

Biographer to the poet John Clare, Iain Sinclair was minded of Lee Harwood, 'full-lipped, fine-featured : clear eyes set on a horizon we can't bring into focus. Harwood's work, from whatever era, is youthful and optimistic: open.'

Poet. Worker. *British Rail* guard, *Better Books* manager, forester, museum attendant, stone mason, exam invigilator, theatre dresser, bus conductor, postal clerk (a GPO letter framed in his bathroom commends Harwood's courage diffusing an armed raid at Western Road Post Office, Hove).

Jobs that may appear modest entailed craft and motion, and a circular motion which matched his way of walking in the world with tenderness, and locally up onto the South Downs to see a rare orchid.

Lee Harwood was raised during wartime near Weybridge in Chertsey. As a child his bedroom window was blown in by a German bomb exploding nearby. His poetry typified his life. Ascetic, delicate, gentle and candid : attentive and careful.

He read English at Queen Mary College, London. Raising a young son Blake with Jenny Goodgame Harwood wrote 'Cable Street', a prose poem of place : Stepney with anti-Fascist testimony. His eye for Surrealism led him, at 24, to seek the Dada poet Tristan Tzara in Paris in 1963. He gained Tzara's blessing for his translations : a commitment which spanned 25 years of publications. The American poet John Ashberry had already lived in Paris for ten years when he met Harwood in 1965. The impact on Harwood's poetry on meeting Ashberry was immediate. Their relationship triggered a lifelong friendship.

By 1967 he'd settled in Brighton, then in Hove. His would be a restless, adventurous life.

Lee Harwood's first works, *title illegible* were published by London sound poet Bob Cobbing's Writers Forum in 1965, and in 1966 by poets Lewis Warsh and Anne Waldman's Angel Hair in New York, *The Man With The Blue Eyes*. This won the Frank O'Hara Prize. *The Man With The Blue Eyes* carried a preface by John Ashberry :

'Lee Harwood's poetry lies open to the reader, like a meadow. It moves slowly toward an unknown goal, like a river. It is carelessly wise, that is, wise without knowing or caring what wisdom is.'

Reading 'As your eyes are blue' thirty years later, Harwood declared, 'who *was* that masked man?' The identity within early sensual poems, published in Fulcrum editions like *The White Room* followed him. Soon Harwood would reconsider what he had set out to do :

And below around us – the flint customs house at Shoreham,
the call of a cuckoo as we climb up-hill to the Stalldown stone row,
the wild moor about, and from its edges
the churches, cathedrals, ancient and beautiful things.

Talking to myself

The sweet qualities of our dreams without which ...

How the wind blows and our hearts ache to follow
the hazardous route the winds follow

6 million Russians

6 million Jews

2 million Poles

1 million Serb

Gypsies and others

A reader hearing of fictional quotations, fragmentary conversation and incomplete speech in Harwood's poetry might expect frenzy. The overheard. The din. ('The sun behind them / and bombs falling all around / 'Jah Jah / CLICK CLICK / Jah Jah').

Quite the opposite. Harwood's poetry attained stillness, the poems evoking an other world – Snowdonian treks, Sussex coast's pearl-shell hue. Poetry was, he said 'a form of collage that tries to present and create a four dimensional world, a sense of "things" in perspective'. Equal care informed his quiet poetry readings, hand guiding their tempo, those pauses, unfinished distances and sentences. 'This world, this fiction, was not static'.

The poet Carlyle Reedy who first read alongside him in 1966 thought 'he so much infused reality with tenderness, that he transformed ordinary life and lifted it up, in the same way that nature surprises you with its beauty. A constant craftsman. A continual observer'.

He trained his eye on the everyday; the commonplace, a loaded word for a writer as careful as Harwood. Eating egg 'n'chips in a caff on the South Downs in the prose poem *Dream Quilt*, he teased himself in 'Gorgeous – yet another Brighton poem'.

In America, Harwood had a wide acquaintance among the poets of California and New York, but intonation from a young working life in New York, Boston and Bolinas shaped his poetry readings. His transatlantic reputation, places him in rich terrain : elders, peers, poet friends in America : Edwin Denby, Robin Blaser, James Schuyler, Edward Dorn, Ted Berrigan, John Wieners and in England, F.T.Prince, Carlyle Reedy, Harry Guest and Anne Stevenson.

Elegant in jeans and shirt, he trekked this nation on sprinter trains to give readings. The tale of Harwood waist deep in snow descending Snowdonia with ten minutes to spare to reach a reading is true. But Crib y Ddysgl was also where he saw his close poet and climber friend Paul Evans fall to his death in 1991.

Reading in Brighton, in 2011, Harwood's care for his poems and audience was evident as he spoke with undiminished affection for unique local creations like Booth's museum. His presence that made you listen intently, emanated from a very still centre. August Kleinzahler considered Harwood's poems to 'have been carried across many horizons by his lightness of touch: like the lightness of the hollow bones in a bird's skeleton, nevertheless substantial enough to carry it long distances'.

Penguin Modern Poets 19 carried Harwood's poems alongside Tom Raworth and John Ashberry, (1971). In 1988 John Muckle edited Harwood's *Crossing the Frozen River* at Paladin. In 2004 Shearsman collected Harwood's poems. In 2013 Harwood received The Cholmondeley Award, and last year Enitharmon crossed a certain bridge in publishing *The Orchid Boat*.

Harwood's poetry is enhanced by their original chapbooks and pamphlets : *Old Bosham Bird Watch*, *Evening Star*, *Monster Masks*, *The Song of Those Who Are On The Sea of Glass*. Family permeated his poetry. His grandmother's nurturing guided the poem 'African Violets', he offered his elder daughter a spell in 'The Rowan Tree'. 'Salt Water' celebrated a younger

daughter. Harwood's poetry is unique for expressing openness to love and company, and practical empathy for the stranger :

on the late night train home

“kind gentle creature he was, died quite young”

heard from the next seat down

“quite diffident, and nervous”

“I shall have to answer at the Pearly Gates.

He declared a passionate love to me,

and I... “ (the rest unheard – train noise)

Travers Rafe Lee Harwood

6 June, 1939, Leicester

26 July, 2015 Hove

married Jenny Goodgame, 1961, Judith Walker, 1974

3 sons, 2 daughters (one deceased)