Douglas Dunn: A Voice against Class Debasement

دوغلاس دان: صرخة ضد الذل الطبقي

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Abstract

Despite the fact that class has disappeared from the political rhetoric, it emanates conspicuously in the consciousness of the contemporary Scottish working-class poet, Douglas Dunn, whose voice works as an epitome of his class. Moreover, the poet proves the fatal effects of class-bound policies against the Scotsmen. Culture, literature, and sovereignty are properties of the ruling class. The working-class Scots are subjugated to follow and obey what they have been asked for. They are looked at as barbarians who are unable to produce culture, literature, or even rule themselves. Therefore, the poet, in his poetry, revolts against such marginalization and subordination. Realistically, the poet disputes that what happens to the working class of backwardness is because of the barbarous sovereignty of the ruling class who belittle other classes, specifically the working class for their hegemony.

The present study is a thematic analysis which traces the development to maturity of Dunn side by side with his grown-up class consciousness. It focuses of the epidemic presence of the notion of class among the British fabric whereas the Scottish suffers two degrees more than the English working class. Dunn's Barbarians represents an alp in the poet's career for defending his working class where he embarks directly on revealing that class gnaws the unifying visage of the British society and leads to a severe damage to the Scots.

Keywords: Scottish Poetry, class discrimination , Douglas Dunn, English literature, postmodernism

المستلخص

بالرغم من حقيقة تلاشي الطبقية من الخطابات السياسية لكنها تنبثق بوضوح في وعي الشاعر المعاصر الاسكوتلندي دوكلص دن الذي يمثل صوته موجز لطبقته والاكثر من ذلك يثبت الشاعر التأثيرات الفتاكة للسياسات الطبقية التي تمارس ضد الاسكوتلنديين. يظهر كل من الثقافة السائدة والادب والسلطة وكأنهم ملك للطبقة الحاكمة وان الطبقة العاملة الأسكتلندية يجب ان تتبع ما يملا عليها وأنها الطبقة بربرية وعاجزة عن خلق معايير الثقافة وكتابة الادب وحتى حكم نفسها. بالنتيجة يثور الشاعر في شعره ضد التهميش والخضوع ويجادل بصورة واقعية بان ما حدث للطبقة العاملة من تراجع هو بسبب التسلط البربري للطبقة الحاكمة التي قللت من شأن الطبقة العاملة من اجل الحفاظ على هيمنتها. الدراسة الحالية هي تحليل فكري يتتبع تطور دن كشاعر ناضج جنبا بجنب مع تطور وعيه الطبقي وتركز على الوجود الجائح لمفهوم الطبقية بين النسيج البريطاني وعلى وجه الخصوص الاسكوتلندي الذي يعاني من الطبقية ضعف معانات الطبقة العاملة الانكليزية. برابرة يمثل ذروة في مسيرة الشاعر في مناهضة الطبقية بعد ان يشرع في تبيان ان الطبقية تقضم الوجه الموحد للمجتمع البريطاني وتؤدي الى ضرر بليغ للإسكوتلنديين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشعر الأسكتلندي، دوكلص دان، التمييز الطبقي، الأدب الإنجليزي، مابعد الحداثة.

Introduction

Douglas Dunn speaks conspicuously of the epidemic existence of the notion of class among British fabric. In an interview with Attila Dósa, he confesses that class politics rather than nationality is behind the British societal inconveniency: "I believe the reason to be a matter of class politics among Scotland's writers and readers as much as nationalism." (Dósa, 2009: 65) His notion of class as a ruining force is embodied in the hegemony of the ruling class as opposed to the working class:

- They ruin us. They conquered continents.
- We filled their uniforms. We cruised the sea.
- We worked their mines and made their histories.
- You work, we rule, they said. We worked; they ruled.

(B, 26) (Dunn, 1979)

Class in Britain is a masked slavery. One class rules, another class is ruled. So class consciousness is an active feel for the ruled class. Dunn defines class consciousness as "a rotten, rancid and disgusting thing in British society, not native to Scotland until someone put it there." (Stabler, 1992: 4). Here, his class consciousness seems to stem more from London, the centre of the class-based government and the ruling class than Scotland. Linden Peach classifies Dunn as "one of the first poets to explore the way in which identities centred on objective notions of class." (Peach, 1992: 135). Dunn clearly deals with class, which centres on the tripartite theme of ancestry, culture, and identity (Peach, 1992: 135). He aligns ancestrally with his working-class grandfathers for decent life: "I stand, if you like, with the ghosts of my grandfathers. It's an antagonism toward the way in which people think about nature as well as about society … a politics of life or of being, rather than a politics of politics." (Haffenden, 1981: 34). His grandfather who was a carpet designer came from a farming family. His grandfather on his mother's side was "the cooperative baker in the town of Hamilton; a very kirkly man, an Old Left Socialist of considerable conviction." (Haffenden, 1981: 11). This is why Dunn admits his "ordinary, respectable, working-class background" when once he wrote that he feels quite grateful to have been born at the bottom of the pile (Haffenden, 1981: 11). Dunn descends from Scottish working-class

environment, "I came from a messily semi-rural kind of background, and this, Terry Street, and Hull were quite different." (Haffenden, 1981: 32). He highlights that though he has begun handling the working-class theme from non-Scottish town, which is Hull, it is an onset of his career for his Scottish working-class issue. Hull ignites his working-class consciousness: "at time, I was living in Hull … I was more conscious of the offence of class-based politics and systems organized around the apparent psychological need for demeaning and humiliation on the grounds of birth, nationality, and accent." (Dósa, 2009: 63-64). For this, Dunn writes for all the working class in general and therefore, tilts to be realistically objective in his delineation of their life.

Scotland, dominated by the ruling class who governs Great Britain, tends to be a politically working class region. Scotsmen live in peripheral, territorial region without statehood, "stateless nation" where there is the sense of a nation and the non-sense of a "stateless-ness." (Skinner, 2004: 377). The consciousness which is shared by both the Scottish people and the working class has its roots in that both of them are exploited by the same centred power which is, in Jonathan Skinner's words, "London, the 'colonial' British metropole, the seat of the old Empire." (Skinner, 2004: 377). Though, Scotland has been part of great Britain since the Act of Union in 1536 and 1707, Scotsmen are denied even the right to abode in Britain (Skinner, 2004: 377-378). They are "involved in the expansion of the British Empire, as well as in resistance to a perceived form of internal colonialism from London." (Skinner, 2004: 378). The distance of Scotland from the central government which is governed by non-Scottish personnel lets it be "a politically acceptable environment in terms of its proletarian characteristics." (Craig, 1996: 362). Another factor, which may strengthen the combination of Scotland and the working class is that both of them angles toward the political Left. Cairns Craig argues that "for many Scots intellectuals, the New Left provided the medium by which they could assert their commitment to working class politics." (Craig, 1996: 361). This consciousness pushes them to behave as non-English citizens who have been brought up in a local culture which differs from the culture of the old Empire. They suffer a sense of an ambivalence which seems permanent due to the existence of class system. It is not a surprise to find Dunn describes himself not as of

Scottish but of non-English origins: "I don't live in Scotland, and I don't know the majority of the people in the Scottish literary scene…. I haven't abnegated my own country; I don't have an English accent and I don't think like an Englishman." (Haffenden, 1998: 20). Skinner ends his idea of this ambivalence as "affection at being British, and the affliction of being British." (Skinner, 2004: 378). Consequently, in addition to the working-class subject, Scottishness is another major subject of Dunn's poetry. He tries to keep both subjects together. Dunn's consciousness stems from the centred ruling class's colonialism over Scotland. In an interview with P.R. King, Dunn makes it clear that his nationality and his working-class background are two effective shaping forces of his poetry:

Over the years my writing has tried to keep promise with a Scottish, Rural, working-class background…. I am certain it is more than a social or political gambit; and I am sure it means more to me than an act of sentimental fidelity…. To persevere with the art of poetry is to pick up a bet you make with yourself. Nationality and background are involved in the bet I made (King, 1979: 221).

Accordingly, in his fourth volume of poetry, Barbarians (1979), Dunn articulates his self-identity as a "barbarian" because of his detachment from the central power and thus declares his exile from it. Later in an interview with Attila Dósa in 1998, he outweighs class over nationalism to be the reason behind the failure of "Britishness or Britishism" in Scotland (Dósa, 2009: 65).

What seems to concern Dunn much is the cultural crisis, which contributes to the class division of Great Britain as a whole country. Edward Burnett Tyler defines culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." (Avruch, 1998: 6). Class division is one of the main factors that leads Britain to lose a unifying culture. Each class has its own set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours. Dunn exclaims that with the existence of class, Britain loses its unifying culture. Dunn calls into question that "British society does not exist except as a notion of the ruling class and the military. How can a society exist when its' not supported by a culture?" (Kennedy, 2008: 4). Here, the prevailing culture at the expense of cultures of other classes is the bourgeois ruling-class culture

which support the interests of capitalism and hence tends to exploit and control. Therefore, the working-class culture is marginalised and exploited. Since the working class is part of the nation, it is a right to enjoy its culture. Nonetheless, it undergoes the feel of exclusion. The Scottish working class is two degrees away from the cultural centre. Art is an essential manifestation of any culture. Yet, it tends to be proprietary means in the hand of the centre: "for Dunn, London, Oxford and Cambridge is the triangular literary Schwerpunkt [a German word which means centre] of this United Kingdom, a centrifuge of scholarship which simultaneously creates and dominates the margins – lesser, more dependent territories such as his native Scotland." (Skkinner, 2004: 377). Therefore, Scotland is one of the margins whose culture is dominated by the cultural triangle. Scotsmen suffer the feeling of the excluded for not being of the ruling class. Dunn acknowledges that his people are not even admitted in the ruling-class culture:

- Unless we enter through a narrow gate
- In a wall they have built
- To join them in the 'disinterested tradition,'

(B, 14)

Colin Nicholson finds that "property-based social exclusion and the signifying systems it generates are in alliance. No alteration is countenanced, and there is no admission to the excluded." (Nicholson, 1992: 193). Dunn's tackling of the working-class subject as one of the main themes of his poetry comes from his cultural "grudge" (O'Brien, 1992: 74). which can apparently be synonymous to his working-class consciousness though it purely springs from it. Culture is the spirit of the nation; its exclusion from any class means the execution of the class itself. This interprets Dunn's concern about "the tale of man disempowered and disenfranchised: an orphan of spirit." (Smith, 1992: 81). Being bothered by the sense of a marginalised culture; He opposes that the means of artistic production are not a property in the hand of the privileged classes. On the contrary, they are accessible for all the classes with their different set of beliefs, values, and behaviours. Yet, the working class is denied for this right as Dunn feels. He imagines poetry as a wall where the poet has not been permitted to sit on as a child: "Poetry is like that wall. There are people who think they own

poetry. They think poetry 'serves' them. It doesn't; and when it does it is being exclusive and partial. So, I have a grudge. My grudge is a good grudge. I can even take it out myself and sing to it…." (O'Brien, 1992: 74). He is conscious of being one of the working-class writers whose ambition is to control the means of artistic production depending on the elaborate formalities offered by the English verse tradition (O'Brien, 2003: 571) and thus deviates his style from the experimentalism of the bourgeois.

Resistance is the flag of Dunn's Scottish working-class poetry. He keeps fidelity and sincerity for his people and his upbringing: "I want to be a poet of High Culture but at the same time I don't want to be disloyal to my native parish, my home, my most immediate people, children, friends." (Dósa, 2009: 64). The primary subject of his poetry is "the facts of [his people's] lives and the larger energies which shape them will not allow his art to prefer a partial reality. Much of the strength of his work emerges from this scrupulous conflict." (O'Brien, 1992: 67). Hence, class is a major force in shaping their lives. He devotes a major part of his poems to the suffering of his class. Though he has done much for his class to reclaim its right, he blames himself for dealing superficially with their issue and revealing part of their truth:

- They suffer, and I catch only the surface.
- The rest is inexpressible, beyond
- What can be recorded. You can't be them.
- If they'd talk to you, you might guess
- What pain is like though they might spit on you (Dunn, 2003: 36).

He follows that "politics softens everything. / Truth is known only to its victims." (Dunn, 2003: 36). This consciousness urges him to take his role and to use poetry for his ends. Dunn defines class prejudice and its connection to the linguistic terms as "a rancorous emotion, and the hostility it generates extend to the linguistic terms with which it chooses to identify itself." (Nicholson, 1992: 193). Therefore, He manipulates his linguistic terms, specifically poetry, to deliver an urgent message and hopes to defend his class's status. Though working-class poetry is about resistance for preserving status, culture and identity; failure and defeat is impending since it is going to be read not by the class for which it has been written but by those it is aimed at.

The work of the working-class writer, Dunn explicates, “is directed to an audience who do not receive it; instead, it is received by an audience of those he is against.” (Spencer: 6). Though he realises that the urban working-class character is feeble, he believes in fighting back. Dunn exclaims that such kind of “Poetry is very largely about defeat and failure. There’s an element of fighting back, of course, of contesting the inevitability of defeat and failure. But I don’t share the Left’s cheap faith in the indomitable character of urban working-class.” (Nicholson, 1992: 188). Here, Dunn proposes to wage a war and establish a movement for the working class – a working-class movement for reform not for dismantlement, for respect not for demeaning, for congregation not for segregation, and most importantly for equality in all the fields not for monopolised and proprietary ideology. Nicholson comments on the benign consequences of Dunn’s imaginary movement, which appears undoubtedly in his Barbarians, that it seeks not to destroy British institutions, but to reform them and revivify them (Nicholson, 1992: 192).

In this fourth volume of poetry, Barbarians (1979), the poet dramatizes his class consciousness as an immanent tone, drawing upon his ethnic background and the hegemonic control over the working-class people specifically in Scotland. Here, he embarks directly on showing that class deforms the unifying visage of society. The volume has got much reaction for its engagement in politics. Dunn argues that “if the poet is engaged in social and political subjects, then people are likely to react to a poem in much the same way as they react to political ideas.” (Dósa, 2001: 57). In Barbarians, the poet boosts his class consciousness by taking a main role in the drama of class. The other development is the appearance of his Scottish identity and Scotland as a prominent marginalised society due to its "absent culture," (Craig, 1996: 362) and suppressed sovereignty. This appearance is stimulated by his consciousness of class prejudice, which overwhelms Great Britain. Here, in the volume, Dunn intends to show "where the political poetry [is] to come from," (O’Brien, 1992: 72) though he "had not openly formulated the problem (of race, class, status) and announced the grudge earlier." (O’Brien, 1992: 72). Dunn well describes his treatment of class-consciousness in Barbarians by saying that Barbarians is about "psychologies of class, racial and national

superiorities – distempering, recalcitrant subjects." (King, 1797: 225). Dunn has been regarded as a poet of the political left (Craig, 1996: 361-362). Left, in politics, is associated in general with egalitarian stance in the face of marginalisation and ethnocide or cultural genocide of the working class. "Leftists tend to be hostile to the interests of traditional elites, including the wealthy and members of the ARISTOCRACY, and to favour the interests of the working class. They tend to regard social welfare as the most important goal of government." (Encyclopaedia Concise Britannica, 2006: 1092). Moreover, Dunn frankly confesses by saying that "I still find myself on the left side of the political spectrum in that I still hold to a belief in social justice." (Dósa, 2009: 69). In addition to his alignment with the working class politics, Dunn labels that Scotland is "a politically acceptable environment in terms of its proletarian characteristics" and its development "could be seen … as 'non-standard', leading to a national backwardness 'which naturally appears as 'neurosis' in the relation to standard models of development." (Craig, 1996: 362). It is, in this context, Dunn declares "his self-identity as 'barbarian'" (Craig, 1996: 362) in the poems of this volume.

Unlike his previous poetry which is written without metre, Barbarians is written in metre because Dunn intends to show the ability of the working-class poet's mastery over the means of poetry. Dunn interprets the premeditation of using metre in the volume that "the style of the book hopes to portray a gesture of affront to readers who might be expected to approve of a metrical way of writing, while finding the meaning of Barbarians disagreeable." (King, 1979: 225). Such adoption of classical forms appears from "In the Grounds" onward in a way, which is entirely appropriate to his politics. Dunn elaborates that "the title sequence is made up of poems about working class politics, so I used the form ironically; in other words, I politicised it." (Dunn,1999: 21-51). This is also highlighted by Craig who refers that "the method of a dialectic between a formal order derived from high culture and a point of view essentially vernacular was to be the foundation on which Dunn would build the major achievements of his poetry in the 1980s (Craig, 1996: 363).

Barbarians has been widely acclaimed among literati. Much attention is paid to the connotation of the term, Barbarian, itself. In an

interview, Dunn explains thoroughly the coinage of the term, highlighting its stem from his consciousness of class-based politics. He reveals his appositional and hostile voice against the discriminating standards of the British society and the proprietorship of "High Culture":

My notion of “barbarians” came straight from the Greek, though. “Bar-bar” in Greek was meant to imitate the uncouth sounds of the languages of those who weren’t Greek and were, allegedly, uncultured. The relationship between English and Scottish literature wasn’t a priority. At the time, I was living in Hull, in East Yorkshire, and although the poems are aware of my Scottish background and concerns, I was more conscious of the offence of class-based politics and systems organised around the apparent psychological need for demeaning and humiliation on the grounds of birth, nationality, and accent …“Barbarians”, in the poems I wrote around that title and concept, are those who have otherwise been excluded from High Culture, but who, by the later part of the twentieth century in the North-West European Archipelago, come to possess it, very much to the embarrassment of those who assume that they have inherited and own the language and its poetic possibilities (Dósa, 2009: 63-64).

Dunn begins his volume with an important epigraph that hints clearly at the main theme of the study. It is extracted from Paul Nizan's novel, Antoine Bloyé:

He was bored, but nevertheless he slowly grew further and further away from the hardship and simplicity of the workers, from his childhood environment. He somehow learned how to behave, as they say. Without realizing it, he cut himself off from his own people. … he thought he was merely bored, but secretly he was flattered at being included. Some forces drew him toward the bourgeoisie; other forces sought to retard his transition.

The truth of life was on the side of the men who returned to their poor houses, on the side of the men who had not "made good." (B, 10)

Here, the story of Antoine Bloye resembles the experience of the scholarship boy as presented in chapter two of Tony Harrison. Kennedy says that "the Nizan epigraph emphasizes how entry into culture involves a process of assimilation that leads to alienation of the working-class individual from himself and his origin." (Kennedy, 2008,

39). Nizan portrays the feel of estrangement of the working-class cultured man amid bourgeois culture. After the portrayal, Nizan also offers his vision and prefers for the working-class person to be loyal to his/her origin, to be on the side of the men who have not "made good" in the eyes of other classes. Yet, in this novel, David Kinloch diagnoses that "the principal thrust of Nizan's published work was to show how every aspect of culture was penetrated by a bourgeois, humanist ethos," (Kinloch, 1992: 159) which leads to "the taming of freedom." (Kinloch, 1992: 159). Thus, the epigraph paves the way for Dunn's poems to revolt against the bourgeois hegemony over "High Culture". It also warns how promotion through classes alienates the working class person from his/ her own kith and kin.

The first poem, "The Come-on", begins with an epigraph from Albert Camus that implies that "… the guardian, the king's son, who kept watch over the gates of the garden in which I wanted to live" (B, 13), provokes a sense of cultural deprivation and class prejudice. Kennedy sees that "the Camus epigraph stresses culture as a matter of privileges not rights." (Kennedy, 2008: 39). Moreover, the poem dramatizes Dunn's aggression against bourgeois culture of 1960s and 1970s. Here, Dunn speaks to the generation of working-class poets to play their role and prove their culture away from the mainstream culture of the privileged classes. Bernard O'Donoghue acknowledges that "'The Come-on' satirises the academic establishment for accommodating the refractory, radical writer by teaching him/her 'to tell one good wine from another.'" (O'Donoghue, 1992: 47). However, the poet first shows that the poem springs from "the bitter ooze from my grudge" (B, 13) against the politics of exclusion from high culture which has been dominated by a privileged class more than intellectual writers. He attacks the ill intellect of the privileged class that has nursed the hegemonic culture by "school or book … [or] enchanting, beloved texts" (B, 13) deviating and monopolising it from those who have the enough intellect to take role in it. Thus, he promises to "blacking out what intellect [of the privileged classes] was nursed" (B, 13). Though he enjoys a wide intellect, Dunn's working-class consciousness makes him feel that "even now I am an embarrassment / to myself, my candour" (B, 13). He seems resentful because of his people's silence, which lets the privileged classes, the "professional

classes," (B, 13) speak proclaiming alleged rights at the cost of their rights. The privileged classes' speech grants them authority and enables them to establish standards according to their desires and benefits:

- Listen now to the 'professional classes'
- Renewing claims to 'rights',
- Possession of land, ownership of work,
- Decency of 'standards'.
- In the bleep-bleep of versicles, leisure-novels,
- Black traffic of Oxbridge.
- Books and bicycles, the bile of success.
- Men dressed in prunella
- Utter credentials and their culture rules us, ….

(B, 13)

Such a culture, in Dunn's view, is "A culture of connivance, / Of 'authority', arts of bland recoveries" (B, 13). In other words, it is not a culture of social evolution and equal humanity; it is a culture of stealing rights and authorities from the "barbarians" who are afflicted by silence and do not belong to the class of those privileged. Thus, "Where, then, is 'poetry?'" (B, 13). The poet interrogates the role of poets; the revealers of inequalities and sayers of truth. He also stresses that this cultural crisis steals the glamour of poetry and empties it from any sense of beauty. For this reason, Dunn wages a cultural war and provokes a revolution:

- Brothers they say that we have no culture.
- We are of the wrong world,
- Our level is the popular, the media,
- The sensational columns,
- Unless we enter through a narrow gate
- In a wall they have built
- To join them in the 'disinterested tradition'
- Of tea, of couplets dipped
- In sherry and the decanted, portentous remark.

(B, 13-14)

Sean O'Brien accurately diagnoses Dunn’s aggressive vision toward a monopolised bourgeois culture as this:

The fury of 'The Come-on' is that of a man and poet who finds that the allowances he has been making receive no reciprocal respect: a

working-class writer may join the establishment through the 'narrow gate/ In a wall they have built', but at the cost of deracination and the continued exclusion of his own people….'The Come-on' does not concern a working-class writer's search for acceptance, as the bourgeois critic may suppose; instead it insists that the health of the imagination will only be served by a willingness to 'admit generosity, modify the centuries of privilege and exclusiveness upon which was erected the culture of some, and not of the many.' (O'Brien, 1992: 73).

Therefore, Dunn establishes his oppositional stand and intends to obtain, for his working-class people and poets alike, a place in the garden of culture not by a revolution with military traditional means but by cunning and intellect using the same bourgeois tactics as decorum, delicate manners, and language together with much patience and secrecy:

- Therefore, we'll deafen them
- With the dull staccato of our typewriters.
- But do not misbehave.
- Threats and thrashings won't work: we're outnumbered.

Our honesty is cunning.
We will beat them with decorum, with manners,
As sly as language is.
Take tea with the king's son at the seminars.
He won't know what's happening.
Carry your learning as does the mimic his face.
Know one knife from another
You will lose heart: don't show it. Be patient;
And sit on that high wall
In its obstacle glass chips, its barbed wire,
Watching the gardeners.
(B, 14)

In this mocking instigation, Dunn intends to make the other classes pay attention to his class as being oppressed. As a result, he threatens to occupy the main culture by a host of working-class poets, depicting it as a garden. He attacks figuratively the idea of subordination:

One day we will leap down, into the garden,
And open the gate –wide, wide.
We too shall be king's sons and guardians,

And then there will be no wall:
Our grudges will look quaint and terrible.
(B, 14)

The poet's attack lies in his encouragement for his working-class peers and peeresses to activate their literary means and reflect their cultural ideology through their production. Jonathan Skinner explains the literary attack of the working-class poets as this:

Dunn sets out a programme for the barbarian poet, encouraging him or her to enter the territory of "disinterested tradition …" and to overwhelm it with great quantities of writing…. In this way, Dunn "advocates a barbarian literary attack" in which the barbarians colonise and appropriate for their own ends the weapons of the English south, a strategy recognised by Crawford as a subversion of the Establishment, Dunn's "culture of connivance" (Skinner, 2004, 379).

The second poem, "In the Grounds", deals with class consciousness, but "it is a repression internal to English culture rather than between English culture and its peripheries." (Craig, 1996: 362). It is purely emanates from the poet's consciousness that the poet speaks aggregately and retrospectively, using the first-person plural pronoun. It, furthermore, portrays "a confrontation between the wealthy gentility of a land-owning class and the awkward feelings of people who are deemed to intrude on this exclusive world." (Macrae, 1993: 31). The poet says:

- Barbarians in a garden, softness does
- Approve of who we are as it does those
- Who when we speak proclaim us barbarous
- And say we have no business with the rose.

(B, 15)

The clear feature of the poem is the formality of its verse. Its consistent rhyme scheme, the regular ten syllables, vocabulary, and syntax are used as gestures of affront as mentioned above. The Soviet critic Mikhail Bakhtin calls such usage "a hybrid construction." (Gregson, 1992: 28). Bakhtin's connotation indicates the writing in a way belonging to an English aristocratic tradition but with an alien accent, that tradition has previously marginalised and suppressed it (Gregson, 1992: 28). Dunn confesses his method of 'a hybrid construction' by "hurting a truth with truth" (B, 15)—a truth of

employing a classical form for working-class themes and tropes. He also reveals his resentment and grudge toward "you"; the classes who have marginalised and suppressed his class:

You do not know, how, unkempt
And coarse, we hurt a truth with truth, still true
To who we are: barbarians, whose chins
Drool with ale-stinking hair, whose horses chew
Turf owned by watching, frightened mandarins,
Their surly nephews loungings at each gate,
Afraid we'll steal their family's treasured things,
Then hawk them—pictures, furniture and plate—
Round the encampment of our saddle-kings.
(B, 15-16)

The poet shows the imminent menace of the working class to advance and play a role in the country they live in as reflected by the fear of the ruling class. He prepares for an imaginary revolution. His intention is to make other hegemonic classes to pay attention and pay the working class's status back. He then justifies his adoption of such method for the following reason:

We are intransigent, at odds with them.
They see our rabble-dreams as new contempt
For England's art house and leaf. Condemn
Our clumsiness.
(B, 15)

Macrae elucidates that "Dunn introduces himself as one of the people labelled as barbarians, the rabble, but he writes in a highly cultivated manner showing an intimacy with history and linguistic stylishness. This discrepancy between the label put on him and his sophistication demolishes the forces of class discrimination." (Macrae, 1993: 31). The discrepancy is obviously touched in the following two lines, where such genteel and soft lines of verse are not expected from a barbarian: "Gently the grass waves, and its green applauds / The justice, not of progress, but of growth" (B, 15). Here, Dunn judges class discrimination according to universal criteria. The grass and its greenery are signs of equality and reveal justice where the British people, who are from the same soil, lack justice and marginalise each other.

The formality of Dunn's poetry works as a gesture of affront, revealing his denial of the prevailing ways of writing poetry which are almost formless. The tension between structure and content carries on to encompass "Gardeners", but, this time, the poet adds a historical dimension. As for the structure or form, the poet draws upon the French revolution and the changes that the romantic poetry adopted as a kind of protest over the neo-classical and metaphysical ones. The poem is subtitled: "England, Loamshire, 1789 / A gardener speaks, in the grounds of a great house, to his Lordship" (B, 17). Writing classical poetry in 1789, the time of romantic poetry, contradicts with the change that poetry has witnessed. Dunn's using of rhymed verse in the time that the public prejudice tilts to free verse seems disinterested. Bernard O'Donoghue reveals the importance of the subtitle that "the imaginary, but politically recognisable, world of 'Loamshire' is placed in the year of the French Revolution, so that its classical formality and revolutionary message have a disinterested context." (O'Donoghue, 1992, 48). However, "this dialectic of structure and statement that provides the real drama … of the poet who has made the tradition his own, [is] only to deny the cultural rights of those who claim that tradition."(Craig, 1996: 363).

As for content, "Gardeners" has three main symbols. The first is a repressed gardener, who represents the working class in the past time. This gardener imagines a revolutionary moment in the eighteenth-century English countryside to confront his hard-hearted lord. Thus, the poem is a "kind of ventriloquism." (Craig, 1996: 363). The second is the lord, a cruel owner, who symbolises the privileged class, who violates the working-class efforts. This owner confiscates the gardener's work to be his own and by his superintendence. The gardener asks his lord's forgiveness because of forgetting this confiscation:

- But pardon us,
- My lord, if we reluctantly admit
- Our horticulture not the whole of it,
- Forgetting, that for you, this elegance
- Is not our work, but your far tidier Sense.

(B, 17)

he third symbol is the garden which stands for Britain; the nation

which is humiliated by the cruel owners. The poet aspires to halt this humiliation by burning the owner's house and hung him in one of the corners of the garden, which will remain intact and untouched. Though it is grudge, this grudge is a natural consequence against the privileged classes' cruelty and humiliation:

They call this grudge. Let me hear you admit
That in the country that's but half of it.
Townsmen will wonder, when your house was burned,
We did not burn your gardens and undo
What likes of us did for the likes of you;
We did not raze this garden that we made,
Although we hanged you somewhere in its shade.
(B, 18)

Cairns Craig explains that Dunn aligns with the labourers that both of them attack to inhabit the nation:

The poem allows the labourers of England in 1789 (those who, according to G. K. Chesterton, have never been allowed to speak in English literature) to voice their condition in a language of abstraction and of formal elegance (ten-line stanzas of couplets enclosed by the rhyme of lines one and five) that belongs to their masters, announcing the parallel between poetry (taken from its makers by the cultural elite) and the English landscape, whose "elegance / Is not our work, but your far tidier Sense" (SP, 106). That dialectic, however, though precisely located in history, is placed in a mythic England ("Loamshire 1789"), which is a construction of the very tradition that Dunn is challenging. Like the labourers, Dunn wants both to attack the tradition and to inhabit it (Craig, 1996: 363).

Dunn shows that Britain still rules by imperialism, which is a kind of slavery in his viewpoint; "colonialism is an intellectually and emotionally awkward area for Scots." (Kennedy, 2008: 5). Yet, British imperialism has been shrunk to oppress the British people by the means of class. Therefore, his working-class consciousness, accompanied with his grudge, appears intact in the following lines from his poem, "Empires":

- They ruined us. They conquered continents.
- We filled their uniforms. We cruised the seas.
- We worked their mines and made their histories.

- You work, we rule, they said. We worked; they ruled.
- They fooled the tenements. All men were fooled.
- It still persists. It will be so, always.
- Listen. An out-of-work apprentice plays
- God Save the Queen on an Edwardian flute.
- He is, but does not know it, destitute.

(B, 26)

Though some of these lines are referred to above, the poem is of great importance. The title is very clear in exposing a serious internal injury of the working class. As if the poet's class consciousness spoke these lines. Here, the poet reports a documentation of his class destitution without any more images or metaphors. They seem an outcry of agony and oppression. The poet begins with the past tense and then shifts to the present tense to show the continuation of class to the present time as in the anthem of "God Save the Queen" by a destitute apprentice.

To conclude, the poet starts snapshotting and displaying the harsh conditions of his class which appears as not only existing in Scotland but as a general phenomenon all over the country. Barbarians is purely Scottish study where Scots appear barbarous and excluded from the main culture. Instead of being an outsider or stranger in narrating and displaying the life of the working class, the poet champions the volume and plays the hero against the abuse of class-based politics.

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