

Robert Sheppard

from *Elegaic Sonnets: Overdubs of the Sussex sonnets of Charlotte Smith*:

excerpts from the project The English Strain

To the Naiad of the Adur

Come, suburban Naiad! seek a naiant channel
to the Hermaphrodites' Cave, as actual
as the 'funny men' Mother warned me of when I rambled
to and fro, in autumn or spring, on the luxuriant Downs.

I sport with these sinuous she-males in their pool,
breasts brushing the swell (and me) until a dirty old man
dishabilitates in gorse and they leap up erect, surprise attack,
to tackle his perversity with their polyamorous tackle:

bum him until his prostate liquefies like a rotting peach
with a split pip!

Where was I? Up the Adur with such ardour,
where there's neither cave nor pool? Drown me in your

Lethean waters where I'll remember neither one thing
nor the other, beyond tidal dialectics, dispersed
in a thousand unsexed voices of two dozen Sussex poets.

Composed during a walk on the Downs

Low clouds, merging into mist that clothes
the slopes, blanket the sky and these chalk-tipped brims.
There aren't many vultures on the Downs,
the odd wallaby, renegade parakeets, a furtive puma.

Nothing under leaf-mould flowerbeds, twiggy and hard, stirs.
Swathed in duffle, I'm an inventory of invented memories,
flowing with chalky milk that swells Kingston Lane gutters
on a wet walk home, drained downhill, dammed with twigs.

By the shore, a hopeful Mermaid flips her luscious tail
outside the Pilot where, Father warns, 'Queers,
Hags and Sailors' huddle in an Edward Burra interior,

while, in the car park, the carefree Vulture munches its way
through the furred kidneys of a chalkland swain, staked
through the heart for voting Remain and for sodomy.

On leaving a part of Sussex

*You're Petrarch and Laura rolled into one
cornball of misery on Southwick Hill, but
you're not anti-binary; you're anti-everything;
not becoming woman but unbecoming woman*

*with a brain full of bullshit and cowpat!
You stuck out a mile in the Ladyboys of Bognor,
bigging yourself up in Bignor like you owned the place.
You'd be walking the South Downs Way, believe me,*

*after wild frenzy with Tom of Findon -
or with a femdom Alpha bitch in Fulking Dungeon,
nettle-thrashing you, Unworthy of Worthing! No!*

*I'm Madam Hamlet of Hambrook, mooching down the Avenue
at dusk, listening out for hedgehogs rustling
and nightingales hammering out the blues in the mulch.*

*To the Insect of the Gossamer; or:
I Heard It Through the Grapevine*

This is Sun Radio broadcasting from Truleigh Hill
The ether threaded with our Sunday jokes and jingles
And woven with back to back singles like *Bad Moon Rising*
(Father's atom-bomb radar bunkers beneath this furze)

My little voice is lost in this form like a poet's
While I spin the banned *Je t'aime* till it's fucked
But when the swift wireless telegraphy Nazis raid
You shout that our free radio beam escapes their cloud

Shoots beyond the stars and that visionary youth
Shall breathe a rainbow bridge of dope smoke over
The Shoreham-by-pass as we're snapped off into aerial static

Monday's dull realities rock in and roll off
Like the traffic you track for the Port Authority 9-5
We're just two little boys with our radio toys

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Blank Calendar: Empty Diary 2017

It's strange to feel him writing through me
after years of Google-sculpting skinflick grunts.
She nodded over her diary which she'd dropped:
It was the heft of her that held him, every step

a sensuous shifting. He watched, aroused –
she wore a lightweight cream-blush blouse –
by the revelation of a promise of strings tugged taut.
Am I a puppet he jiggles or a dummy he hides inside?

If I'm not in a committed relationship by 37
I will go to a sperm bank (she wrote (I dreamt
(who said? I sense his writing-hand in my
knicker-drawer feeling for dildos and black diaries:

Trying not to drink more than half my bottle of Pinot
this wet Monday as I bingewatch the box set of *Magnifica 70*.

Fucked in Translation: Empty Diary 2018

I made this (male) character.
Up. For myself. She
says. Animal sexpert
breeding pigs on his rival's
sofa, herding with his 'cock',
adjusting himself
in a taxi of lady voices.
It's (male) lust that's nailed, if
not stapled. 'Fluid, certainly,'
opines the police officer,
the first on the scene.

Love is a pain, a kidney stone
in boxer shorts. She
writes. He cannot believe his
luck, bad luck of
course, opening bottles
with his bare teeth,
domestic blisters.
I believe I have fully
unravelling. One day,
she discusses 'chicks'
with some finger-lickin'
clit-flickin' Eurocrat,
messing up his messy
Swedish meatballs, his
soup of love juices. If
he churns his girlish
sniffing, one of his chicks
leaves home to roost.
When I'm a mere
flicker of knickers,
and his wife is a repulsive
obstruction to the spurt
under his shirt, desire will
bust. Nothing
is 'like' the breasts
of his mistress,

tall, tanned and sweaty,
swaying across
to the slippery fish
of a phone. Warn her:
the lover of those made up
afternoons is on the line.