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A “living, cloven, apostolic tongue” and “philanthropic philology” – Exploring the Possibility of Working-class Writings on Language Theory in the 1840s.

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A “living, cloven, apostolic tongue” and “philanthropic philology” – Exploring the Possibility of Working-class Writings on Language Theory in the 1840s.

This article looks at two essays by John Goodwyn Barmby published in the *New Moral World* and *Howitt's Journal* to explore the possibility of a working-class theory of language in England in the 1840s. Positioning Barmby's writings in relation to explicit connections between politics, language theory and culture by middle-class writers in the 1830s that prepared the way for the emergence of the New Philology in England in the mid-nineteenth century, I also examine whether these two pieces fit within and extend a tradition of 'alternative' politically radical language theory produced at the turn of the century. By adopting and adapting research into the earlier period, I explore how Barmby's texts attempt to invoke and accentuate discourses that became crucial to the development of new paradigms for the study of language in England. My analysis shows evidence to support the view that those discourses were neither radical nor conservative, and that their use in writings on language and politics was complex. I conclude that Barmby's essays add to our knowledge of the history of language theory in England in the nineteenth century. More specifically, his texts are best described as instances of what could be called working-class labour on language theory in the 1840s, and as such they help our identification and analysis of the work being done by others at that time to appropriate and shape discourses in order to speak about language in terms of the emergent paradigm of the New Philology.

Keywords: Barmby; philology; language; working-class; 1840s.

Introduction

In 1841 and in 1847, John Goodwyn Barmby published two essays on language in the *New Moral World* and *Howitt's Journal of Literature and Popular Progress* respectively. Written by a prominent, if self-styled, leader of various early communist initiatives, and published in periodicals targeted at a radical, working-class readership, a key question is posed by “An Essay Towards Philanthropic Philology; or, Ideas on Language, in Reference to the Future, of Transition and Community” (1841) and “Universal Language and Phonography”(1847). Beyond having a place in Barmby's own vision of society progressing to a communist state of being, what can these essays reveal more generally about the possibility of writing working-class language theory in the 1840s? Embedded within that question are a number of challenges that need to be met if we are to be in a position to provide a response. First, we need to establish the historical reference points we should use to orientate our understanding of what presents as

a discrete, if scarce, form of writing on language. Second, given that there are so few texts of the 1840s purporting to develop a theory of language that is advantageous to the working classes, it is not surprising that there is no established methodology for reading such works, but we will need to develop one. Third, we will need to consider the implications of conclusions we draw about such texts in terms of what they can tell us about the wider sphere of writing on language during that period.

The sample taken to explore those issues may appear to be small. However, in the context of a paucity of such writings on language during this period, these two short articles not only make working-class politics an explicit aspect of their remit, but also illustrate issues which emerge when pursuing that objective. In investigating how we read the possibility of working-class language theory through Barmby's work, I will: situate the intent of these essays in relation to the emergence of an explicit link between language theory and politics in the 1830s; develop a critical methodology by reviewing analysis of an alternative tradition of politically radical writings on language between 1790-1820; and offer a reading of Barmby's writing that casts new light on the establishment of the New Philology in England as the dominant paradigm for thinking and speaking about language. My thesis is that the best way to read Barmby's essays is to interpret them as a form of working-class labour on language theory, and to see them as prompting questions about the work done by others in the 1840s to accentuate discourses which constructed the dominant understanding of language in England for the remainder of the century.

Barmby and working-class writing on language

The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* tells us that Goodwyn Barmby, who was never known by his first name, was the son of a solicitor, and allegedly from the age of sixteen “eschewed the professions and followed a career of social and political radicalism” (947). He presented himself as being behind the establishment of a Chartist council in East Suffolk and Yarmouth in 1839, and this was followed by two years as “an elected delegate to the Chartist convention” (947). Armytage states that by 1841 Barmby “had organized the Central Communist Propaganda Society, to promote communitarianism”, and he soon became Chair of “five territorial groups” operating in London, Cheltenham, Ipswich, Merthyr Tydfil, and Strabane in Ireland (196; 197). In 1842, he set up the Moreville Communitorium at Hanwell, the subsequent re-naming of this communitarian experiment in 1843 lying behind Holyoake’s recognition of his historical role in *The History of Co-operation*, where he writes that “Mr Barmby founded a Communist church, and gave many proofs of boldness and courage” (151). Trahair tells us that “as a representative of the Communist Church he went to Paris in 1848” (28), maintaining a revolutionary fervour that has been noted by others. Garnett is dismissive of Barmby’s claims to have introduced the word “communist” into the English language (38), but he nevertheless gives some sense of how to view the tenor of his work by stating that the term communism was “reserved during the 1840s largely to describe militant revolutionism” (25). The biographical record references “his post-1848 disillusionment with communism”, noting that it was “probably to his friendship with W.J. Fox MP that Barmby owed his introduction to Unitarianism”, signalling a move to “liberal political convictions” that characterised the remainder of his life (948).

Prior to that shift, there is sufficient evidence to think of Barmby as a distinctive champion of working-class and dissenting political causes. Despite differences between the two men that led to the collapse of at least two journals, in his *Forty Years' Recollections* Thomas Frost refers to Barmby “as a writer of remarkable originality” (56), and Barbara Taylor includes Goodwyn as well as his first wife Catherine (who published under the name “Kate”) in her claim that the pair produced writings that were “the most explicit critique of the concept of an essential masculinity and femininity to be found within Owenism” (179-80). Barmby’s essays in the *New Moral World* and in *Howitt’s Journal* can be seen as part of his political project, defined by Dennis Hardy as “an evolutionary view of human progress, in which there was a progression from ‘Paradization’ (the original state of nature) to ‘Communization’ (the social consequence of positive association)” (33). Passing through “Barbarization” and “Civilization”, Hardy shows how in Barmby’s view humanity would only achieve the final stage by addressing forty-four “societarian wants” identified by him in 1842, of which number sixteen was “Unitary common language” (34). The essays on which I focus in this article were written at the height of his communist fervour in the 1840s, and Barmby chose to publish his work on language in periodicals with a radical, working-class readership. Holyoake states that the “*New Moral World* may be regarded as the most important, the longest continued periodical which the co-operators had established” (133-4), and the *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* comments that “blending branch news, policy directives, correspondence, poetry and extensive comment pieces, the *New Moral World* and its Chartist equivalent the *Northern Star* were distributed by the same network of radical newsagents, while production also often overlapped” (444). As regards the other outlet for Barmby’s writings on language, it should be noted that as well as being an emissary from his Communist Church, he was also in Paris in 1848 on behalf of *Howitt’s Journal*. The *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* notes that even though only 6 volumes of the periodical were produced in 1847-8, the articles were

“organized to further the Howitts’ generous-spirited concept of what might support and encourage ‘popular progress’” (294). Most significantly, in her essay on “Writing for Periodicals”, Linda Peterson gives pride of place to Brian Maidment’s incisive claim that *Howitt’s Journal* was ‘wrought out of evident support for the intellectual and cultural development of the working classes’ (80).

On first impression, Barmby’s essay of 1841 in the *New Moral World* would appear to establish his credentials as a working-class theorist of language. He tells his readers that:

The voice of society demands linguical improvement, but we deem it chimerical to suppose that from the present Babyl of words, a universal language should, as by miracle, at once spring forth. ... Progress is gradational, and the barbaric state preceded the civil, as civilization is the herald of socialization; there still being a transitional state between the barbaric and the civil, and between the civil and the social: so must there be a general transitional tongue, chosen from among those now in existence, which shall precede, and pioneer the way for that universal language, which shall grow out of it, under the parental eye of established communism (205).

This understanding of language fits with a theory of the progression of humanity through four phases, where paradization (not mentioned here) gives way to barbarization, then to civilization, and eventually to communization. It is a future vision that is part of a working-class agenda for political and social change, with the essay ostensibly answering the sixteenth “societal want” of the communist project with regard to the need to establish in the future a “unitary common language”. There appears to be little value, therefore, in asking whether a progressive, working-class theorisation of language existed in the 1840s. Barmby’s essay is

important because it pushes us towards a different kind of question: how are we to read what presents as language theory designed to enhance working-class politics? This is far less straightforward, with Barmby's writing on language bringing a number of issues to the fore which cannot easily be accommodated by simply labelling his writings as working-class language theory.

An example of the uneven texture of Barmby's writing can be seen in the way his proposal that "a general language has become now pre-eminently essential to progress" (205) is linked to an argument that the "remedy for the disease of Babyl ... is a general tongue, and a grammar of humanity" (205). This is intended to reinforce the view that society will progress to a future state of political improvement when "a universal language" emerges from "the present Babyl of words". However, in his highly influential work on the history of language theory in England, Hans Aarsleff is clear that conceptualisations of universal language and grammar belong to a period defined by a prescriptivist approach to language, and one which is displaced by the descriptivist methods which define the emergence of nineteenth-century thinking about language. He writes that:

It is universally agreed that the decisive turn in language study occurred when the philosophical, a priori method of the eighteenth century was abandoned in favour of the historical, a posteriori method of the nineteenth. The former began with the mental categories and sought their exemplification in language, as in universal grammar (127).

The notion that Barmby's theory of language points towards a future in which communism will become the dominant social mode is therefore problematic, with his references to universal

language and grammar appearing to make his views more typical of the eighteenth century than the 1840s. On this point, we should note Haruko Momma's view that:

In the late eighteenth century, history allowed William Jones to divorce philology from universal grammar and redirect it to the investigation of linguistic facts, each specific to time and place. John Mitchell Kemble's search for Anglo-Saxon ethos during the 1830s concerned a different function of history altogether, as he hoped to locate the identity of the English in the language of the earliest vernacular literature. (100)

Despite Barmby's gesture to the future in 1841 by insisting that his approach aligns with views held "among the advocates of the social state of society" that is yet to come into existence (205), his way of speaking of the language that will define an imminent socialist state effectively aligns him with the past. For Aarsleff also, Kemble played an instrumental role in bringing about a new approach to language in response to work undertaken in continental Europe, and he notes that "Rask and Grimm were both visited at home by the two Anglo-Saxon scholars Benjamin Thorpe and John Mitchell Kemble. They brought the new philology to England in the 1830's" (161). According to these historical co-ordinates, Barmby's work is already irrelevant by 1841.

In similar fashion, Barmby's references to the Tower of Babel have a tendency to align both his views on language, and also his political thinking, with the end of the eighteenth century. In *Language, Custom and Nation in the 1790s*, Susan Manly writes of this period that "the government's fear of popular articulacy, of dissenting and unrepresented interests, led it to take action to outlaw freedom of speech and to demonize the terminology of reformers, condemned by Edmund Burke as 'the confused language of their Babylonian pulpits'" (2). For Steven

Blakemore and others, Burke's statement typifies the way in which the reaction in England to what was happening across the Channel effectively made understandings of language central to the battle between conservatives and radicals. Those who were sympathetic to the French Revolution are portrayed by Burke as putting words under so much pressure that language collapses in a manner that replicates the second fall of humanity in the Bible. He makes a battle for the meaning of words into one of the key features of the fight with his opponents, and effectively identifies the conceptualisation of language as the prize for whoever wins that political contest. As Blakemore says of Burke:

He sees how language can be used to assault civilization while altering the perceived meaning and "facts" of human reality. In short, Burke sees the French Revolution as a radical linguistic event; he sees it as a new Fall of language, and he presents a theory of language which explains both the old world and the Revolution which causes it to fall. (287)

Tom Furniss contributes to this analysis by stating that "this is a selective, if traditional, reading of the Babel myth which allows Burke at once to belittle radical aspirations and to claim that the English constitution preserves and is preserved by an unfallen language" (55), pointing out: that "this seems to make what for Burke would be a more disturbing analogy between Babel and revolutionary Paris. For the confusion of languages at Babel comes as a *defence* of heaven against Babel's threat to 'the Lord'" (55-6). In Genesis, the "confusion of languages at Babel" is delivered precisely to offset threats to the correct world order. John Turner underlines the complexity of this when he claims that "it is Burke who, defending the old, evolves new linguistic understanding where Paine, promoting the new, adheres to the old" (52).

The reference to Babel therefore risks pulling Barmby's writing on language back to debates which played out at the end of the eighteenth century. Moreover, once these aspects of his essays become apparent, questions also begin to surface about how to read the politics of his writing. Even when we put Barmby's political commentary in the context of his own time, it risks becoming more problematic than first appears. For instance, shortly after invoking Babel to illustrate the case for his new account of language, Barmby justifies this by claiming:

It teacheth us that to the greatest designs of humanity, the various idioms and tongues of language, have hitherto been an insurmountable barrier, and implicatively that this barrier must be removed to facilitate the establishment of the grand designs of Socialism (205).

In attempting to update a trope that was central to a much earlier period of radical writings on language, Barmby inadvertently puts the politics of his own writing on language into question. For instance, Garnett reminds us in his retrospective on Barmby of how Engels used his "Preface to the Manifesto of the Communist Party, 30 January 1888" to claim that "in 1847, Socialism was a middle-class movement, Communism a working-class movement" (25). This, coupled with Taylor's assessment that Barmby and "Kate" are best understood as "two young, middle-class intellectuals" (172), emphasises how the politics of these essays are less stable than first appears. Issues emerge regarding how language theory and politics were brought together during this period, along with questions about how to interpret Barmby's writings in relation to those of his radical predecessors. In that context, beginning with a consideration of the coming together of politics and language theory in the 1830s, and then moving on to modify critical approaches to radical writings on language between 1790-1820, I will articulate a reading of Barmby's exploration of the possibility of working-class language theory. In doing so, I will also indicate how his writings highlight important political aspects of work to define

language in the 1840s that are so often obscured by the dominant narrative of how the New Philology became established in England.

Politics and the history of language theory

When considering Barmby's two articles it is hard to ignore a history of language theory which identifies this period as crucial to the redefinition of philology in England, albeit not in the manner proposed by these essays. Momma is right to say that "linguistic historiographers have often considered 1830 as the beginning of the new philology in England" (68), and Aarsleff did much to establish that view when identifying the historical significance of work by Kemble in the 1830s, then built upon by his close compatriot Richard Chenevix Trench in the 1840s. Momma writes of Kemble that "in the late 1830s, his mood oscillated between pessimism and optimism" about the future of the new philological methods he was proposing (92), but for Aarsleff it is Trench who brings all to fruition by using those methods to lay the ground for the creation of the *New/Oxford English Dictionary*. He confidently claims that Trench "deserves to be remembered in the history of language study for the truly Faradayan saintliness he carried to the enterprise" (230), first with a series of lectures eventually published in 1851 as *On the Study of Words*, and subsequently in works such as *On the Deficiencies in our English Dictionaries* based on lectures given in 1857, in which he promoted a "true" dictionary as being "an historical monument, the history of a nation contemplated from one point of view" (*Deficiencies* 6). This is a compelling version of the context against which we should measure Barmby's contribution to the definition of philology in the 1840s. Aarsleff goes so far as to claim that "by the early 1840's, it was clear that Kemble and Thorpe had won the case for the new philology; they had also determined the future course of language study in England" (209), with the *N/OED* as the eventual realisation of Trench's ideal dictionary constituting what he

calls “one of the chief philological monuments of the century” (4). However, the groundbreaking work by Isobel Armstrong on debates that played out in the aesthetic of the 1830s is illustrative of how that line of development was far less straightforward than an hermetically sealed history of language theory would suggest, and her research has a particular bearing upon how we approach Barmby’s politically-informed attempts at writing language theory.

Armstrong focuses upon an explicit coming together of culture, politics and language theory in the 1830s, and this adds an important dimension to historical analysis of Barmby’s writing on language. For instance, in *Victorian Poetry* she identifies the two leading poets of the period in relation to influential groupings which set out new parameters for understanding such connections, maintaining that:

Browning was associated with Fox and the *Monthly Repository* group, Tennyson belonged to the Apostles. These groups represent two quite different intellectual formations in the 1830s. Yet both conceived themselves as avant-garde, experimenting with the new in political, theological and aesthetic matters, defining new categories and defamiliarising the old (27).

Both Kemble and Trench were members of the Cambridge Apostles, therefore it is not surprising to note Armstrong’s insistence that “if representation of the world and its constructed nature are at issue, it is to be expected that theories of language will be, as they are, critically important to both the Fox and the Apostles formations” (34-5). As such, in reinforcing the view that certain members of the Apostles were key players in developing language theory in this period, she also puts this “intellectual formation” into a new critical frame when she writes that, “to borrow from Walter Benjamin’s distinction, the *Monthly Repository* group developed

a politicised aesthetics while the Apostles developed an aestheticized politics” (28). Indeed, for Armstrong the Apostles are historically important as part of a pair of highly influential groups, of which “one wrote at the limit of the radical, one at the limit of the conservative doxa” to the extent that “there are no real equivalents for these formations” beyond the nineteenth century (28). Importantly, she uses this to claim that between the two groups in the 1830s “a highly self-conscious debate on the interconnected questions, literature and ideology, consciousness and knowledge, language and the nature of class, culture, race and gender, was being pursued” (29).

Whilst not belonging to either of the groups in question, there can be no doubt that Barmby is also focused on bringing together politics and an understanding of language in his writings, with the cultural production of literature often the mediator of the two. For instance, he writes in 1841:

The English language has been in a general state of amelioration, and now it requires a glossary to read Chaucer, Spencer, and oftentimes Shakespeare, while older British writes are scarcely comprehensible. ... The English language is superior to other languages, dead or living, in itself, and therefore best adapted for facilitating the transition of humanity from the present state of society to a better one. (206)

With due acknowledgement of the value of literary predecessors, Barmby’s clear intention is to use those cultural sources to establish a definition of English as a politically-charged language. The point is still clearer in 1847, when in “Universal Language and Phonography” he writes:

I, who “The faith and morals hold which Milton held,” should belie myself, not as an Englishman, but as a thinking member of the one great human family, were I not to declare the truth, that the grand course of political revolution and reform commenced in the land of England. It did not arise in France. It began with the Great Rebellion in England. ... They are England and the English, and not France and the French, which are then the country and the language of political progress. And thus far is England preferable as a universal tongue (96).

The political import of Milton’s writing is promoted as Barmby positions English as “the language of political progress”. Armstrong claims that “Tennyson with Hallam, and Browning with Fox, posthumously debated the questions explored in the 1830s for the rest of their poetic lives - though it has to be remembered that they anticipated questions which began to circulate more generally only in the 1850s” (37). In that critical frame we can see more clearly how Barmby sits within the specific context of the 1840s in explicitly addressing questions about the relationship between culture, politics and language theory. For Armstrong, the 1830s brought the “consequential realisation that language and theories of language must be a contested area” (37). There are strong grounds for arguing that Barmby’s writings are of his time precisely because they offer a politically-charged intervention into that contested arena. The question remains, however, of how to read texts that so clearly dissent from the dominant tone imposed by Kemble and Trench in establishing the New Philology in the 1840s.

One way to address the need for an appropriate critical methodology is to take into account readings of an earlier period in which there were radical intervention into debates about the definition and social meaning of language. This particular aspect of the history of language

theory in England owes much to Olivia Smith, and more specifically to her engagement with Aarsleff's account in the 1980s. As Aarsleff produced a new edition of his work at the start of that decade, he took the opportunity to defend spending much of his book talking about the work of John Horne Tooke, effectively seen before then as nothing more than a footnote in the development of language theory in England. Indeed, Aarsleff's main objective in doing so is to identify Horne Tooke's *The Diversions of Purley* (in two volumes, 1798 and 1805) as being of historical significance simply because it was an obstacle to the development of the New Philology in England. This is because he sees Horne Tooke's work as an unnecessary delay to completing the philological project first outlined in the late eighteenth-century by William Jones, leading him to insist that the "new dictionary is unthinkable without the rapid absorption of Continental scholarship by English philologists and their intensive study after 1830 of early English language and literature; and, equally important, without the complete departure from the powerful Tooke tradition" (165). In *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819*, Smith engages with this historical narrative by arguing that the 1790s stand out because of the politically radical language theory that emerged at that time, and that this is epitomised by the historical and political impact of *Diversions*. In particular, she demonstrates how *Diversions* challenged contemporaneous writings on language by establishment figures, such as James Harris (one-time Chancellor of the Exchequer) and his conservative endorsement of universal grammar in *Hermes*. Smith puts a compelling case for understanding Horne Tooke's work as the cornerstone of a politically radical history of language theory that includes writers such as Paine, Spence, Hone, and Cobbett. However, even though she offers an alternative narrative for the development of thinking about language in England, she only traces it to 1819, with the concluding comment that: "Although radicals had a more effective language, which would be needed, they still did not have the means of disarming the literati and the state from using language against them". (251). Moreover, more recently Smith's critical approach to Horne

Tooke and other radical writers has been questioned in terms of how their radical political intentions inform the theories of language they put forward.

Towards a critical methodology for the 1840s

For Manly, “Smith’s book was very important for the proof it provided that ideas about language played an integral part in the social and political order challenged by demands for reform in the 1790s and beyond” (4). Whilst she does not agree entirely with Smith’s critical premise, there is no doubt that the earlier analysis informs Manly’s central argument that:

While there was a body of thinking about language and sovereignty in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries which sought to represent the “mass of the people” as irrational, incoherent and thus unworthy of participation in the political nation, there was a countervailing tradition, deriving from Locke’s philosophy of mind and treatises on government, which linked the arguments for popular sovereignty with arguments for the value of common creativity, public discussion and common language. (187)

Horne Tooke retains a prominent position within this analysis, summarised by the claim that “his theory of language was designed to refute the argument made by conservative linguistic thinkers such as James Harris and Lord Monboddo that the language of the vulgar was irrational and inarticulate” (187). Most importantly, his work defines the alternative radical tradition that Smith highlights as a missing element of the history of language theory in England, since Manly concludes (quoting Wordsworth from *The Prelude*) “for Tooke, Thelwall and Edgeworth, the truthful, clear and unsophisticated language of the masses is a source of ‘renovating virtue’, and a sign of the aptitude of the people for full participation in government”

(188). Jane Hodson's engagement with Smith is far more critical in its reading of her project, not least in asserting that "most linguistic concepts are not intrinsically aligned with a particular political viewpoint" (19). In particular, she problematizes the way in which Smith positions radical political figures as champions of "vulgar" language and therefore as challenging the social, political and cultural status of "refined" language, at a time when both of those concepts were shifting phenomena. At the heart of this critique is the insistence that "while discourses of language and discourses of politics are often fundamentally intertwined, their relationship is not a straightforward one" (9). Hodson therefore revises Smith's approach by focusing more sharply on the "complexity of the relationship between discourses of language and discourses of politics during the eighteenth century" (9), and in doing so draws up principles for a new critical methodology. These include consideration of: the Author's Reputation; the Author's Concept of Language; the Intended Audience; textual Examples; and the Practical Political Effects of the Text (9).

Hodson's research therefore asks us to recalibrate Smith's approach to the period from the end of the eighteenth century and into the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Given that there is no significant body of work on writings that bring together politics and language theory in the 1840s, it would therefore seem reasonable to see how her tests apply to Barmby's writing. Accordingly, in terms of her main critical principles, we have: recognised his reputation as a writer with communist and socialist credentials; noted that his concept of language identifies "unitary common language" as one of the "societarian wants" that will bring the desired progression to "Communization"; and observed that the journals he chose for publication of his essays on language were orientated towards working-class interests. However, when moving on to look at more examples from his work on language in order to measure the

practical political effects of his articles, we will see that adopting Hodson's approach also entails adapting it to suit analysis of writings published so long after the earlier period of radical language theory. In many ways this is not surprising, since Barmby was writing as much as fifty years after some of the radical writers identified by Smith. Moreover, we can see that he is specifically not interested in the ideas proposed by the figure so often positioned as the dominant influence on those earlier texts. For example, in "Universal Language and Phonography", he writes:

The origin of language, and the question of the mother tongue, are ... subjects which, although they are highly interesting and instructive to the learned, are scarcely adapted for the pages of a popular periodical. For the one, the theories of Monboddo, of Harris, and of Horne Tooke, may be consulted For the other, whether it be Chaldee,

Hebrew, or Sanscrit, Scaliger and the scholiasts ... must be referred to (94).

This aligns Barmby not only with the 1840s, but also with the position of the Apostles who desired to dismiss the influence of Horne Tooke in order to establish the New Philology. However, in order to investigate the extent to which Barmby's politics transferred to his writing on language, I will now adopt and adapt Hodson's insistence upon close reading of textual examples to determine the practical political effects of writings on language.

The statement above in which Barmby directs attention away from Horne Tooke and other writers on language suggests that he was well-informed about the principal figures and texts in the field of study. However, we do not know this for certain, since there are no writings available to us to demonstrate his research in preparing these two essays. Moreover, Hodson

writes that when considering radical writers on language from the turn of the century, it should be remembered that “although this period presents an array of writers who may all be claimed for a history of linguistic thought, none of them were ‘linguists’ in the modern sense” (8). It cannot be denied that the same would apply to Barmby. However, rather than attempting to ignore that, in many ways this becomes central to our understanding of the political effect of his writing on language. Put simply, none of the writers on language in England prior to the 1830s can be considered to be linguists in the modern sense, since one of the outcomes of the debates of that time about culture, politics and language theory was the establishment of the New Philology as the dominant approach to language, complete with the definition of what was to become modern linguistics as the questions of that decade were addressed into the 1850s and beyond. On this point, for Tony Crowley, the new form of philology that emerged in England was only possible with the articulation of a new “science of language” (22). This was presented under a variety of names through the 1820s, but Crowley asserts that “the name with which the new science was eventually christened was of course linguistics, a version of which had been used by Whewell in 1837 when he asserted that ‘we may call the science of languages linguistic, as it is called by the best German writers’” (23). Most importantly for us, he points to work on the Continent by Schlegel, Rask, Bopp, and Jacob Grimm in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, but maintains that “in Britain, however, the new science was only to be taken up seriously, and then not comprehensively, in the late 1830s and 1840s” (23). In adopting Hodson’s approach to read Barmby’s essays, I will also adapt it to show how his work reveals significant aspects of how that definition of modern linguistics in England developed, and will demonstrate how it is here that we find the practical political effect of what it means to explore the possibility of working-class language theory in the 1840s.

From our knowledge of the 1830s and of the influence of Kemble and Trench we can see how Barmby is different from earlier politically radical writers on language at the turn of the century, and that he is very much a writer of the 1840s. There are textual examples to support the view that he is focused specifically upon the English language, and that this involves a denunciation of all other languages. In his essay in the *New Moral World* in 1841 he tells us that the “French language, which is principally bastard Latin, is barren in the extreme” (206). In his view, amongst other things French people have to rely on “gestures on the face, shrugs of the shoulder, and other actions of the head and body” in order to “supply the natural deficiencies of the speech” (206), and it is “without any of that masculine tone, which will be necessary to give strong expression to the powerful thoughts which we look upon as consequent from the outpourings of future genius” (206). The gendered assumptions are an interesting feature in light of Kate’s reputation for contesting sexual inequalities, but the emphasis of the essay is very clear: the focus is to be exclusively upon the English language. So, for its part, Italian is a “beautiful, musical, and poetical tongue”, but “great labour is required to possess a thorough knowledge of it” (206). On the other hand, German has “great mysticity and inversion in the form of its phrases, which is unpleasant to the understanding”, and its “verbal character” is “barbarous” (206). For good measure he also dismisses the “bombastic Spanish, the obscure Dutch, the barbaric Sclavonian”. Just as the development of the New Philology drew upon comparativist grammar and studies of language from the Continent in order to focus exclusively upon English, so Barmby’s writing manifestly has only one language in view.

There are also other textual examples where Barmby’s approach and the emerging New Philology appear to come together. For example, he writes of the English language that:

It is a decomposition of most other languages. From Greek, French, Latin, and German, it has culled their choicest words, and often invested them with novel beauty, while it has rejected the majority of their imperfect forms of expression. From the successive immigrations of the Phoenicians, Romans, Saxons, Danes, and Normans, into Britain, and their fusion with the inhabitants, it has derived much choice of words, and copiousness of language; but perhaps even more so from the good taste of its writers, who have never hesitated to coin or borrow the best expressions for their ideas. (205-6)

Here we see a focus upon the historical development of English in order to forward Barmby's claims for its pre-eminence. Crowley's analysis of this period sees it producing a new way of speaking about language in England, and of particular note is his claim that "comparative philology was not the dominant mode of linguistic study in Britain, since on the contrary, the concern for the relations between history and language in Britain produced a novel and powerful discourse, that of 'the history of the language'" (30). His focus on "the importance of the distinctive British discourse" from the 1850s onwards (20), reveals a way of speaking in which "language became a holy geological site in which to dig, to go beneath its surface in order to discover the historical strata it holds" (59). Barmby's account of the influences of different peoples on the state of English in the 1840s is not immediately at odds with this development. Indeed, his work can be seen in relation to Aarsleff's insistence that it was only following interest in Anglo-Saxon that the methods of the New Philology proposed by Kemble and others began to take hold. This is further evidence of the historical specificity of Barmby's essays, but just as he cannot be absorbed within the earlier radical tradition originally mapped out by Smith, the practical political effect of these examples has to be explored in relation to the 1840s.

With our knowledge of how the 1830s made explicit the link between language theory, culture and politics, we need to refocus our perspective on the impact of Barmby's particular identification of the English language and its history. By way of example, we should look at his essay of 1847, in which he writes:

Let us recollect the intrinsic advantages of the Anglo-Saxon, and we shall be justified in deciding that the English tongue has the preferability and probability for becoming, above all other varieties of speech, the common language of mankind, the universal tongue of the world, and the unitary speech of the future of progress (96).

From this instance we can see that rather than being in parallel with those preparing the way for the New Philology, Barmby's writings offer important counter-claims on ways of speaking about English being used by writers who were defining language in England at the time. Whilst there is an emphasis upon Anglo-Saxon and the promotion of English above all other languages based upon its history, the significant difference in Barmby's writing is that this is not done in order to promote English as a national language. Rather, it is an explicit attempt to ensure that the English language has a place in Barmby's language theory as the most appropriate *international* language to bring about the global transition to a socialist state. One striking effect of this is to counteract Aarlseff's claim that the New Philology had overcome all other approaches to language by the 1840s, with Barmby's essays therefore challenging a crucial element of this hugely influential history of the development of language theory in England. Moreover, even though we have only two short essays under consideration here, there is nevertheless a case to be made for Barmby's work as a politically-charged intervention that

highlights the historical possibility of ideological alternatives to the language paradigm that was emerging.

This is not simply an instance of a struggle for the history of the English language and determination of its place vis a vis other languages. In effect, Barmby is using a way of speaking about language to assert a claim to the English language that would make it a fundamental part of a trans-national socialist transformation of politics, society and culture. Moreover, his articles do not simply contest the “discourse of the history of the language” that Crowley sees as coming to dominate the second half of the nineteenth century. When viewed as an intervention into crucial debates about language, culture and politics that spill from the 1830s, Barmby’s “philanthropic philology” also reveals a multiplicity of discourses to be taken into account in the 1840s in advance of their eventual formation as one meta-discourse on language. I will close this article by looking at examples of how Barmby’s progressive account of language in relation to a future socialist state compare with textual extracts from Trench’s *Words*, which effectively launched the future of language study in England in 1851. Whilst these will only be brief examinations of Barmby’s short foray into exploring the possibility of working-class language theory, they are indicative of issues that still remained pertinent in the 1840s. In addressing those issues, I will also adhere to Hodson’s call for a “multi-dimensional understanding” of discourses in writings on language and politics (19).

Barmby's labour: revealing work on contested discourses of language theory

An indicator of what can be achieved by comparing examples from Barmby's essays with what was shortly to establish the main direction of language theory in England can be derived from the following. In *Words*, Trench writes that "'palace' and 'castle' may have come to us from the 'Norman,' but to the Saxon we owe far dearer names, the 'house,' the 'roof,' the 'home,' the 'hearth'" (65). This preference for certain words over others in terms of cataloguing what constitutes the true English language is explained a little later in *Words*, when Trench affirms that:

We should certainly gather, that while there are manifest tokens as preserved in our language, of the Saxon having been for a season an inferior and even an oppressed race, the stable elements of Anglo-Saxon life, however overlaid for a while, had still made good their claim to be the solid groundwork of the after nation as of the after language; and to the justice of this conclusion all other historic records, and the present social condition of England, consent in bearing testimony. (66)

Anglo-Saxon is invoked here, just as in Barmby's essays, to demonstrate the Englishness of the English language. In similar fashion, Trench defends English as being superior to other languages by weaving this history into his promotion of its resilience and authentic nature. He writes:

That the Normans never made a 'Norman-land' out of England, as they had out of Neustria, and as the Angles had made an 'Angle-land' out of Britain, - that they never so supplanted the population or dissolved the social frame-work, of the Angles, as these had done of the Britons,- is evident from the fact that there went along with *their*

conquest of the land no such substitution of a new name for the old, no such obliteration of the old by the new, as on that prior occupation of the soil had found place. (102)

Here he is insistent that the real language of Eng-land is material affirmation that the language of Angle-land never ceded its power to the language of French Norman-land. Indeed, this becomes part of his affirmation of what the mid-nineteenth century form of the English language should look like, since the history of the word England is to be understood as “a sign that the sense of unity, of all making up one corporate body, one nation, was emerging out of the confusion of the preceding period of the Heptarchy” (102).

It is here that we see a fundamental difference between Barmby’s use of a discourse of the history of the language and Trench’s deployment of that way of speaking about English. Whereas for Trench this is specifically about using an historical definition of language to build a sense not only of English but of the nation it represents, for Barmby the promotion of English is a cause that crosses national boundaries. His definition and conceptualisation of language is focused on the transition to socialism across all countries, including France, Germany, Italy, Holland and Spain, whose populations will benefit equally from English becoming the language that leads to a unitary language for all nations in socialist harmony.

This is a significant difference in the accentuation of a way of speaking about language that Crowley believes eventually encapsulated the whole paradigm shift as the “discourse of the history of the language”. Moreover, when comparing examples of Barmby’s writing with extracts from Trench’s *Words* we can begin to see other discourses at work and similar

differences in emphasis. So, for instance, Trench defines those who shape the meaning of words as poets, explaining that “he who first discerned the relation, and devised the new word which should express it, or gave to an old, never before but literally used, this new and figurative sense, this man was in his degree a poet – a maker, that is, of things which were not before, which would not have existed but for him, or for some other gifted with equal powers” (6). Later on he explains how all writers have a particular shaping role in relation to language, since “one of the arts of a great poet or prose writer, who wishes to add emphasis to his style, to bring out all the latent forces of his native tongue, will very often be to reconnect a word by his use of it with its original derivation” (165). In effect, this is the incorporation of a literary discourse into the justification of a specific form of language as being authentic English, as seen more clearly in another extract from *Words* where Trench pre-empts the creation of the *N/OED* by stating how he is “persuaded that a volume might be written which would have few to rival it in interest, that should do no more than indicate, or, where advisable, quote the first writer or the first document wherein new words, or old words employed in a new sense ... have appeared” (95). On turning to Barmby’s essays, we can see a similar passionate endorsement of the power of literature and a promotion of the benefits of wider access to literary writings in 1841, when he proclaims that “the young men who are the props of our Mechanics’ Institutions, hail with fervor what is termed the *literary* reformation” (98). However, he is also clear in his identification of the particular benefits of such writings, effectively anticipating the use of a literary discourse found in Trench’s *Words* by insisting:

The present question it must, however, be recollected, is not as to the superior literary merit of English works, but as to their superior utility. ... In doing this, we yield up all the glory and loveliness of the poesie of Shelley, all the classic beauty and delicate music of Keats, all the fiery and melancholic grandeur of Byron, all the glowing and lovely fierceness of Elliott, all the quiet quakeress-like charms of Wordsworth, all the

flowery voluptuousness of Moore, all the perspicuous brightness of Addison, and all the stormy powerfulness of Johnson. These we give up, with a legion of others, as unquestionable utility, and not literary merit, is to be our standard (206-7).

We should note Barmby's inclusion of Ebenezer Elliott, the so-called "Corn Law Rhymer", effectively setting the poetry and working-class creativity of the master-founder from Sheffield alongside the work of more established literary figures. Above all else, however, for Barmby when considering such writings, it is the "utility, and not literary merit, [that] is to be our standard". This statement is a far cry from how Trench's *Words* not only supplied the idea, but also the theoretical means, of promoting literary forms of language as Standard English by the end of the century.

As an indicator of the specific political implications of these textual comparisons, we should recall Crowley's statement that "there were many aspects to the responses to Chartism (ranging from overt repression to liberal reform), which produced numerous complex effects; but one of the most important of the cultural and educational responses, and one with far-reaching effects, was the institutionalised appearance of the new discipline 'the history of the language'" (46). In that context, we can extend this analysis with reference to how, in 1841, Barmby advocates "smoothing away those difficulties of orthography and pronunciation, which would be some hindrance to the easy acquirement of the English language, as a general transitional tongue, by other nations" (207). Principally, this comes down to the argument that the "English should have a pronunciation in harmony with its orthography", as for instance in the spelling of "redd" for the (past) "perfect of the verb to read" (207). With this as the most important "amelioration" of English, Barmby concludes that English should henceforth be "*taught in all*

schools, and in all communities of all nations, in addition to their present languages, until it should entirely supersede them, and thus prepare the way for one universal common language, to be spoken, as with one voice, by the vast fraternity of the human race” (207). Trench’s approach could not be more different. In arguing against any introduction of a system of phonetic spelling, he puts a number of objections before concluding:

The far deeper and more serious one [objection] is, that in innumerable instances it would obliterate altogether those clear marks of birth and parentage, which, if not all, yet so many of our words bear now upon their very fronts, or are ready, upon a very slight interrogation, to declare to us. Words have now an ancestry; and the ancestry of words, as of men, is often a very noble part of them, making them capable of great things, because those from whom they are descended have done great things before them; but this would deface their scutcheon, and bring them all to the same ignoble level. Words are now a nation, grouped into tribes and families, some smaller, some larger; this change would go far to reduce them to a promiscuous and barbarous horde. (182)

Echoes of Burke abound in references to the appearance of “a promiscuous and barbarous horde” as a consequence of changes to spelling that would threaten the “clear marks of birth and parentage” that belong to proper English words, and to those deemed to be their habitual users. Here, Trench looks to be more in line with the 1790s than Barmby, but the latter’s essays can add more than this to our knowledge of language and politics in the 1840s.

Where Barmby speaks of education in relation to language in order to promote the widespread use of English in the future so as to achieve his political project, Trench talks of language very

much in terms of markers of the past and of a heritage that belongs to only a few. Not surprisingly, this produces a distinctive – discursive – difference in how they represent the body of words that constitute English. For Trench:

Far beyond all written records in a language, the language itself stretches back and offers itself for our investigation – “the pedigree of nations,” as Johnson calls it – itself a far more ancient monument and document than any writing which employs it. These records, moreover, may have been falsified by carelessness, by vanity, by fraud, by a multitude of causes; but *it* is never false, never deceives us, if we know how to question it aright. (60)

In promoting a particular version of the past, of course, Trench produces a powerful discursive representation of the future of language study in England. It is one that is echoed by Aarsleff in his insistence that the creation of the *N/OED* was a philological monument to the new approach. By contrast, in 1841 Barmby writes:

The dead languages have been too long dead to merit a resurrection, and those writers who have sought immortality in them, as being, in their opinion, more durable than modern tongues, have found indeed the immortality they sought, but it has been the immortality of the sepulchre, whose inscription “*in memoriam*” could not be understood, by those who are called *the vulgar*; nor even redd by the learned, for the damp and the moss which clung around its carven stone. (206)

Whilst Trench may portray the English language as “a far more ancient monument and document than any writing which employs it”, Barmby is intent on avoiding a definition of English that leaves it with no relevance to the future state required by his politics. On that basis, he points out the limitations of “dead languages” to his readers by representing various attempts

to immortalise them by learned authorities and an authorial elite as producing a damp and moss-shrouded tombstone which stands as a memorial to the linguistic exclusion of the common people. It is a way of speaking about language that pre-empts, and exposes, Trench's discursive construction of the enduring power of English in 1851 as a monument to the birth and parentage of true English, and its true speakers.

We see here how discourses are shared, but also disputed and differently orientated, as an integral part of the contradictory intentions of two writings on the English language. Trench encourages his readers to embark upon "inquiries, which by the aid of any tolerable dictionary you may carry on into the past history of your own land, as borne witness to by the present language of its people, on which language the marks and vestiges of great revolutions are visibly and profoundly impressed, never again to be obliterated from it" (61). Barmby, has a different kind of "revolution" in mind, even though he uses some of the same discourses, as seen most emphatically in his statement in 1841 that:

The philologist who has wasted his time on bulky tomes, in which he discussed, in all its bearings, the antiquarian question of whether the Hebrew tongue was the language used by Adam, or in which he wrote learned dissertations on the lost digamma of the ancient Greeks; must soon give up his lore, as worse than useless, and apply himself to thoughts and plans which will make his favourite study truly philanthropic. We must no longer have only learned philology; we must have philanthropic philology (207).

Just as Kemble, Trench and their successors sought to redefine England as well as the national language through the New Philology, Barmby's "philanthropic philology" argues that the English language when properly understood advances the future socialist state of society. He writes:

Because the expositions of the system of community are written in it; which system contains the greatest truths yet known to man; and, *therefore*, the language in which they are vested, is the one, above all others, adapted to accompany that transition, from the present to a superior state of existence, which they clearly demonstrate is to arrive, and thus to become the general transitional tongue which shall herald that universal common language, which will be spoken when the people of our planet are “of one heart and one voice”. (207)

At first glance, a textual comparison of this kind would appear to indicate that all of the effort to shape English to suit a specific understanding of the language and the future state of society is being exerted by Barmby. However, when we focus on their shared use of discourses, we begin to notice Trench’s own admission of the labour expended on his part to produce his definition of language and society. He writes that “any one with skill to analyse the language might re-create for himself the history of the people speaking that language” (62), and that what he “supposed might be done in the way of reproducing the past history of England” could have been done through language “had all the records of her earlier times, and of the great social changes of those times been entirely swept away” (66). For his part, Barmby acknowledges explicitly the work required to change people’s thinking about language. In 1841 he writes:

The Hebrew (so called) abounds in gutturals, prejudicial to the health, and does not contain, if for the sake of humouring the prejudices of the Jews and Christians, we except the Old Testament, one other single book of any merit, and allowing to the Greek and Latin languages, a fair degree of verbal worth,

still their science is so obscure in comparison with that of the present day, and it will be much more so as to the future, that it would be irrational to use a tongue, which was calculated only for the expression of confined ideas. (206)

Whilst this would appear to be another instance of an outdated reference to a Biblical endorsement of the history of the language, that claim appears in quite a different light when we see that Barmby's intention is to produce an understanding of English that makes its capacity to communicate modern science part of its claim to be future orientated and therefore the foremost of existing languages. By contrast, the *Proposal for the Publication of a New English Dictionary by the Philological Society* (1858) not only adopts a principle advocated by Trench in *Words* by insisting "that it should contain *every word occurring in the literature of the language it professes to illustrate*", but also follows this by stating that the editors "admit as authorities all English books, except such as are devoted to purely scientific subjects, as treatises on electricity, mathematics, &c." (*Proper English* 153-4). Barmby includes the scientific discourse in his definition of English whereas the New Philology excludes it, except for the occasions when it presents its own writings as evidence of the new science of language that underpins such definitions. Indeed, Barmby's "Philanthropic Philology" in the *New Moral World* of 1841 pre-empts, and contests, such claims for a new objective understanding of language when he closes the essay with the comment that:

The benevolent reformers of society with prophetic hope, call out with a voice of high and harmonious cadence, for a universal language. The philanthropic philologists must respond to their cry. .. The amelioration of the English language, as a general transitional tongue, and the formation of a universal common language, are tasks for the genius and philanthropy of the future, while the application of *metaphysically-*

grammatical criticism, in furtherance of these objects, will make the science of language, indeed, worthy to be entitled rational and philanthropic philology (207).

Conclusion

In his writing about English, Barmby did not achieve the “formation of a universal common language” for a new socialist era, but his intervention into the arena that was attempting to establish a “science of language” is highly significant. His essays show that arena to have been composed of multiple discourses in the 1840s, with comparison to Trench’s hugely influential *Words* revealing the battle for those discourses that took place before they became the powerful meta discourse identified by Crowley. In adopting and adapting Hodson’s approach, I have shown how Barmby’s exploration of the possibility of a working-class “philanthropic philology” brings a multi-dimensional critique to discourses that were integral to the coming together of language theory, culture and politics in the 1830s and 1840s. Although the 1850s appears to provide answers to the issues that surfaced then, Barmby’s writing reminds us of the key questions. He insists in 1847 that it is “not a dead, but a living speech – not a merely vegetating and breathing, but a moving and thinking tongue ... - that we have to decide upon in the matter” (95). Ultimately, for Barmby such a language is of a particular kind:

It is thus decidedly evident that a dead language could not be restored as the common speech of humanity. For this a living, cloven, apostolic tongue, tipped with the red flame of vitality, is requisite. It must be the living language of progress, ever spreading, and constantly enlightening the development of society (95).

This reading reveals how he worked to win discursive battles by putting forward that view of English as “cloven” and a “living language of progress”. It also demonstrates how Barmby’s

writings and those of contemporaries such as Trench, are also cloven and dynamic in their manipulation of several discourses. Most importantly, Barmby's labour has the enduring capacity to reveal the politics of the work being undertaken by Trench and others in discursively constructing not only the identity of the national language, but also the key principles of a specific linguistic paradigm. The fruits of their labour were instrumental to the national language being understood in ways that were very different from Barmby's conceptualisation of English as an integral element of the trans-national transition to a future socialist society.

9,871 words.

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