Tony Harrison's Oresteia**: from Aeschylus to Egil and Scargill**

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Tony Harrison's career was launched by his dramatic works, in particular his translations for the National Theatre in the 1970s. The traditions he built on are a mixture of the popular theatre he encountered as a child and the classics he studied at Leeds Grammar School and University. Although he turned to translation as a way of learning from the great masters, he appropriated the genre of theatrical adaptation, honing his very own style and developing a rich metacritical reflection. His conception of translation as a synthesis between a classical education and an instinct for drama led him to develop his idiosyncratic techniques of adaptation that he perfected in the 1960s and 1970s, culminating in his version of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* in 1981. In this article, the author explores the genesis of Harrison's adaptation of Aeschylus and places his English text in the context of the theatrical performance, thus offering an insight into his aesthetics.

Keywords: adaptation; Harrison, theatrical aesthetics; translation.

Tony Harrison's career was launched by his dramatic works and in particular his translations for the National Theatre in the 1970s. Every single theatrical venture allowed him to refine his original conception of theatricality even if this meant going against the mainstream trends. The traditions Harrison built on are a curious mixture of the popular theatre he encountered as a child and the classics – Greek, English and French in particular – he studied at Leeds Grammar School and Leeds University. The scholar in him is indeed nostalgic of the immediacy between actors and spectators found in music hall theatre:

> The kind of theatre I saw most often was late music hall, or 'variety', and panto, and though it was in proscenium theatres like the Empire, the fourth

> wall was broken down by the direct address of the comics I saw there: Norman Evans, Frank Randle, Old Mother Riley, Albert Modley, Robb Wilton, and even Laurel and Hardy live on stage. (Harrison 2007: ix)

Conversely, when he later discovered realist drama, he found it artificial, elitist, and lacking in audience participation. His very first dramatic creations were rag revues performed in the streets of Leeds, i.e. comedy shows he wrote as a student to raise money for charities. Their success even led one of his partners, Barry Cryer,[1] to imagine forming a comic duo with Harrison. Stirred by the many productions he saw in Leeds – international plays as well as Professor Wilson Knight's productions of Shakespeare – Harrison decided to channel all his energy into theatre. Although he turned to translation as a way of learning from the great masters, Harrison readily appropriated the genre of theatrical adaptation, honing his very own style and developing a metacritical reflection he was to elaborate on in prefaces and interviews. His conception of translation as a synthesis between a classical education and an instinct for drama led him to develop his idiosyncratic techniques of adaptation that he tested and perfected throughout the 1960s and 1970s, culminating in his version of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* for the National Theatre in 1981. In this article, the author explores the genesis of Harrison's adaptation of Aeschylus and places his English text in the context of the theatrical performance, thus offering an insight into Harrison's aesthetics.

Harrison had learnt the art of translation in the 1950s at Leeds Grammar School where, as in the rest of the country, the classics were brandished as models of eloquence and stylistic perfection against the barbarism of his own vernacular English as the poet's persona recalls in the sonnet "Classics Society": "The grace of Tullies eloquence doth excel / any Englishmans tongue… my barbarous stile…" (Harrison 1987: 120). Even if this taught him linguistic precision,[2] he quickly resented the ideological preconceptions underlying the translation of the classics:

> I was 'educated' to produce jog-trot versions of the classics. Apart from a weekly chunk of Johnson, Pitt the Younger and Lord Macaulay to be done into Ciceronian Latin, we had to turn once living authors into a

> form of English never spoken by men or women, as if to compensate our poor tongue for the misfortune of not being a dead language. (Harrison 2002(a): 4)

The speech marks around the term "educated" testify to the poet's critical distance towards the way translation was taught: reducing the dramatic text to a mere block of written words was to deny its inbuilt theatrical nature. On the contrary, as a teenager, Harrison instinctively felt the orality of dramatic speech, even if written in Latin, a speech once spoken and alive like all modern languages. This awareness derived from the linguistic hiatus experienced at Grammar School where he discovered the hegemony of Standard English over his vernacular Beeston Hill[3] dialect. His attempts at linguistic authenticity in translation (which involved the use of demotic and contemporary English) were however mercilessly crushed by his Classics teacher; but when he became a dramatic translator, Harrison engaged in a crusade for the recognition of the oral, colloquial and conversational specificities of dramatic speech. With models such as Gavin Douglas, John Dryden, Ezra Pound and Edward Powys Mathers, Harrison's adaptations of the Classics are a blend of classicism and modernity displaying both a strong regard for their source and a certain freedom. Harrison claims to be "the kind of poet who uses an immensely formal classical prosody against colloquial diction and against the working class speech of Leeds and even the language of street aggro and graffiti" (Harrison in Astley: 438). He wants the theatre to be the locus for the reconciling of high and low culture, or at least to testify to that cultural and socio-political tension. He sees himself as a picaresque hero, a rebel from popular culture "braving the somnolent ogre of a British classical education to grab the golden harp" and defines his adaptations of the classics as "a *Jack and the Beanstalk* act" (Harrison 2002(a): 4) disrupting a fraught equation between the Classics / prosody / Standard English / high culture vs. popular culture / comedy / colloquial and demotic language.

Harrison's first dramatic adaptation of a Classic contains the ferments of his later, better-known works. *Aikin Mata*, created in 1964 in collaboration with James Simmons in Nigeria is his first adapta-

tion of Aristophanes' comedy *Lysistrata*. From a Western perspective, it is formally and linguistically innovative with its mixture of pantomime, music, dance and video, Pidgin English and Yoruba, conceived as a way of anchoring the adaptation in the contemporary Nigerian context of ethnic rivalries and gender polarisation. Although the title of this first adaptation tends to blur the reference to the original, in subsequent plays Harrison will repeatedly acknowledge his sources: "*Le Misanthrope* by Molière in an English version by Tony Harrison" (Harrison 2002(a): 1), "*Phaedra Britannica*, after Racine's *Phèdre*" (Harrison 2002(a): 111), "*Le Roi s'amuse* by Victor Hugo in an English adaptation by Tony Harrison" (Harrison 2002(a): 209), or "*The* Oresteia of Aeschylus in an English version by Tony Harrison" (Harrison 2002(b)). However, terms such as "version", "adaptation" and "after" carefully avoid any reference to translation which for Harrison would focus on the written text rather than the dramatic performance. Harrison's translations for the stage can be considered as "adaptations" (which he claims them to be) inasmuch as they are "re-mediations […] translations in the form of intersemiotic transpositions from one sign system (for example, words) to another" (Hutcheon & O'Flynn: 16). Indeed, he has transposed written texts[4] into full-fledged dramatic production, harnessing the translation of the text itself to collaborative decisions concerning staging, costumes, music, etc.

Indeed, wary of "the dubious permanence of the printed page" (Harrison 2002: 10), Harrison is adamant that his adaptations of the Classics are meant for the stage first and foremost, which means they have to be clear and accessible immediately. There is no second reading for the spectator, no footnotes available to clarify an obscure reference so that the dramatic text can be enjoyed in the ephemeral moment of performance. In order to do that, Harrison has conceived his adaptations of Classical plays for contemporary audiences with the process of structural amnesia in mind that he borrowed from African oral culture[5] in which artistic memory has to adapt and change to survive, discarding outmoded elements that have become irrelevant and replacing them by new ones. Thus, in an oral culture the text is not fixed but

evolves with time; and yet it remains the same text. The work of art thus survives like a plant tended by a loving gardener:

> Like the rose, for example, in a state of nature, a work is constantly throwing up new growths. Into these new growths it gradually directs its sap, and the older growths become starved out. The activity of pruning, in our case historical consciousness at work in the mind of the director or translator of the classic, is to hasten the rejection of the old wood and to encourage the instincts for producing new growths *especially* (the gardening manuals tell us) *from the base of the plant*. And pruning of this kind is a regular, recurrent task. (Harrison 2002 (a): 12)

Harrison opposes such a creative relationship with the text to the written culture of the Western world that he denounces as a "museum culture" with an "almost fetishistic" concern for the text (Harrison 2002 (a): 12). He goes even further, asserting that "one of the marks of a literary classic is its capacity for change and adaptation" (Harrison 2002 (a): 10). According to him, the Classics are not fixed, immutable texts but on the contrary, they need to be retranslated continuously otherwise they lose their vitality and become "starved out" like the rose in the above metaphor.[6] This echoes Hutcheon and O'Flynn's definition of adaptation as "an act of appropriating and salvaging […] a double process of interpreting and then creating something new" (Hutcheon & O'Flynn: 20). In Harrison's adaptations, there is both a strong regard for the past, a desire to be faithful to the source text as well as an impulse to appropriate the adapted material to make it relevant in the socio-political context of its production. Harrison also plays on the tensions between vernacular culture and academic knowledge, confronting and combining his desire for aesthetic authenticity with personal rebellion. By emphasising the new production in an English translation as an adaptation, he moreover invites "an ongoing dialogical process" between the two works (Hutcheon & O'Flynn: 21) while the audience, who more often than not is acquainted with the adapted text, is aware of intertextual resonances.

Drawing on his experience of Molière's *Le Misanthrope*, Racine's *Phèdre*, and the alliterative language of the medieval Mystery plays, Harrison created a new version of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* that premiered

on the Olivier stage of the National Theatre on 28 November 1981. It was the result of eight years of research on the original text and collaboration with director Peter Hall, designer Jocelyn Herbert, composer Harrison Birtwistle, and actors. The National Theatre production was for an all-male cast wearing masks (Jocelyn Herbert's masks covered the whole of the actors' faces). It was also characterised by strong Yorkshire voices, ritualised movement, episodes of sung text and musical accompaniment, thus endowing it with an oratorio-like quality. Harrison had eschewed "the clichés of naturalistic drama that have become the norm on TV and in most theatrically anaemic modern drama" (Harrison 2002 (b): 3) as well as the theatrical "anorexia" he identified in modernist verse drama (Harrison 2002 (b): 3). He had wanted to reconnect the modern stage with the public dimension of ancient times (the festivals of ancient Greece, the *corpus Christi* of Medieval York) or more recent times as in the pantomime and the music hall of his childhood when artists like Norman Evans, Frank Randall, Nat Jackley, Robb Wilton, Arthur Lucan, Jewell et Warriss starred at the Leeds Empire or the Grand Theatre.[7] These iconic figures of popular comedy were a constant source of inspiration:

> The kind of theatricality that [those comics] had, though still defiantly alive in the last days of vaudeville, had more or less disappeared from so-called 'serious' theatre, and I carried their presences with me as a sometimes grinning and girning, but always supportive, chorus, paradoxically, into the quest for an Aeschylean *gravitas* (Harrison 2002 (b): 5).

These ghosts of popular theatre therefore watched over the poet's labours during his adaptation of an ancient Greek play. Harrison felt torn between two traditions, one popular (connoted by the use of the dialectal word "girning"),[8] the other scholarly (the Latin "gravitas"); one national (the alliteration "grinning and girning" reminiscent of the alliterative style of old English poetry), the other foreign (Aeschylus). And yet, Harrison operated an aesthetic metamorphosis blending Athens and Yorkshire, Aeschylus and the language of *Beowulf*.

Harrison had indeed noticed that Aeschylus's Greek is replete with alliterations, a style that bore similarities with the meter of the Mystery plays he was working on at the same time (also for the Na-

tional Theatre) or, further in time, with Egil's Anglo-Saxon poetry. He was therefore particularly attracted by Robert Browning's *Agamemnon* first published in 1877. Although this version is deemed unperformable and unreadable, it furnished him with stylistic clues as to his own translation because Browning, trying to imitate Aeschylus's style, used a disjointed syntax, many alliterations, neologisms and compound words close to the kennings of Old English:

> And blowing forth a brisk blood-spatter, strikes me
> With a dark drop of slaughterous dew – rejoicing
> No less than, at the god-given dewy-comfort,
> The sown-stuff in its birth-throes from the calyx. (Browning: 352)

This idiom evokes the oral dimension of Anglo-Saxon poetry in which sounds are just as important as meaning. Browning's sensitivity to strong rhythm and consonants was bound to please a Yorkshire poet like Harrison, the Yorkshire accent being characterised by short, flat vowels and percussive consonants. Experiments with actors in the National Theatre rehearsal rooms also taught him that strong consonants and short vowels were necessary to make the text audible through the masks the production had decided on from the beginning. Consequently, Northern diction was promoted from "the comic bits" (Harrison 1987: 122) to the tragic stage:

> Father, father doused in doom
> kept immovable by death
> what can grope through your grave-gloom
> unbreachable by light or breath?
>
> What words can worm their way
> through the sour soil of sorrow
> what beacon of bright day
> burrow your dark barrow?
>
> From all the blood-clan's grave-rites
> they barred and blocked your bones,
> never budging, held by night's
> death-heavy anchorstones. (Harrison 2002 (b): 111)

Although Harrison here displays his formal mastery through the use of alternate rhymes, the rhythms created by alliterations, a predilection for monosyllabic words and strong consonants conjure up the atmosphere of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Most lines have a strong three-beat rhythm that contributes to the energy of the dramatic text delivered though a mask composed of many layers of muslin.[9] However, rhymes are fairly rare in the play, usually restricted to stichomythia. Harrison borrowed from Browning the technique of image-making and compound words reminiscent of the kennings:

> The clans and the clanchiefs clamour for sea-calm
> The god-sop that gets it makes their guts sicken
> The cure for the stormblast makes strong men craven (Harrison 2002 (b): 47)

The language is simple but heavily stressed with two beats before and after the hemistich. Strong rhythm and lexical repetitions or variations ("firegod", "firenews", "fire-tailed", "flame" repeated three times, "top", "peak", "upwards") all contribute to making a very dense text intelligible for a theatre audience who receives it orally:

> Firegod Hephaistos flashed out from Mount Ida
> flame after flame bore the beacon's despatches,
> jaded flame to fresh flame bearing the firenews.
> Ida to Crag Hermes on the island of Lemnos.
> From there its third stretch to the top of Mount Athos,
> the peak that Zeus favours, then further upwards
> and over the ocean dazzling and flaring
> luring up fish-shoals to see what the flash is,
> a fire-tailed comet transmitting its message
> to the watchtowers scanning the sky on Macistos.
> (Harrison 2002 (b): 50-1)

Harrison's text does not literally imitate Aeschylus's nor does it use genuine archaisms from Old English. Instead, Harrison creates a new style that is reminiscent of both Aeschylus and Egil but is essentially a dramatic script conceived for performance like a libretto or a musical score: "This text is written to be performed, a rhythmic libret-

to for masks, music, and an all-male company" (Harrison 1986: 187). Although this may sound self-evident, a comparison with MacNeice's version will show how determining this awareness of the demands of the stage on the resulting translation are:

> But the money-changer War, changer of bodies,
> Holding his balance in the battle
> Home from Troy reined by fire
> Sends back to friends the dust
> That is heavy with tears, stowing
> A man's worth of ashes
> In an easily handled jar.
> And they wail speaking well of the men how that one
> Was expert in battle, and one fell well in the carnage –
> – But for another man's wife.
> Muffled and muttered words;
> And resentful grief creeps up against the sons
> Of Atreus and their cause.
> But others there by the wall
> Entombed on Trojan ground
> Lie, handsome of limb,
> Holding and hidden in enemy soil. (MacNeice: 137)

MacNeice's version, which uses a fairly modern variety of English, has its literary merits and is faithful to Aeschylus. However, it is primarily destined for a reading audience rather than a theatre audience. On the contrary, Harrison's version may sound less accessible to the reader but it has the rhythm and dramatic energy that MacNeice's version lacks. Compare for instance the previous quotation from MacNeice with the equivalent passage from Harrison:

> 'Geldshark Ares god of War
> broker of men's bodies
> usurer of living flesh
> corpse-trafficker that god is –
>
> give to WAR your men's fleshgold
> and what are your returns?

Kilos of cold clinker packed
in army-issue urns
wives mothers sisters each one scans
the dogtags on the amphorae
which grey ashes are my man's?
they sift the jumbled names and cry:

my husband sacrificed his life

my brother's a battle martyr

aye, for someone else's wife –

Helen, whore of Sparta.
whisper mutter belly-aching
the people's beef and bile: *this war's*
been Agamemnon's our clanchief's making,
the sons of Atreus and their 'cause'.
Where's my father husband boy?
where do all our loved ones lie?
six feet under near the Troy
they died to occupy.' (Harrison 2002 (b): 54-5)

The typography, with its use of capital letters, italics, dashes and blank spaces within the lines or between them reads like nuances on a music score: they testify to the oral nature of the text devised by the translator. Harrison has indeed been very much aware of the theatricality of the text he translated; similarly, he conceived his version so that it would be addressed to the audience by the actors. It uses a public tone as opposed to the intimacy created by MacNeice's version. Theatricality or what Harrison calls "inbuilt *performability*" (Harrison in Astley: 444) is the guiding principle of his process of adaptation.

When Harrison declares that his versions of the classics were written for performance as he does in the preface to *The Oresteia*, or when he declares the published text of *The Mysteries* is a mere transcription of the actors' scripts, he draws attention to adaptation as process rather than product. Harrison does not sacralise his text; on the contrary, he offers it for the actors to test on the stage. It then undergoes multiple revisions as rehearsals take place. Harrison's correspondence with Pe-

ter Hall reveals the intrinsic link between scenography and text in his work: "I asked about "movement" before only because until I know how they are going to move I'm not sure how they are going to speak." (Letter to Peter Hall, 22 December 1975 in Astley: 276). Furthermore, the whole adaptation is conceived as a collaborative experience between the poet / translator, the director, the designer, the composer and the actors. In another letter dated 20 September 1981, Harrison quoted Stravinsky and Wagner, the first for his definition of formal constraint as an engine of freedom, the other for his recognition that Aeschylus's *Oresteia* was of operatic scale[10] (Astley: 280; Stravinsky 2000). Music does play a significant part in Harrison's adaptation of the Aeschylean trilogy. In the National Theatre's 1981 production of *The Oresteia*, the relentless tempo of the dramatic text spoken across the stage at 92 beats per minute (a rhythmic precision that makes it easier for actors to switch from spoken text to song) is sustained by the music of percussions, wood instruments and the harp, like a continuo that encapsulates tragic momentum during the five hours of performance. The percussions accompany the text to a precise tempo of 92 beats per minute; the harp is used as punctuation during silences, while the clarinets play often long notes in unison during entrances and exits. This reinforced the ritualised aspect of the performance necessitated by the use of masks. Indeed, behind them, actors had only a limited angle of vision; consequently, the movements were group rather than individual movements.

The music is consequently more than a mere accompaniment, since it is woven into the fabric of the text:

> for example the Parados, the entry of the chorus was done apparently marching in quasi-military fashion, though it might well look like Dad's Army being all old men… the Parados in *Agamamnon* was marching, and the rhythm was a marching one. Do we want that? […] I have a march rhythm up my sleeve if you want it, Hiawatha, not Colonel Bogey:
> 10 years now since Menelaus
> with his brother Agamamnon
> both the joint true heirs of Atreus,
> to revenge themselves on Paris

for his ravishing of Helen,
launch the Argive expedition
of a 1000 warships strong,
battalions of retribution
sent from Argos to smash Troy. (Letter to Peter Hall, 22 December 1975, in Astley: 276)

In fact, this passage was rewritten in the final version:

Ten years since clanchief Menelaus
and his bloodkin Agamemnon
(the twin-yoked rule from clan-chief Atreus –
double thronestones, double chief staves)
pursued the war-suit against Priam,
launched the thousand-ship armada
off from Argos to smash Troy. (Harrison 2002(b): 42)

The text is denser and shorter (seven lines instead of nine). In the second version, the use of kennings conjures up a mythical past reminiscent of Saxon England ("clan-chief", "war-suit"). Moreover, the technique of the kenning allowed Harrison to point out a key opposition in the trilogy between family ties and wedlock as in "bloodbond" / "bedbond" and "bloodright" / "bondright". It also allowed him to exacerbate gender tensions; instead of adding a suffix to a masculine term (god) to create a feminine one (goddess), both masculine and feminine use the same morphological structure, as in "he-god" and "she-god":

Apollo he-god healer your she-kin
Artemis intervene prevent her
sending winds on the fleet from the wrong direction
keeping the armada too long at anchor (Harrison 2002(b): 46)

Harrison exploits the semantic possibilities of compounding to throw light on the gender polarities inherent to the Oresteia myth that deals with the ending of a matriarchal system, a series of bloody revenge, in order to establish a new social order:

so a Father can take his own she-child take her
and kill her his she-child his own flesh and blood

The war-effort wants it the war-effort gets it
the war for one woman the whore-war the whore- war
(Harrison 2002(b): 48)

In order to clarify the implications of this "piece of patriarchal propaganda" (Harrison in Astley: 244), Harrison even invited feminists to come and debate with the all-male cast about the symbolism of the furies' defeat at the end of the trilogy. Some of his translation choices are deliberately meant to bring out Aeschylus's (sexist) patriarchal assumptions: "the womb of the woman's a convenient transit" (Harrison 2002(b): 169), closely echoing Elizabeth Gould Davies in *The First Sex*: "The male, in the view of nature, is only a 'glorified gonad'" (Gould Davies: 93). He had also imagined separating male and female audiences to increase the gender tensions in the theatre hall but this proved a step too far and had to be given up. Still, Harrison's translation testifies to his desire to reinject political significance – it is in this way that "adapters are first interpreters and then creators" (Hutcheon & O'Flynn: 18) – into a play about a distant mythical past so that it could still be relevant for a modern audience in the late 1970s and early 1980s context of the women's movement.

Harrison's passion for the Classics that started at Grammar School has never stopped. The obstacles the young working-class boy faced along his quest for culture and learning paradoxically became incentives so that the wayward student finally managed a *tour de force*. Not only did he reclaim his colloquial diction as a language fit for the stage, but he also appropriated the classics, thus "hijacking" (Padley 2001) this emblem of high culture:

Much of my writing has been a slow-burning revenge on the teacher who taught me English when I was twelve, and full of retrospective aggro. I think that to these feelings are due my reclamation of the Mystery Plays for Northern speech and actors and why there's a strong Northern character to the language I used for the National Theatre *Oresteia*, which proved too much for some people. One critic wrote that the chorus sounded like fifteen Arthur Scargills! I make no apologies. There's no earthly reason why a Greek chorus should sound like well-bred ladies from Cheltenham in white nighties. (Harrison in Astley: 437)

Even if this may sound like a deliberate provocation, the very fact that Harrison delivered this speech in front of the Classical Association at the University of Bristol on 12 April 1988 as President of this venerable institution showed that his adaptations of the classics, and in particular of *The Oresteia*, had broken new grounds. Harrison obviously relished the unwitting association with Arthur Scargill, leader of the NUM[11] who was *persona non grata* in Thatcher's England. Harrison had indeed expressed his political sympathies with Scargill in *v.*, his elegy written in an urban cemetery during the miners' strike, "full of […] aggro", whose film adaptation directed by Richard Eyre had caused so much political and media furore in 1987. Although Harrison has kept harping on his ambivalent relationship with a working-class upbringing – a quasi-literary myth derived from George Orwell, Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams who are great influences –, the choice of Northern voices for *The Oresteia* went far beyond the "slow-burning revenge" and the desire for "reclamation". "Can the poet in any way transcend these stereoptypical versuses?" Christopher Butler asks in "Culture and Debate" (Butler 1997). Yes he can, and Harrison did so in *The Oresteia* in which the choice of a Northern diction was aesthetically legitimised by Aeschylus's alliterative text. The then dominant representation of a Greek chorus on stage "in white nighties" with Received Pronunciation voices would have jarred with the tensions that Harrison painstakingly brought to light in his choice of adaptation, both through a robust language full of kennings and the choice of an all-male cast. His audacious methods and contributions to the reflection on the art of translating and adapting the classics[12] also owed him to become poet in residence at the National Theatre. There he surrounded himself with trusted actors, directors, composers, choreographers, designers who shared the same vision of dramatic adaptation as a collaborative, organic enterprise in which the translated text was but one ingredient of the whole. Finally, Harrison's apparent "classical vandalism" (Woodcock 1990) in fact reveals a very strong regard for the authors of the past and the ritual and communal dimension of Greek drama.

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[1] Actor Barry Cryer was later to become the author of the comic duo Morecambe and Wise.

[2] The sonnet "Classics Society" ends on: "And so the lad who gets the alphas works / the hardest in his class at his translation / and finds good Ciceronian for Burke's: / *a dreadful schism in the British nation*." (Harrison 1987: 120)

[3] Beeston Hill was and still is a working-class area of Leeds.

[4] The Classics, especially Greek tragedies, have survived primarily as texts.

[5] The time spent in Nigeria (1962-1966) and as a UNESCO Fellow in Cuba, Brazil, Senegal and Gambia (1969-1970) brought Harrison in close contact with African cultures.

[6] Harrison's conviction about the necessity of updating the Classics was reinforced during the year he spent in Prague (1966-1967) in a context of political oppression. There, he passionately went to the theatre, night after night, and witnessed the theatre perform Ezra Pound's promise that "literature is news that stays news".

[7] Two emblematic theatres in 1940s and 1950s Leeds.

[8] "girn: to grin, pull a face (var by metathesis of 'grin')" (Kellett: 69).

[9] Photo of one of Jocelyn Herbert's masks at <https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/blog/treasures-archive> (accessed 14 January 2018).

[10] The music composed by Harrison Birtwistle for the National Theatre's 1981 production of *The Oresteia* uses the principle of the leitmotiv that Wagner is believed to have hit upon while reading Aeschylus.

[11] National Union of Mineworkers.

[12] Although he likes satirising the academic world and the literate audience, Harrison expanded on his art of dramatic translation and adaptation in the prefaces and introductions to the published versions of his plays. All these texts, the only ones he wrote in prose, are now collected in *The Inky Digit of Defiance*.