

Transatlantic or Nomadic?: Lyric Voice in Lee Harwood's *The Man with Blue Eyes* (1966)

This article focuses on English poet Lee Harwood, and particularly his second collection of poems, *The Man with Blue Eyes* (1966).¹ As R. J. Ellis suggests, Harwood's work as editor/publisher of magazines including *Horde* (1964), *Soho* (1964), and *Tzarad* (1965-69) formed an important part of the samizdat publishing activities in which the modernism of the British Poetry Revival found expression;² his own poetry, meanwhile, has been understood as central to that Revival by critics and anthologists from *Children of Albion* (1969) onwards. My decision to discuss *The Man with Blue Eyes* over any of Harwood's important work from the 1970s through to the 2010s is prompted by the book's status as a key text of the Revival. Indeed, the following analysis feeds into a larger reassessment of Revival poetics and their particular formulations of space, place, and identity. Perhaps more problematically, my attention will be concentrated on just a handful of poems from Harwood's 1966 volume. This limiting of scope is intended to allow a spatialized reading of Harwood based on sustained close analysis, with the chosen texts – I hope not unfairly – being taken as representative of techniques and tendencies displayed more widely by Harwood's 1960s poetry.

¹Lee Harwood, *The Man with Blue Eyes* (New York: Angel Hair Books, 1966); repr. in Lee Harwood, *Collected Poems: 1964-2004* (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2004), pp. 27-50. All subsequent references are to the latter edition.

² R. J. Ellis, 'Mapping the United Kingdom Little Magazine Field', in *New British Poetries: The Scope of the Possible*, ed. by Peter Barry and Robert Hampson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 72-103 (pp. 82-83).

The poetics of the Revival were sustained by influences and active connections with art and literature outside Britain. Harwood's work takes substantial impetus from Surrealism and Dadaism, in particular Tristan Tzara;³ nonetheless, transatlanticism, too, forms a key context to his work in ways that I will both reinforce and interrogate. As a poet of the Revival, Harwood may be seen as internationalist in his literary connections, but also as perpetuating a modernist aesthetic of rapid shifts and juxtapositions which embed spatial upheaval at a formal level. In this article, I will consider how far these elements can be understood in terms of transatlanticism. In weaving a lyrical love story across continental and transatlantic displacements, *The Man with Blue Eyes* usefully epitomizes the fragmentation of the Revival poets whilst explicating its geographical implications. Thinking at a transatlantic scale does justice to these complex elements of Harwood's writing, whilst also contributing to a scholarly move away from the 'nationalist framework developed in the mid nineteenth century, which encouraged scholars to focus principally on the uniqueness [...] of a particular nation's literature and to employ it in exceptionalist and nationalist terms'.⁴ Discussions of modern British poetry have begun to challenge this framework, but there is more to be done, especially in recognizing that modernist poetics frequently resist neat notions of nationhood. I will also suggest, however, that in interrogating the relationship of self to place, Harwood might be seen to engage not only

³ For a discussion of Harwood in the context of English Surrealism, see Geoff Ward, 'Lee Harwood's Guaranteed Fine Weather Suitcase', in *The Salt Companion to Lee Harwood*, ed. by Robert Sheppard (Cambridge: Salt, 2007), pp. 35-53. For his connections to Tzara, see for example Will Rowe, 'Lee Harwood Tristan Tzara', in *The Salt Companion to Lee Harwood*, ed. by Sheppard, pp. 54-68.

⁴ Eve Tavor Bannet and Susan Manning, 'Introduction: British and American Genres', in *Transatlantic Literary Studies, 1660-1830*, ed. by Bannet and Manning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 1-9 (p. 8).

with a transatlantic dynamic but with a more fundamental geographical instability that we might, following Pierre Joris, begin to characterize as nomadic.

One clear area in which Harwood's text is transatlantic is its publication in New York by Angel Hair Books. Now known as United Artists Books, this longstanding independent is known for publishing (in books or in its 1960s magazine) many of the first- and second-generation writers of the New York School, including Ashbery, Ted Berrigan, Barbara Guest, Frank O'Hara, Ron Padgett, and James Schuyler. V. Joshua Adams suggests that, if Harwood's poetry sometimes 'recalls [...] the playfulness of the New York School, this is no accident. Harwood, who met John Ashbery in Paris in the 1960s, might be considered Britain's ambassador to that movement'.⁵ This allegiance can be seen as reinforcing, rather than complicating, Harwood's typicality among the Revival poets. Thus, for Adams, Harwood's cosmopolitanism and non-British range of influences 'confirms the extent to which the British Poetry Revival was really a reverse British invasion' in which 'American and Continental models were deployed against the Movement poets'.⁶

Co-founders of *Angel Hair*, Lewis Warsh and Anne Waldman, both stress that they were not attempting to represent just the New York School or just that one city.⁷ This is

⁵ V. Joshua Adams, review of Harwood, *Collected Poems*, *Chicago Review*, 53.1 (Spring 2007), 171-76 (p. 173), in *Literature Online* <<http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>> [accessed 22 March 2016].

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 174. For more (albeit partisan) discussion of the relationship between the Movement and the British Poetry Revival, see in particular Robert Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and its Discontents, 1950-2000*, Liverpool English Texts and Studies, 45 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005).

⁷ Lewis Warsh, 'Introduction' and Ann Waldman, 'Introduction' to *Angel Hair Magazine: The Sixties and Seventies*, in *Jacket*, 16 (2002) <<http://jacketmagazine.com/16/index.shtml>> [accessed 20 December 2016].

The two texts are excerpted from *Angel Hair Sleeps with a Boy in My Head: The Angel Hair Anthology*, ed. by Anne Waldman and Lewis Warsh (New York: Granary Books, 2001).

borne out by the fact that their very first book was Harwood's *The Man with Blue Eyes* – one of the few *Angel Hair* books by a non-American author. Warsh underlines that their editorship 'mirrored our social encounters as much as any fixed aesthetic', their living room operating 'a little publishing industry' amid a 'salon atmosphere'.⁸ Harwood might be inserted into this Manhattan melee, as he recollects that '[i]n the mid- to late 60s I was spending a lot of time going back and forth to New York, and I usually stayed with [Ashbery]';⁹ yet it is not clear whether Harwood – who also collaborated with New York artist Joe Brainard around this time¹⁰ – had met Warsh and Waldman in person by the time the book was published. Certainly, he appeared in the first issue of *Angel Hair* magazine, published in Spring 1966 (it would run for six issues across three years), and Warsh notes 'a natural progression [...] from magazine to books, a furthering of the commitment to the writers that interested us most'.¹¹ Harwood himself had edited a series of short-lived magazines by the mid-1960s, and it bears mention how important shoestring publishing activities were to poets in Britain and America (as elsewhere) wishing to read and publish the work of their transatlantic counterparts.¹² Asked 'How did you start to involve yourself in the New York

⁸ Warsh, 'Introduction'.

⁹ See Oli Hazzard, 'In Conversation with Lee Harwood: "A Triangle of London, Paris and New York"', *PN Review*, 219 (41.1) (2014) < http://www.pnreview.co.uk/cgi-bin/scribe?item_id=9169 > [accessed 20 December 2016].

¹⁰ Cartoon strips by Brainard, for which Harwood supplied the text, were published in *The East Village Other* in the summer of 1966 and in 1967; see 'Lee Harwood: A Bibliography', in *The Salt Companion to Lee Harwood*, ed. by Sheppard, pp. 227-32 (p. 229). Brainard also designed the front cover for *The Man with Blue Eyes*, though didn't intend for it to be printed on blue card; see Waldman, 'Introduction'.

¹¹ Warsh, 'Introduction'.

¹² See, for example, Ellis on UK 'little magazines'. Regarding Harwood's magazine, *Soho*, and its publication of American poets, see Oli Hazzard, 'In Conversation with Lee Harwood'.

poetry community?', it is telling that Harwood's first answer (before Ashbery) is 'the little mag scene [...] where people would send mags back and forth between the US, Canada, France, Britain and South America'.¹³ As Faye Hammill and Mark Hussey argue, with a focus on earlier modernist publication practices, 'the small press movement and, alongside this, the rise of little magazines [...] fostered new forms of collaboration', in which 'even the most locally anchored small presses and magazines usually shared the vision of modernism as an international artistic community'.¹⁴

Having sketched this internationalist picture, it is nonetheless striking how few of Harwood's major publications materialized outside of England. He co-edited *The Boston Eagle* (1973-74), but even his explicitly transatlantic collection, *Boston–Brighton* (1977) was published in England, along with all his book-length works except *Assorted Stories: Prose Works* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1987) and, of course, *A Man with Blue Eyes*. The latter also stands out for narrating a homosexual relationship within an *oeuvre* not normally received in terms of gay literature (indeed, the majority of Harwood's relationships seem to have been with women, and the majority of his love poems written about women). One might ask how the Atlantic crossing of this book relates to its subject matter, which, legally and socially, was potentially problematic in both America and Britain. The book appeared one year prior to the Sexual Offences Act 1967, which initiated the decriminalization of homosexuality in the UK; yet it also appeared one year after the introduction of New York

¹³ Oli Hazzard, 'In Conversation with Lee Harwood'.

¹⁴ Faye Hammill and Mark Hussey, *Modernism's Print Cultures, New Modernisms* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 5, 9.

Penal Law 130.38, which defined ‘consensual sodomy’ as ‘deviate’ and illegal.¹⁵ Nor should the situation in Britain after 1967 be oversimplified: Harry Cocks has recently argued that ‘certain key legal decisions made by the courts between 1960 and the early 1970s on the matter of conspiring against public morality ensured that homosexuality – now a legal activity – ended up as a “wrongful” or unlawful activity in English law’.¹⁶

Denying any consideration of the book’s reception, Harwood states: ‘I wasn’t thinking about audience, or how it would be received – it was like a necessity. It was addressed to [Ashbery]’.¹⁷ Yet Robert Sheppard calls attention to the self-conscious ‘restraint of the gay poems with their lack of gender markers and their focus on detached parts of the body’.¹⁸ Perhaps the New York School on some level offered a more receptive space for this anxious mode of address than the British Poetry Revival. Warsh seems potentially to disagree: he reflects on a lack of diversity in *Angel Hair’s* output, stating that ‘[t]o say that there were fewer women poets writing or that the most radical political groups at the time were sexist and homophobic is no excuse’.¹⁹ Amid this tangle of consideration, what might be contended here is not that either country was more or less receptive to poetry recounting a gay relationship, but rather that transatlantic crossing – facilitated by modernist small presses and little magazines – might in itself have symbolically offered a more open and ambiguous space for self-expression.

¹⁵ See ‘New York’, in *Sodomy Laws* < http://www.glapn.org/sodomylaws/usa/new_york/new_york.htm > [accessed 20 December 2016].

¹⁶ Harry Cocks, ‘Conspiracy to Corrupt Public Morals and the “Unlawful” Status of Homosexuality in Britain After 1967’, *Social History*, 41.3 (2016), 267-84 (p. 268).

¹⁷ See Hazzard, ‘In Conversation with Lee Harwood’.

¹⁸ Sheppard, ‘It’s a Long Road’, in *The Salt Companion to Lee Harwood*, ed. by Sheppard, pp. 18-34 (p. 20).

¹⁹ Warsh, ‘Introduction’.

Weighing up transatlantic and nomadic experience as possible contexts for Harwood's work, I will also be dealing with his acute concern with the conventions of lyric poetry. Harwood's early poetry, being rooted in the modernism of the Revival, is perhaps a surprising context in which to find a genuine engagement with lyric. As Linda A. Kinnahan suggests, lyric voice has generally been seen as 'fundamentally at odds with a linguistically alternative poetics', since 'poetry stressing the operations of language places [the lyric self] in question [...] and moves towards an extinction of the "I"'.²⁰ Harwood does indeed challenge the assumptions of lyric by 'stressing the operations of language', yet he also employs the lyric 'I' in intimate, personal texts. William Walton Rowe explains this apparent contradiction precisely in relation to 'the context of this upsurge of new writing, which has been called the British Poetry Revival', in which lyricism did not necessarily entail 'self-dramatization in language'.²¹

'Fuck these angels': Harwood's incomplete lyricism

As noted above, Harwood's lyricism typifies elements of the early Revival's style of writing. Specifically, it frequently seems to be disrupting and dismantling stable poetic voice, instating a more indeterminate and shifting structure in its place. Thus, the poem 'Green light' opens with 'the night tingling', which could be the start of an erotic, lyrical love poem; but the line immediately leads into 'tingling / sleigh bells arching you', which interrupts that

²⁰ Linda A. Kinnahan, *Lyric Interventions: Feminism, Experimental Poetry, and Contemporary Discourse* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004), pp. xvi, 10.

²¹ William Walton Rowe, *Three Lyric Poets: Harwood, Torrance, MacSweeney* (Horndon: Northcote House, 2009), p. 2.

mode and undercuts the implicit possibility of straight-forward expression.²² This occurs as, in lieu of completing a romantic, lyrical statement about the tingling night, the text offers two lines dense in possible meanings, with no syntactical certainty to facilitate clear expression. There is an irresolvable ambiguity over where the verbs ‘tingling’ and ‘arching’ should take their effect and what, therefore, is happening to ‘you’, the speaker’s lover: is ‘the night [...] arching you’?; are the ‘sleigh bells arching you’?; or are you an afterthought to the ‘the night tingling’ and ‘sleigh bells arching’? Rather than providing linear expression, the poem continues to blend materials and meanings in a way that undermines lyrical conceptions of authenticity. This is highlighted by the repetition throughout the poem of ‘is it?’, which – in each case isolated by page space or parenthetical hyphens – seems to introduce an alien, outside voice, questioning any self-expression a central speaker might be attempting. The third repetition occurs mid-line, interrupting any lyrical statement before it can be created: ‘watch – is it? – a movement’. Equally, the uncertainty of the poem’s opening is underlined later when ‘the night tingling’ resurfaces as ‘a night tingling’ – that small change playfully turning the singular and definitive into one possibility among a range.

As Sheppard says of Harwood’s work in *The Man with Blue Eyes*, ‘this is not a poetry of definitive statement but of moment by moment revision’; furthermore, it is a poetry of unsettling juxtaposition rather than logical ordering, as ‘incidents are arranged without recourse to the logic of argument or the verities of realism’.²³ This non-definitive poetic marks the key way in which Harwood fundamentally upsets lyric assumptions (while nonetheless writing genuinely romantic poems). Where conventional lyric stresses the possibility of direct expression, Harwood stresses the multiplicities of language and his texts

²² Harwood, ‘Green light’, in *Collected Poems: 1964-2004*, p. 35. Further references are to this page.

²³ Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying*, p. 104.

work partly in accordance with a self-reflexive, non-mimetic attitude to meaning. As Rowe states, 'the reader has to handle multiple possibilities' – for example, when 'no grammatical relation is given between [...] particular phrases and the ones that follow them; narrative connections are not provided; [...] no overall scenario is given into which details can be fitted'.²⁴ These disruptions of logic and expression are particularly problematic for lyric voice because they imply the incomplete or provisional nature of the self, as well as the text. This is indicated in Rowe's comment that 'the engagement elicited from a reader [...] is not designed to confirm the ego, the habitual self, which imagines itself as already complete'.²⁵

As Harwood's poems juxtapose materials without a clear sense of logical, discursive order, and as this juxtaposition deconstructs any stable lyric voice that might emerge, those statements or scenes that do achieve coherence are prevented from remaining definitive or fixed. This process of unfixing and revising – imparting a self-aware sense of the poem as an act of construction – may happen retrospectively. Thus, 'Green light' dismantles the delicate, romantic imagery of an earlier poem: 'your body so good / your eyes like sad love stars'.²⁶ The lines are recycled as follows:

this star within your mouth

a love eye burst from a mist

²⁴ Rowe, p. 26.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Harwood, 'Rain journal: London: June 65', in *Collected Poems: 1964-2004*, p. 33. Further references are to this page.

hanging
tinkling glass tree
downward.

The original lines form part of Harwood's 'first real love scene' (p. 33), but rather than remaining as a lyrical moment of authentic, romantic expression, they are pasted onto a collapsing Christmas backdrop, with the body of the lover seemingly spliced with the tree ('this star within your mouth'; your 'love eye' as a 'hanging / tinkling glass' bauble; p. 35). The syntactic dismantling of straight-forward voice extends here to the dismantling of the 'you' position – and of the bodies that occupy lyrical, intimate scenes. When, later in the poem, Harwood depicts 'claws caught in metal fissures / and torn off near their roots', he perhaps underlines the potential for destructive urges beneath the restlessly shifting voice, which combines materials, but also tears them from their 'roots'.

'Journal 20 May 65' draws further attention to Harwood's disruption of lyric through deconstructive processes, contributing to an impression that the modes of voice found in Revival poetry work directly against lyric, rather than simply being non-lyrical. Being titled as a journal entry, the poem instils an expectation of candid self-expression: a journal is most frequently a record of the self, therefore suggesting stability of voice and the possibility of authenticity. The poem's opening line, 'the new angels', seemingly anticipates some complete phrase in which the poetic 'angels' help organize the journal's emotional content. That anticipation is broken by the pause or incompleteness of ellipsis, before the poem continues:

oh fuck these angels

an eye closed half vision
of black smoke clouds.²⁷

The outburst humorously subverts the journal mode, but also suggests a genuine frustration at the apparent impossibility of straight-forward self-expression – as if the poem’s speaker begins a journal entry, but immediately loses faith in any completed statement that might be made.

There is a sense of restlessness in the syntactic fluidity of the ensuing images, along with a further rejection of fixity or closure. Where short lines may sometimes invite slow, staggered reading, their structure here (in a visual pattern, with indented lines which force the reader’s eye into a run-on reading) seems to impatiently catapult us onward into the

half vision
of black smoke clouds
in my red sea
white shredded feathers falling
through the night
of your gasp.

The indented lines serve to bridge the gaps between Harwood’s clauses: belonging to the syntax of the lines both above and below, they encourage the reader to hurry on in anticipation of a syntactic completion that is never fully realized. These lines interlink Harwood’s restlessness and his resistance of singular meaning, which both work against the

²⁷ Harwood, ‘Journal 20 May 65’, in *Collected Poems: 1964-2004*, p. 37. Further references are to this page.

assumptions of lyric voice. A pseudo-pun brings multiplicity to the fore once more, as the reader may expect to read 'falling / through [...] your [grasp]', but instead finds their shock registered in a 'gasp'.

'Gun slingers riding in': Harwood's cinematic America

If 'Journal 20 May 65' undercuts the fixity of a self-expressive journal or lyric, it equally resists the belief in textual transparency to which those modes are linked. An autobiographical journal, like a lyric poem, generally assumes the ease of recording reality through language as a neutral medium. Like many Revival texts, Harwood's poem places reality always just out of reach, beyond some variety of media. Thus, an 'eye closed half vision' propels us away from the journal; and later images are seen indirectly through 'old homestead photographs'. The poem's title itself may remind us that a journal entry is not a container to be straightforwardly filled, but a medium with conventions and constraints which the poem invokes among others. Harwood's use of a literary/cinematic Western register ('gun slingers', for example) offers another device for lyric expression to be filtered through, further denying the possibility of neutral directness. The various media then seem to compete for space:

angel body twisted like rope
old homestead photos of fishermen
 plaiting rope with creaking
 papuan wood machinery
gun slingers riding in
and messing up the whole show.

The photographed scene displaces the original journal entry, and the 'fishermen / plaiting rope' seem somehow to have caused the 'angel body twisted like rope'. The photo is in turn displaced by another material as the Western register starts 'messaging up the whole show'. The effect is like that of a cartoon animation, both in the surreal fight between fishermen and cowboys and in the jostling of various layers of self-reflexivity. All of this play on media and layers of removal draws attention to the poem's own materiality.

Clearly, the language of Harwood's poetry does not usually amount to a conventional use of voice, as a subject-position within a more-or-less neutral medium. Rather, it invokes various fragments, voices, and materials which are seen to construct the form of the poem as they proceed. Nonetheless, there are certain voices which are specifically highlighted and imbued with the idea of being a material from outside the poem's own voice. We see this with the phrase 'is it?' in 'Green light'; similarly, in 'Journal 20 May 65' the phrase 'don't take our father away' appears in speech marks, seeming to be both a plea to the 'gun slingers' another interrupting material. The line provides a clue to understanding the overarching narrative of the collection, which, as Lopez reveals, 'narrates a love affair with John Ashbery in 1965-66'.²⁸ Connecting the line 'don't take our father away' to the breakup described evasively in 'Landscape with 3 people',²⁹ Lopez suggests that 'the situation that is narrated here' – '[a] young family broken up, feelings of guilt and the need for escape into travelling, fantasy narrative, and heroin' – 'is personal and is the very

²⁸ Lopez, p. 107.

²⁹ Harwood, 'Landscape with 3 people', in *Collected Poems*, pp. 49-50. Further references are given parenthetically.

core of the book'.³⁰ It may seem that the introduction of biographical detail is counterproductive in discussion of a writer who problematizes the lyric 'I' position and who argues in an interview 'that a strong sense of self can be a hindrance'.³¹ Yet Harwood adds, 'though I say pronouns are variable, it doesn't necessarily mean I'm not in there somewhere'; and interestingly, his way into this discussion is the recollection of meeting with Ashbery in 1965.³² While an overreliance on biography must be resisted, puzzling over the complex ways in which Harwood is 'in there somewhere' is part of the process of understanding his renovated lyric form.

Following Lopez, then, there is a sense in which 'don't take our father away' comes closest to a lyrical or confessional crux of Harwood's so-called journal entry. However, underlining Harwood's unwillingness to allow any lyrical statement to remain fixed, the next lines exaggerate and subvert the plea, making it absurd, while also subsuming it into the cinematic, Western register:

'don't take our father away'

let his cock droop warm and clean

in his denims

I don't know . mental fingers

goosing him in wood-shed

³⁰ Lopez, p. 112.

³¹ Harwood, *Not the Full Story: Six Interviews by Kelvin Corcoran* (Exeter: Shearsman, 2008), p. 18.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 14-15.

ecstasies.

Enveloping the initial plea in fictionalizing registers (the 'denims' recalling the Western 'bandits', and the 'wood-shed ecstasies' mimicking some variety of erotic fiction),³³ Harwood refuses to retain candidness in the way we might expect of a journal entry. The use of 'I don't know' suggests that the poem is being made up verbally as it goes along, with the speaker trying to decide on the next image. The punch-line ending, 'the first to come in all situations' (with its sexual pun, and also its transformation of the father's departure into an arrival), further undercuts any straight-forward expression. In an interview with Sheppard, Harwood suggests how the enveloping of lyrical expression in a range of fictional, apparently less direct materials might still be aiming at the 'real' and the 'true' – a fact which fundamentally complicates any notion that to write in a 'direct personal way' is to write without mediation. Harwood states: 'At times the personal is the fiction and the elaborate stories, "the make it up as you go along bedtime tales", are the real thing'; 'if you are writing in a more direct personal way [...] you may very well censor your work. You let it flow into all sorts of dream and imaginings and things. And it may well be much closer to the truth'.³⁴

As we see from the above extracts, much of the 'elaborate stories' and 'imaginings' in *The Man with Blue Eyes* are connected to stock or cinematic depictions of America. We

³³ A tangential but pertinent consideration is the way in which the Western genre has dramatized and codified homosocial, homoerotic, and homosexual relationships. See, for example, Blake Allmendinger, 'The Queer Frontier', in *The Queer Sixties*, ed. by Patricia Juliana Smith (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 223-36.

³⁴ Lee Harwood and Robert Sheppard, 'So it Shifts: An Interview with Lee Harwood', in *The Salt Companion to Lee Harwood*, ed. by Sheppard, pp. 8-17 (p. 11).

can follow Harwood's sense that these materials 'may well be much closer to the truth', as Lopez has convincingly suggested that the cowboy narrative of 'Landscape with 3 people' is a kind of autobiographical mask. Yet we can also more broadly suggest that the shifting surface of materials and images express a transatlantic relationship whose unsettled geography would not be best expressed through fixed, static perspective: the collaging of places, voices, and cultural preconceptions in this sense constitutes 'the real thing'. This is intensified by the fact that Harwood's poetic is itself not simply a means of expressing a relationship with Ashbery, but an active part of that transatlantic contact: as Harwood says in 'As your eyes are blue...', 'I imitate you'.³⁵ This affirmation is all the more striking in *Penguin Modern Poets 19*, where the poem is preceded by a selection of Ashbery's poetry and succeeded by 'For John in the Mountains', inviting the eagle-eyed reader to correlate Harwood's style and subject matter.³⁶

As demonstrated, techniques including short lines, sparse punctuation, syntactical ambiguity, and rapid movement from one image to another, all contribute to Harwood's disruption of conventional, lyrical voice. Returning to 'Green light' (p. 35), however, we can see how the inability or unwillingness to pin down a determinate expression, scene, or syntactic order also informs a geographical restlessness and a self-reflexive treatment of places as poetic material:

watch – is it? – a movement

in the streets a train and shop-fronts

³⁵ Harwood, 'As your eyes are blue...', in *Collected Poems: 1964-2004*, p. 28-29 (p. 28).

³⁶ Harwood, 'As Your Eyes Are Blue...', in *Penguin Modern Poets 19: John Ashbery, Lee Harwood, Tom Raworth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), pp. 85-86.

an instant blasted in pinkness
of London squares roses flashing
from the slots of pinball machines
arcades dressed in greenery.

As with the opening of the poem, the first lines of this passage contain a number of possibilities jostling for position; but the effect in this case is that the location or landscape of the poem is unfixed. There is a sense in which our perspective is from the train, with the streets, shop-fronts, and squares 'flashing' past. But more direct is the image of a train 'in the streets', which then becomes a gruesome accident ('shop-fronts // an instant blasted in pinkness'). Conversely, if 'pinkness' belongs to the 'roses', perhaps the 'movement / in the streets' is actually the 'train' of a wedding dress. The poem has shifted slightly from playing with conventions of lyric, to simultaneously interrogating the idea of being specifically located in any realist sense. Just as other poems offer the makings of a lyric before undercutting and pluralizing that mode, 'Green light' now offers a semi-coherent scene in a particular urban landscape; yet the scene refuses to come into a definitive focus, instead swimming with the hazy possibilities of actions it may contain.

There seems to be a rapid transatlantic jump towards the end of the poem, from the 'London squares' to 'a bison' on 'its hill' – the latter suggesting a North American location. The jump, tellingly, is far from dramatic: the fact that Harwood can readily make that transatlantic jump without explanation underlines that his disruptions of voice are tied directly to a loosening of geography. It is also important to note that the two suggested locations are not in themselves realist portrayals the poem switches between. Rather, the

non-realism of the scenes is indicated by a playful use of scale, so that the passage above might posit 'London squares' inside 'pinball machines'. Similarly, the next stanza zooms out from the 'hill' to the cosmos and back in to 'carpet patterns':

let a bison ramp its hill
into one small star speck
carpet patterns shuddering.

This fluidity of scale is enabled by the rapidly disorganizing syntax of the text and works in conjunction with the fact that no unified voice is instructing the reader on how to link images.

Like his disruptive juxtapositions, Harwood's self-reflexive stress on language-as-medium can be seen to link lyricism to landscape. Places in Harwood's poems are, like the unstable speaking positions, made explicitly textual and often inflected by the conventions of another lens beside that of the poem. In particular, depictions of America seem to be shown in the process of being assembled from imagination and received images. "New York will welcome me", for example, begins:

the blue cadillac
sweeps around the sky
into its tower sun setting
people file out of offices

and crocodiles move into the subways.³⁷

Like the bison in 'Green light', the Cadillac, high-rise skyline, and sewer-dwelling crocodiles might be lifted directly from media representations of America in 1960s Britain.

As I suggested in relation to 'Journal 20 May 65', the literary and cinematic conventions of adventure stories and Westerns are fundamentally obstructive to a reading of Harwood in terms of authentic expression; yet, Lopez has shown how what they convey may be the 'personal [...] core of the book'.³⁸ What Lopez does not explicitly address is the sense in which the adoption of fictionalizing modes and materials also has implications for the landscapes of the poems. The shifting geographies of the collection are, on one level, direct engagements with places to which Harwood's romantic narrative is anchored; but they must also be viewed as superficial backdrops against which imagined adventures are acted out. Lopez does begin to suggest this in pointing out that '[t]he fictional relationships presented here are distanced because they are set in exotic mythic American scenarios: in the wild west and on a whaling ship that lands on a deserted island beach'.³⁹ Harwood's textual registers make lyrical authenticity difficult to locate (leading Lopez to read 'fictional relationships'), but also disturb any stable ground on which that lyricism might be rooted (leading Lopez to consider the settings as 'mythic'). Yet, the reader must once again maintain this sense alongside a contrary perspective, as it is precisely through the provisionality of identity and place that the lyrical 'core of the book' emerges.

³⁷ Harwood, "New York will welcome me", in *Collected Poems*, p. 45.

³⁸ Lopez, p. 112.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Nomad lyric?: Re-reading Harwood's uprootedness

In further analyzing the connections between lyric and geographical movement in Harwood, it is useful to consider Pierre Joris's writings on 'nomad poetics'.⁴⁰ With his uprootedness of voice complicating a sustained lyricism, perhaps Harwood is best read not in terms of transatlantic connections but as developing what might be called a nomadic lyric. Joris uses the concept of nomadism to gesture towards a type of poetry that would be 'always on the move, always changing, morphing, moving through languages, cultures, terrains, times without stopping'.⁴¹ In writing of nomadic poetry's needing to 'never return home, or live in the familiar of that place or self', Joris suggests how his poetry of continual movement might inherently problematize the idea of a stable self or voice – and thus he implicitly links geographical and poetic states of unfixed-ness.⁴² Harwood's poetry does not quite meet Joris's criteria; yet measuring Harwood's uprootedness against this sense of the nomadic can help in reading *The Man with Blue Eyes* as adapting the lyric to enable romantic expression in an internationalist context. The transatlantic, at least in my handling, has posited Harwood as shuttling between the two national frameworks of Britain and America, the instatement of the Atlantic as a locus of meaning suggesting irrevocable (though traversable) distance between two places and cultures. When Harwood works with a more fundamentally unstable geography, and when his poetry collapses distances, it is potentially necessary for critical understanding to move away from the transatlantic and towards the nomadic.

⁴⁰ He expounds the concept in numerous pieces of writing, but I will be referring to those of Pierre Joris, *A Nomad Poetics: Essays* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003).

⁴¹ Joris, 'Notes Toward a Nomadic Poetics [Version 4.00]', in *A Nomad Poetics*, pp. 25-55 (p. 26).

⁴² Joris, 'St/range: An Uncertain Range', in *A Nomad Poetics*, pp. 17-22 (pp. 21-22).

In envisaging literary responses to ‘the turbulent fluxes the dispersive nature of our realities make inevitable’,⁴³ Joris makes clear that geographical movement can be linked to the pluralizing of the self: he suggests that a nomadic poetics would ‘[take] into account not only the manifold of languages and locations but also of selves each one of us is constantly becoming’.⁴⁴ It becomes apparent that to embrace any conception of the nomadic would entail a destabilization of lyric voice, and of language and form more broadly. Harwood can be seen to respond to a comparable geographic mobility by interrogating and altering the lyric mode, and therefore moving towards a nomadic poetic at a formal level. The poems in *The Man With Blue Eyes* are characteristically shifting and difficult to pin down, but at the same time the book is evidently a collection of lyrical love poems. We can view Harwood as adapting the lyric to a new experience of place – ‘nomadicizing’ the lyric, so to speak. This reading becomes clearer in light of Lopez’s comments on the biographical contexts of the collection: noting that ‘locations and dates were removed, except where they had been incorporated into titles’, Lopez nonetheless suggests that readers might piece together the narrative of a real love affair from the fragmented expression it is given.⁴⁵ This implies how a lyrical urge towards ‘authentic’ self-expression is maintained by the overall shape and story of the collection, beneath a disruptive, self-reflexive surface. Indeed, both the autobiographical substructure and the immediate collage of materials can be thought of as an attempt to make lyrical writing possible without simplifying the process of emotional expression. That is, Harwood’s poems attempt a form of lyric that does not contradict a late modernist understanding of (in Joris’s terms) ‘a material flux of language matter [...] moving

⁴³ Joris, ‘Notes Toward a Nomadic Poetics’, p. 44.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 119, n. 3; p. 107.

in & out of semantic & non-semantic spaces, moving around and through the features accreting as poem';⁴⁶ and, meanwhile, this nomadicized lyricism allows him to express – genuinely and without simplification – a romantic experience that is similarly in flux, being conducted across a scattered, disorientating mix of places and dates.

Turning to the opening poem of Harwood's collection, 'As your eyes are blue...', it might be noted that one of the ways in which Harwood's nomadicized lyricism functions is by maintaining, among its plurality of meanings and materials, the dual possibilities of intimate proximity and alienating distance. In this way, the lover's body remains the traditional, lyrical object of much of the poetic utterance (so, for instance, the title and opening line focus on 'your eyes'); but this is countered by a sense of geographical separation (as when the fourth line sets the lovers 'cities apart' (p. 28)). When Harwood appears to narrate the shift from romantic intimacy to loneliness, he actually shows that the different elements of a relationship cannot be distinctly separated. This is clear in the penultimate stanza for instance:

the afternoon sunlight which shone in
your eyes as you lay beside me watching for... –
we can neither remember – still shines as you
wait nervously by the window for the ordered taxi
to arrive if only I could touch your naked shoulder
now 'but then...'. (p. 29)

⁴⁶ Joris, 'Nomad Century Ahead', pp. 5-6.

Here, the shift from past tense ('shone') to present tense ('shines') neatly separates a moment of intimate closeness ('as you lay beside me') from a reluctant departure ('you / wait [...] for the ordered taxi'). Yet, as the speaker longs to return to physical contact, the interjection of a separate voice ('but then...') complicates the lyrical model: not only does the contradictory interjection contribute to Harwood's characteristic undermining of authoritative speakers, but also 'then' clearly destabilizes the preceding sense of 'now'. As the speaker's is no longer the only perspective, and as his clear sense of 'now' is potentially contradicted, the apparently secure distinction between remembered intimacy and current separation is called into question, and the two romantic states must be left indeterminately in tension.

This apparently straightforward passage might be read in terms of an interlinking set of uncertainties in Harwood's early poems; Rowe suggests that these poems

revel in the 'made-up' quality of any speaking 'I' and of any scene described.

Moreover, they give no reliable 'here' and 'now' from which we can measure the distance to a 'there' and a 'then'. The result is an intermittent uncertainty about where we are; the present seems permeated by other persons or places. And yet the poems make deeply intimate statements and are concerned with how to speak the truth.⁴⁷

This helps contextualize my attempt (and Rowe's) to frame Harwood in terms of an adapted form of lyric. It suggests how the conventional concerns of authentically 'speak[ing] the truth' and making 'intimate statements' are maintained, but a series of problematic

⁴⁷ Rowe, p. 12.

uncertainties meanwhile attest to the complexity and difficulty of expression. In the above section of Harwood's opening poem, the "'made-up" quality' of the speaker and the sense of having 'no reliable "here" and "now"' are ultimately underlined. Joris makes clear how this destabilization of 'here' and 'now' is an integral part of his conception of the nomadic, in a way that would not necessarily be true of transatlantic poetics: thus, Joris asserts that, in a nomadic framework, '[w]e can only inhabit that which will disappear with us, that which does not survive us, i.e., ourselves. We are our home, this infinitesimal second'.⁴⁸ Though this seems to suggest a privileging of the self, Joris nonetheless hints at the implications unsettling 'here' has for the stability of the lyric 'I', proclaiming that 'we move into a here that, even before we can dot the I of our quasi-presence, has become a there'.⁴⁹ Joris's combined insistence is that uprooted geographical experience puts emphasis on the self but simultaneously destabilizes that self and makes it changeable or provisional. This seems irresistibly to contextualize Harwood's use of lyric as a mode which best suits the subject matter of *The Man with Blue Eyes*, but which must be destabilized in order to accurately express experience.

In the configuration of 'As your eyes are blue...', it is important to note that the two opposed romantic states of intimacy and separation are not directly conflicting (we are told that 'the difference is little' (p. 28)). Rather, proximity and distance both remain as intertwined possibilities throughout the poem, connected to the range of geographical locations to which the reader's attention is directed. This is evident in the third stanza, for example:

⁴⁸ Joris, 'St/range', p. 20.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

'cancel the tickets' – a sleep talk
whose horrors razor a truth that can
walk with equal calm through palace rooms
chandeliers tinkling in the silence as winds batter the gardens
outside formal lakes shuddering at the sight
of two lone walkers. (p. 28)

Here, the speaker's initial focus is implicitly one of intimate proximity, as he appears to be hearing his lover's 'sleep talk' in the 'shadowy room' described in the previous stanza (p. 28); yet, that 'sleep talk' suggests an imminent departure or elopement and its possible cancellation. As if in response to the prospect of separation, the poem's focus is shifted from the intimacy of 'your shirt on the top of a chest-of-drawers' (p. 28) into unspecified 'palace rooms' and 'gardens'. This again, however, does not allow for a clear dichotomy between closeness and distance: in the final line of the above stanza, the two lovers are together again ('two lone walkers') and the scene – which initially seemed like an imagined separation – now appears to be a memory of previous togetherness.

Not wishing to understate the transatlantic as a valuable critical context, it can be noted that part of Harwood's geographical unfixed-ness in these early poems might be explained by Nick Selby's sense of 'a delicate and complex meditation on the energies of transatlantic relationships, whether they be poetic, sexual, historic, geographic or political'; this leads Selby to locate in two later Harwood collections 'what might be called a transatlantic poetics'.⁵⁰ However, what I am seeking to describe in Harwood's early work is

⁵⁰ Nick Selby, 'Transatlantic Poetics in *H.M.S. Little Fox* and *Boston–Brighton*', in *The Salt Companion to Lee Harwood*, ed. by Sheppard, pp. 85-103 (pp. 85-86).

a spatial uprootedness that is more fundamental, irresolvable, and, in Joris's sense, nomadic. Selby begins to point towards it in highlighting in the later poetry 'a sense that different places and different people, and various moments of record [...] are never quite separable within the poem's ongoing process'.⁵¹ In 'The white cloud', Harwood continues to keep presence and absence irresolvably in tension, and we begin to see how this creates a kind of 'nomadic lyric' by implicitly enmeshing the near and far in a lyricism that disrupts spatial stability:

the white cloud blinds me
passing through your blue chair
and eyes.⁵²

The strongest, immediate sense here is of the collection's two lovers together, with the speaker renewing the intimate focus on eye colour romanticized in the previous poem. The setting would appear to be another interior (like the 'shadowy room' of 'As your eyes are blue...'), suggested here by the chair and also by the possibility that 'blinds' refers to the blinds of the window through which the cloud is being viewed ('the white cloud', 'blinds', 'me / passing through'). Yet, however one reads these lines, it is impossible to prevent a sense of absence from contradicting the intimate scene: if the speaker is 'passing through', then the scene is a temporary juncture in the collection's narrative of separations; if, in the more syntactically logical reading, either the 'cloud' or 'me' are 'passing through your blue chair / and eyes', then the result is to make 'you' an absent figure – a mere outline or

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 92.

⁵² Harwood, 'The white cloud', in *Collected Poems*, p. 30. Further references are to this page.

memory. The series of questions immediately following the passage both strengthen and complicate these readings: asking 'why does the bird fly?', the speaker is confirmed as an abandoned lover in a lyric of lovesickness; asking 'why is this wall so white?', he registers the room's emptiness; yet, this is abruptly countered by 'why do you cry in my arms?', which is obviously an image of physical closeness.

Though appearing naïvely simple, Harwood's poetic involves complications, requiring the reader to adopt multiple views of a scene, as irresolvably conflated as the poem's states of presence and absence. When Joris talks of nomadic language as a 'lingo-cubism', he suggests primarily an intertwining of languages, but evocatively implies that a poetics of constant movement would necessitate a pluralism of perspectives: he is drawing from a sense of '[t]he nomad eye of cubism [...] as against the sedentary perception of perspective'.⁵³ Analyzing Nicole Peyrafitte's visual art, Joris underlines these connections between multiplicity of perspective and nomadic uprootedness: he suggests that the 'constant destabilization of view-point', and the 'continuous eye-&-body-act of de- and re-territorializing the spaces of the drawing' (for which the poetic parallel might be the investigative re-assessing of a poem's meaning), both 'keep the reader from ever being able to find that fictional single static point, that center outside the painting/drawing that would organize a fixed, rectilinear, thus hierarchical world & gaze'.⁵⁴ With this tension between fixed/unfixed or singular/plural in mind, we might recall Kinnahan's sense of the lyric speaker as '[t]he individual figured as a private but universal voice [...] outside of a reality through which he or she can communicate through language' (p. 10). The destabilizing of

⁵³ Joris, 'Notes Toward a Nomad Poetics', pp. 38, 40.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

poetic voice and of depicted places are therefore intimately connected in ways that Joris's nomad poetics are well positioned to explain.

'The distance is nothing': Conclusion

Just as the syntactic plurality of Harwood's texts can be linked to their geographical uprootedness, so the irresolvable coexistence of nearness and separation is sustained at a grammatical level: this becomes clear in the penultimate lines of 'As your eyes are blue...' – 'and still you move me / and the distance is nothing' (p. 29), revisiting the lyrical utterance of the opening lines ('As your eyes are blue / you move me' (p. 28)). In both statements, 'you move me' signals awakened emotion, but also geographical movement as Harwood's speaker is 'moved' (relocated) by the relationship. Meanwhile, the word 'still' in the later lines is temporal ('[even now] you move me'), but also suggests stillness as the opposite of movement: it renews 'your' stillness from the previous stanza, meaning 'as you lay beside me [...] you move me'. In this fundamental plurality of meaning, 'still you move me' contains in a single moment the irresolvable opposites of distance and proximity, making it impossible for the reader to decide whether 'the distance is nothing' because it is overcome by love or, on the contrary, because the lovers are physically together. In 'The white cloud', similarly, there is a syntactic ambiguity in the lines, 'no - / one does exist outside this town': in one reading, 'no-one does exist outside' insists on the intimate, lyrical moment as an isolated event; but this is refuted by the alternative reading, 'no – one does exist outside this town', in which the speaker comes to terms with his lover's continued existence in a state of separation. Such confluences of separation and togetherness represents one way in which Harwood can be said to create a nomadic lyricism, marrying a lyrical, intimate focus to an apparently incompatible geographical openness, which Joris suggests in describing 'a

between-ness as essential nomadic condition, thus always a moving forward, a reaching [...] & an absence of rest, always a becoming, a line-of-flight'.⁵⁵ Harwood embodies this '*between-ness*', both in his geographical shifts and, relatedly, in his syntactical plurality – yet he embeds in that 'nomadic condition' numerous fragile moments of lyric intimacy, which might represent what Joris terms '[r]efuelling halts' or 'poases' (that is, *poem-oases*): 'they last a night or a day, the time of a poem, & then move on'.⁵⁶

Earlier in 'As your eyes are blue...', Harwood suggests the way in which the most intimate, lyrical moments may be inevitably tied to elsewhere:

you know even in the stillness of my kiss
that doors are opening in another apartment
on the other side of town. (p. 28)

These lines reinforce my argument that, where Harwood seems to interrogate or dismantle lyric voice, he is also embarking on a genuine attempt to make lyric work, but in a context where the most intimate and specific places are inevitably opening onto others. In working in cooperation with this instability, Harwood accepts Joris's sense that 'there is no at-home-ness here but only ever more displaced drifting'.⁵⁷ Indeed, the lyrical '[r]efuelling halt' represented by 'the stillness of my kiss' (or by the moment of 'me / passing through' in 'The white cloud') is quickly displaced by nomadic 'drifting', firstly into 'another apartment', but then into other, apparently distant places, as the poem continues:

⁵⁵ Joris, 'Notes Toward a Nomadic Poetics', p. 29.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

on the other side of town a shepherd grazing
his sheep through a village we know
high in the mountains the ski slopes thick with narcissi
the back of your hand and –

a newly designed red bus drives quietly down Gower Street
a brilliant red ‘how could I tell you...’
with such confusion

meetings disintegrating. (p. 28)

Like ‘the stillness of my kiss’, the intimate focus on ‘the back of your hand’ creates a brief respite – one of Joris’s ‘poases’ – amid a nomadic poetic texture. The line plays on the sense of knowing something *like the back of my hand*, but here the suggestion is of intimate knowledge of another person. By situating that intimate focus amid a continual shifting (from one place to ‘another apartment’, to ‘the mountains’, to ‘Gower Street’), Harwood succeeds in introducing lyrical moments into a restless nomadism.

Harwood registers the degree to which this restlessness contradicts the lyrical impulse and makes clear expression difficult: thus, the lines “‘how could I tell you...’ / with such confusion’ seem to comment (both directly and through their juxtaposition of voices) on the consequences Harwood’s spatial disruptions have for clear expression. Harwood implicitly asks whether a shifting terrain of ‘meetings disintegrating’ makes lyric expression impossible. Clearly, transatlantic contexts are vital, not only because he mediates self-conscious images of America within the shifting textures of his poems, but also because his

practices of parataxis and irresolvable ambiguity are influenced by American literary precedents. Crucially, though, it seems the concept of the nomadic is necessary, too, in explaining those elements of Harwood's work which are fundamentally unsettled and which collapse the sense of distance implied by 'transatlantic'. This finding helps with critical understanding of Harwood's early writing, but also, I think, of the British Poetry Revival's modernism more broadly, where transatlantic connections and dynamics are vital, but only go so far in explaining the complex interactions between unstable texts and uprooted experience of place and space. The uprooted elements of Harwood's poetic ultimately cohere with his lyrical expression, as the continual provisionality and uncertainty of his texts become an essential part of his emotional response to the depicted relationship. In other words, the disruption of stable positions within Harwood's early texts may vitally contribute to an expressive urge which they initially seem to contradict. It is in this sense that Harwood may most strongly be said to create a 'nomadic lyric', in which a geographical experience of multiplicity and unfixity is shown to problematize romantic intimacy, but in doing so ultimately contributes to a genuine, powerful love poetry.

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