

Paul Sutton

The Chronicles of Dave Turnip

I. Turnip Adrift

Dave Turnip (poet and former punter),
enlightener of estates & concrete arterials.
The documentary films explore
some shrines in his bedroom.

The first “whore” to disappear
her mouth he can remember
engorging him, “after the
end of a relationship, finding myself
in the red-light district.”

Kicks a habit and starts to chronicle.
Project born of his spunk in skinny girls,
hooded or straggling.

What is it with girls found in water,
on flooded fields and painters’ light
under bridges (no Ophelia references,
I beg you cunt).

“In the feral darkness
I tasted fire and sex.
In waste-grounds and B & Q car parks,
I saw myself saviour,
Lawrence of Arabia;
to the erstwhile urchins,
I was Bilbo Baggins.”

Picture any seaport in the snow,
all those pretty girls wanting to sell.
This man drives around,
meticulous about his fingernails,
has worked the construction sites
and liners, stolen from cabins
(white gold with sapphire)

Job, job, job,
up and down the sinking east coast
ports from 70's cup replays.
Then the containers and easy pockets
filled with rye.

Dear Mr Turnip,
Your name is ridiculous.
I recall a former England boss
(came after Robson from Ipswich Town).
ACE funding for your project has no chance.
I advise contacting "Crack Down"
an outreach project
for sex workers with habits.
To find their community centre,
look for the green light.

Car on car on car,
sometimes the seagulls
sensing a change,
abandon their landfills for
outflows from factories.

Turnip as ornithologist
watches their circling
higher like snow, a helicopter can see
it pans out; the map shows geography
of movement then capture.

In old Suffolk he rests his fuddled head.
Soon he'll buy that abandoned water mill,
walk the skinny fields, crack the odd puddle.
About Dave Turnip much more shall be said.

II. The haunting of Turnip

DT now uses just his initials.
Having read "A Glastonbury Romance"
Turnip speeds over Somerset's levels,
to a room pre-booked in a pricey pub.

Turnip adrift, wanderer
over half-built estates and
slip roads unlit in moonlight.
Brings degree certificates
to show qualifications:
MBA; PGCE;
oh how the world has tilted.

Glastonbury for its ghosts.
Arriving under lake light,
pale prince on a dripping bus.
One road, and off it this inn,
narrow stairs behind the bar,
epilepsy carpet, through
fire doors to a lonely bulb.

Such weight, pressed for confession;
(prison yard pictures of men
without pleas). So now Turnip
cannot rise, squeaks in surprise,
a hooded man comes calling
for skinheads and patriots,
sitting on his skinny chest.

Witnessing disinterment,
feverish notes to himself
scrawled under swinging lamplight.
Joins a guild of gravediggers;
"no bugger is interested"
snaps some attempted pickup.
Turnip needs more property.

Wherefrom (you say) comes his cash?
Several redundancies,

share-saves and annuities:
a ditch-encircled cottage,
still the waters lap at him,
late driver (headlights undipped)
spots our drunkard moonraking.

Abandoning syllabics;
bored with the seven counting,
headshakes, like birds pulling worms,
embarrassing simile.
Decides on prose poetry,
reads Celine, distilling rage,
attempting his ellipsis.

“All my life, form and counting... oh to abandon it... I met him by chance...how travel once bored me...I lost my books in Munich...re-read Le Carré and Christie...one Sunday...we hugged like survivors and swapped bags...I carried his to the pension...extra rooms? no problem...someone on the run...attracting departing shoulders...checks corners...the empty stillness of the sloping sea ...a coast for concealment...Looking outwards...he said nothing.”

So began the haunting of Dave Turnip.

III. Turnip Resurgam

In the Central African Republic
where his name means nothing,
melting in the heat and mud,
tramping on absurdly through.

Astounded by the mountains in mist,
everything slithering, khaki villages,
soaked and sky-lowering, in warm rain
he suspects unspeakable acts.

A period in France, researching his hero,
befriended by bitter wrecks, anti-Semites,
eaters of dead flies and carpet carriers.

Distillation becomes an obsession.
The beauty of its apparatus, counting
the gathering drips, fractional, his chemistry
days at Oxford, the First – abandoned for what?

Einbahnstrasse

Lungs in mouth – switchback to the border (you had to cross) – Christ empty as a kiosk in January – no you
– no need to summon the hordes that passed here.

Great for junkies now (they love the desolation) – douane & snaps of terrorists.

In the first town (Catalan of course) bullet holes pock facades by broken liquor stores.

No pleas by me though – feels safe in my rented Peugeot.

Footfall of harried intellectual
with suitcase tattered
heels so vulnerable;
snap, snap,
even an inch is enough –
I cannot help enjoying the glamour.

Always the English confused by abroad.
They wrote too much
buggered Marxists cheering conflict
(but here for sex and verse)
from pulpits in basalt cliffs
and now the rain starts.

One Way Street

Fuck Modernism. Now it's weekly bins whereas
(in my street) parking and directions are impossible.
Long ago I travelled there – via pilgrimage to Collioure –
now in Witney - birthplace of “lager louts” © Douglas Hurd
the Chavs are controlling my movements. I visit MOMA
(Oxford) a cultural divide I worship (am stuck with) –
such damn fools – peacock in a giant gold cage – I scowl my rage –
see the comments book – I dared address the curator by name but signed “Gilbert Gobster: outraged
Sunday painter and local water-colourist”. Returned on the 100 bus – sweating oleum; *O wanderer wherefore art
thou?* Into the Market Square abode of “shiremen” (beefy-headed Oxon fodder).

Once I tried painting them
the sluts and venereal turds
I toured the bars and pubs
affecting a lisp and offering to listen.
Fucking hell I suffered!
Became known & can't move without jeers
(negative equity and downturn meaning
Summertown is out of the question).

“Who is producing art for the new builds?”

The putative title of my surely-to-be-rejected project. One day I'll pack up,
take my case like Walter Benjamin but only to cross at Eynsham (toll bridge free on foot) or hop along the
A40. Please mistake me for a migrant – preferably an Eastern European artist dealing in platitudes about
borders. I'll put my work into any drawer (with labels) gallery visitors can open and shut quick as larry-oh
and just glance at my name; I exist in the comments book anyway under my own (*erased?*).

Seriously though. I say venereal but nothing so déclassé
nor bohemian, I remember my house purchase from Barratt's
I joked about the opportunities, not just for mixers and diggers:
I'm run ragged, kippered, stalled on bob-a-job memories from whenever.

Wrong Turn

Of course I read Orwell in my youth – I can quote reams from “Down and Out...” (my own writings are furthering that tradition!). Class is unimportant – opportunity – all cultures – little Billy the ballet boy shows how narrow assuming all such are bovine – Frears dribbling how art transcends – still, I’d scarper myself if chased by “shiremen” – one wrong turning off the ring-road I did regret – returning from stakeholders’ meeting on 14-19 outreach to ethnics – you know the signs (tyre places, young people on corners, large mottled forearms clutching comestibles). Stopped dead: “Beuys woz ere” I half-joked then realised my wheels were gone, brick-hoisted and installed for the fuckers to skewer at leisure (c.f. kebabs).

Appalling – the ingratitude.

Fauves

Animals; I remember painting a sunset in the Market Place and some shit throwing fried onions at me. So I went conceptual. An installation of racist chants superimposed on multicultural pieties. No takers. A collage of used nappies on takeaway cartons. Ditto. Recordings of nightbus' incontinencies overdubbed with Larkin and Kate Clancy. A terse rejection.

An anthology for some clap-house publisher prompted various responses:

"...showboats his sneering irrelevance. Best understood as an attempt to attack true poetry, of which I know him to be profoundly ignorant. Veers between fevered lunacy and formless obscurity; there's nothing here to interest this discerning reader."

Jed Bracewell – poet and translator – winner of the 2003 Feta prize for the collection "Mumbling in the Moon's shadow"

"Too loud and bullying; hasn't he stared at an autumn sky, scudding with crows and leaves flying widdershins? If so he lacks the means to show not tell. And where's the science? Natural magpies that we are, some of us jump from fractals to Schrodinger's cat as easily as we juggle families and writing. Go figure."

Su Tenderdrake, co-facilitator of Hard Tacks, a heuristic workshop for unlucky sods.

"I ask only one thing of a poet – that she makes me see afresh this mad myriad place. His poetry leaves me cold as a snowman without a bobble hat, cold as a pike in a northern reservoir. Kipperd"

Tilly Stigmata, poet and winner of the 1998 Brodie prize for her (first) collection "Sumo Wrestling in Auld Reekie".

Fuck 'em all!

Fuck 'em all!

The long and the short and the tall:

The Thames seems any river only ours.
We walked the banks so many times,
I trace them in my dreams and
at sunrise the traffic howls;
I know you're passing, north or south.