://www.britannica.com/art/elegy.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. n.d. “Alexander Selkirk | Scottish Sailor.” Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alexander-Selkirk.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. n.d. “Hugh Gaitskell | British Statesman.” Encyclopaedia Britannica. Accessed October 14, 2021. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hugh-Gaitskell.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2008. “Tony Harrison | English Writer.”

Accessed June 7, 2021. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Tony-Harrison.

The Editors of Poetry Foundation. 2021. “Tony Harrison.” Poetry Foundation. March 13, 2021. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/tony-harrison.

Thurston, Michael. 2010. *The Underworld in Twentieth-Century Poetry : From Pound and Eliot to Heaney and Walcott*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, , Cop.

Tranter, Susan. “Tony Harrison | Critical Perspective.” Accessed June 7, 2021. https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/tony-harrison.

Wallenfeldt, Jeff. 2019. “The Troubles | Summary, Causes, & Facts.” In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/event/The-Troubles-Northern-Ireland-history.

Young, Hugo. 2019. “Margaret Thatcher | Biography & Facts.” In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Margaret-Thatcher.