

***Takeaway* — Tommy Hazard**

A Red View



**We're the flowers
in the dustbin**

Product

The book is small and unassuming. You could slip it into the back pocket of your jeans. The cover is red. Red looks like stop and danger and alert and proceed with caution. The book's title is given in the top right corner of the front cover: *Takeaway*. We all like a takeaway. You can take an ersatz culinary tour of the world through takeaways: Indian one night, Chinese the next, then Thai, etc. *Takeaway* promises to take the reader away somewhere. The lower portion of the front cover contains a line drawing of an ambulance with the back doors open and a stretcher (unoccupied or perhaps laden with a body bag; probably the former) awaiting deployment. The passenger door is open too. There is no sign of the ambulance driver or paramedic or patient. The takeaway will presumably be the patient. The patient will be collected and taken away. There is a dim suggestion of cannibalism in all this.

The word "Takeaway" isn't the only one on the front cover. Underneath the title is the name Tommy Hazard. We remember the hallowed names of the punk rock annals: Sid Vicious, Steve Ignorant, Rat Scabies, Johnny Rotten. Tommy Hazard could be one of them. I am an antichrist. I am an anarchist. Destroy. Etc. Beneath the name is a thick black line, underneath which, in a smaller font, appear the name of the publisher (Morbid Books) and the word "Fiction". Anyone familiar with the iconoclastic publisher might be surprised at this unnecessary act of categorisation.

The back cover contains everything you would expect: endorsements, an ISBN and a barcode.

Thinking about that red. At first I thought it was blood red, but it isn't: it isn't dark enough. Ketchup red. Yes, the cover is ketchup red. The book measures 14.7 x 1 x 9.5 cm. Its entry on Amazon claims it is 122 pages long. This is a lie: it has only 88 pages. A very short read, you think. It is a small, ketchup-red book. And the font is bound to be huge. So *Takeaway* must be a short story.

Red Herring

you've got to be fucking joking

Jeremy fucking Hunt

apply pressure here and here don't stop

what's it supposed to look like

blood or something

worst crisis the NHS has faced

I'm not an animal

just cruising around not harming anybody what's it got to do with you

I'm not a loss in protein

just driving around king of the road no ties no one to tell me what to do

fuck it all and fuck the fucking brat

hardly appropriate but what do you expect of a Tory

bleeding the health service

selling it off

blood cells skin cells brain cells

sex sells

don't point that thing at me

don't point it at me

what next then

oh another burst appendix

do you know *Le malade imaginaire* it's a hoot utterly exquisite genius

#sickofbeingsick

LOVER BOY

I'm not an animal

A full-body anatomical illustration of a human male figure is superimposed over a photograph of a dark, narrow hallway. The hallway walls are covered in colorful graffiti, and the floor is dark and worn. The anatomical figure is shown from the waist up, with its torso open, revealing internal organs like the stomach and intestines. The figure's head is bald and its face is obscured by a white, featureless mask. The figure's arms are outstretched, and its hands are open. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights on the figure's muscles and the graffiti on the walls.

We're the poison in the human machine

Bulk

When you open the book you are surprised to discover that the font is small. *Takeaway* is a novella, it turns out. There are line numbers on each page, which will prove useful to a student of literature. The line numbers on each page mean that when you quote an excerpt, you will be able to cite the exact location of your quotation, in the same way you might when quoting *King Lear*, for example, by writing, “‘Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!’ *King Lear*, Act 3 Scene 2 line 1.”

Takeaway is a novella by Lewis Parker and one of his Morbid Books collaborators. Tommy Hazard is their non-de-plume, as well as being the name of the book’s narrator, a London ambulance driver. The story comprises a series of grotesque vignettes, in which the protagonist describes the situations and people to whom he is dispatched in the course of his working day. The tone is predominantly light, dry, cynical. The narrator explains that most of the emergencies he encounters are nothing of the sort; it is a London of time-wasters, malingerers and hypochondriacs:

“We’ll get this ostensibly serious job, but as soon as we read it, we go, yeah, it’s a load of bollocks.” (Page 7, lines 25-26)

Tommy Hazard (the character, not the authors, whom I have never met) reminds me of Magnus Mills’s narrators. His voice is distinctive, his manner conversational, artfully off-hand. He employs the present tense to convey drama. You can’t help but like him. You will be drawn in and you will laugh at Mr Hazard’s laconic observations and comical sangfroid. Here is one of my favourite moments, in which he discusses three people who frequently call for an ambulance, despite there being nothing wrong with them:

“The Holy Trinity is Mr P, Mr Q and this other fucker called Mr S. They’re named after the wave forms of an ECG. Really Mr S should have been called Mr T but that would be confusing for fans of the *A-Team*.” (Page 37, lines 11-14)

The novella’s final episode sees Mr Hazard having it off in a mildly kinky way with a nurse who has just discretely euthanised a cancer patient. The effect is probably intended to be shocking, but I found it quite moving. The lonely Tommy Hazard, driving around a fragmented London, finally has a moment of intimacy that seems to mean something. I found myself thinking about Kneehigh’s theatrical adaptation of *Steptoe And Son* and its hopelessly male world, in which women are beautiful phantoms, just beyond reach. There are female characters in *Takeaway*, but if you look closely they’re made of thousands of tiny penises.

In an interview with publishers La Casita Grande, Lewis Parker said, “I think if I was a more affable person who knew how to play the promotional game better, this book would thrill and disturb a lot of people.” He is right, though I suspect that *Takeaway* is more thrilling than disturbing. If Irvine

Welsh had written this book it would have been far nastier and more unsavoury. Tommy Hazard would have been a rapist or a pedophile and the story would have been awash with blood, excrement and semen. *Takeaway* would have been a silly, nihilistic Grand Guignol drama. As it is, the novella is an entertaining picaresque whose chapters create a sort of fairground London, full of attractions, noise, jovial banter. Most of the rides break health and safety regulations, and the attendants have bad teeth and blank stares. But if you're after quick thrills and don't mind sponging a bit of vomit off your shirt afterwards, *Takeaway* is for you.

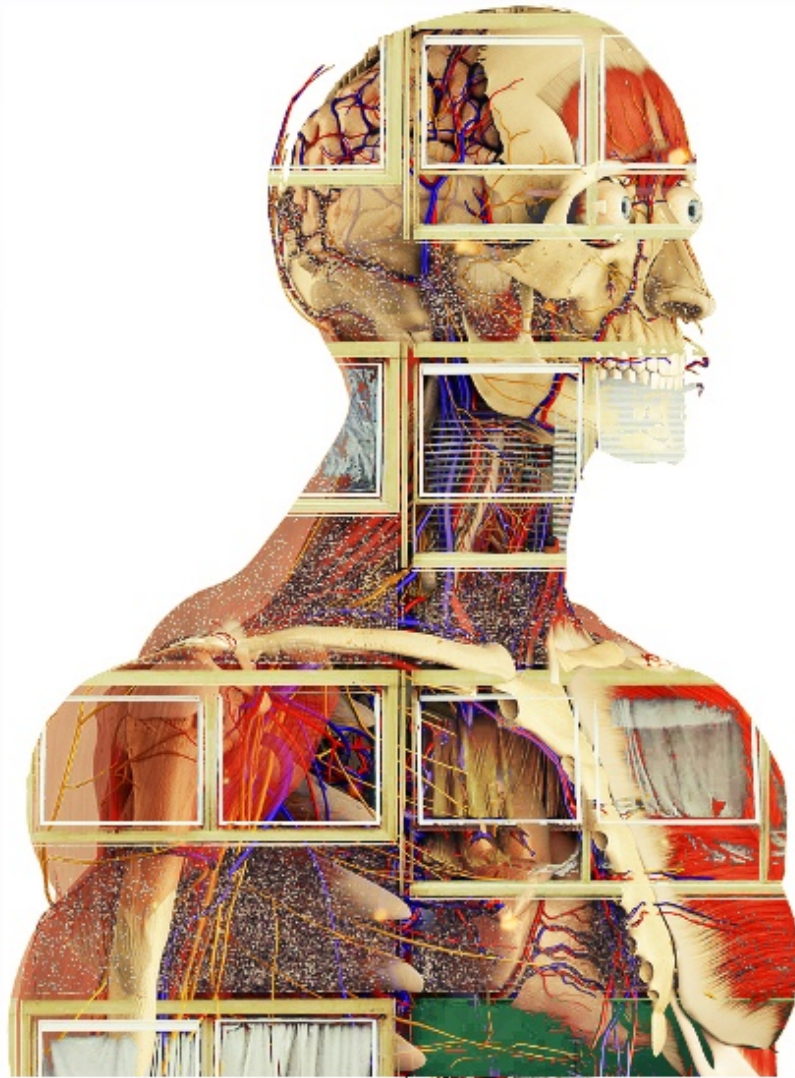
Red Terror

calling for insurrection resurrection of revolutionary principles
I used to faint at the sight of blood I'd be out cold just like that
calling for heads on spikes
fuck the bourgeoisie

"Literature is the loneliest road that leads anywhere," smirked André Breton as he signed a deal with Editions Gallimard

everything went fuzzy my sight faded my hearing went everything sounded papery it was like dying

an end to novels the novel is dead the novel is dead again fuck the novel
an end to poems plays short stories
an end to endings
I've always said you make a poem by setting fire to something
calling for heads on spikes
little books little red books packed with word bombs
calling for blood
the blood of the poet
the blood of the poor
the blood of the
felt like dying
went fuzzy



**We're the future
Your future**