

# No Perfect Fruit

Poems by Terry Simpson  
and John Mullen

# No Perfect Fruit

It is not drop by drop thought out poetry,  
It is no lovely product, no perfect fruit.  
It is the deepest need which has no name,  
In heaven it is cries and on the earth acts.

**Poems by Terry Simpson and  
John Mullen**

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**Poems by John Mullen**

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## **Gennevilliers Industrial Estate**

The estate  
where the cafe bar men  
spend the daytime building trucks  
between patches of waste ground,  
saving up for a bit of pride  
on the day each month  
when the cheque goes home  
to wife and babies in Morocco  
or Algeria.

Where the Arab five year old,  
who wore a French cock on his hat  
and called me 'tu' because I smiled at him  
seemed not to know that in the metro station  
might be armed CRS wanting  
papers details papers details papers  
unless you can prove you are white.

The industrial estate  
where the power lies sleeping,  
but in the Friday evening wave to the  
workmates  
(I feel) lies only waiting  
waiting for papers  
waiting for confidence  
waiting

## Place de l'Opéra

I will walk to work erect and desperate  
For I am not beaten.  
They will never beat me  
(though they might not let me speak).

I will not.  
I will walk weary.  
Blue overall open.  
Head forward.  
I will show  
I am waiting  
With forced patience.

I will walk suited, slowly, with long steps.  
I have a key to the managers' toilet.  
And in ten years time (who knows ?)  
A two metre wide desk,  
And a neo-classical clock.

I will walk briskly - it is seven fifty eight.  
It took longer than expected to make myself  
beautiful  
But it is good - the customers like it, He says.  
I am young and I still wonder  
Why work is not what they told me.

## Poem for Keith

We cried together,  
and something happened  
beyond the rejecting of stereotypes of men,  
beyond the generalised indifference  
that had replaced the stereotype.

An extra window opened,  
and I realised that what I had thought was the  
front of the house,  
the panoramic view,  
was an admittedly cosy back alley.

Outside this alley I am scared  
of what I might find.  
I have not been there maybe since  
my father asked me to sing for his tape  
collection  
and was proud of me.

I intend to go with you  
onto the main street  
holding your hand.

## **Bicentenary June 1989**

I want to make love to you,  
and you don't want to.  
I feel frustrated,  
and you feel guilty.

For me, to make love with you  
would be a little swell  
of electric sweet music  
among the cold traffic  
and sirens and deadlines  
which chase me.

For you to sleep only sleep  
next to me  
would be a little safe space  
amid the broken glass and nettles  
of looking for work in Paris,  
a rest from being someone else's  
and not your own.

The world cuts acidly into our soft skins.  
But in this grey Sunday banlieue morning  
we made appear at least  
a yellow flower of honesty which promised to  
grow  
when it found the time.

## **University**

A sickening aluminium  
skeletal structure  
smelling of urine.

When it should be  
the fire and milk of human youth,  
smouldering, flowing and pulsating  
for knowledge and action.

## **Exam Poem**

All Candidates must answer FOUR insults,  
Not more than TWO from any ONE section.

## **The intelligentsia**

Cowed students  
laugh it all off as unimportant  
- they're not really bothered  
- they cry themselves to sleep  
after eight pints.



## **Dream**

Through the locked door of a church  
a childhood friend speaks to me  
embarrassed to see me again.

He is smaller than me now,  
he has not grown.  
His face is round, small, beautiful  
like a pixie's.

I do not remember what I said to him  
But it was not much,  
and it certainly did not reflect  
the immensity of childhood desires.

## **Michelle**

A soprano voice rising in a cathedral  
Caressing every form  
In the stone roses thirty feet overhead.

I am standing on the scaffolding  
Watching in through the stained glass  
And my heart is stopping.

Now the smoke from my Marlborough Light  
Is in my eyes and fades the glass  
And I cannot see you.

But now the voice is a glowing starling  
And leaves by the window to join me  
And we are off to carve something new  
together  
in next year's style - post-smoke,  
post-frightening, neo-human.  
Let's carve us a river, Michelle.

## **Blues**

Current rushes through tangled  
multicoloured wires which are very thin,  
and thousands of miles long,  
covered only with fine plastic  
insulation.

Between them spaces, mostly triangles,  
of different sizes.

This is an image to say how vulnerable I feel.  
I feel like software : not really there at all,  
and easy to annihilate at the touch of a key  
on the instructions of a higher level  
programme.

I'd like to feel your current  
running through me, mine through you,  
doubling our power.

It seems a long way off,  
but I believe it's possible.

## Twigs

Yet there are still twigs  
aching to bud,  
they still etch the sky at 5 O clock  
(it is December).

Yet there are still voices  
hoping to flow,  
they still seem alive to me  
(on the telephone).

Yet there are still buses  
on the Harrogate Road,  
they still carry frightened people  
(to and from work).  
While there are still twigs,  
aching to bud and to grow  
and young men  
aching to love and be safe.

## **Retiro/Luxembourg/Versailles**

(Parque de Retiro, Madrid 1993)

Somewhere behind the hedges, tennis courts  
and poplars  
in this wooded park there is a château.  
And I have time away again to look for it  
and notice new things and be on holiday.  
And wait for my girlfriend to meet me.

When twelve years of wooded parks  
and chateaux and girlfriends seem to melt  
into one giant wooded chateau girl  
I am waiting for breathless again,  
to enfold me in an ill-disguised symbolism of  
womb and home,  
to whisper love to me in German again.

And this wooded chateau girl  
has no fear in her face  
and can run to me to absorb mine.

## **Loneliness** (After Miguel Hernandez)

My eyes without your eyes are not eyes,  
They are two anthills of loneliness.  
And without your hands, my hands  
are harsh bunches of hawthorns.

I cannot find my lips  
without your red lips  
filling me with sweet tinkling bells.

Without you, my thoughts are  
a series of disasters,  
burning up fennel  
and replacing it with thistles.

I cannot trust my ears without your voice.  
Which pole do I wander to without your star ?  
My voice weakens without your warmth.

I chase the smell of your breeze  
and the forgotten image of your footprint,  
which starts in you, my love,  
and ends in me.

## Love and Imagery

«It is too grand» she says to me.  
«This is not Homer, this is Cheltenham,  
And I am certainly not Hermione.

«What does 'destiny' mean, or 'glory' ?  
You tell just one side of the story.  
Maybe there are more sides too.

«Life is no sonnet, life is a game,  
Which established images cannot comprehend  
And why are you so keen to be my friend ?

«'Ich hab dich lieb', 'ich hab dich lieb'  
Is that all you can say ?  
Isn't that enough today ?»

I, the timid and confident stranger  
Paint the universe violet twice  
While making us another cup of coffee.

## **G**

I love you like  
the now shaken petal loves  
the driving raindrop who  
shook him into living.

## **Separation**

Why was there  
no room for that eternity  
in your head ?  
Who closed the door to that infinite garden,  
sealing it with industrial grease ?

What could I have shown you different  
for your life to begin to catch up  
with all those wise words you said ?

Will someone crack one day  
the mystery of that rose  
black on the inside,  
with thorns pointing mostly inwards ?  
I wanted so much to be that person,  
to take out the first thorn.

I wish you all the world your own  
and enough safety to speak.



## Poems

1. Small tricky witty images of poet chatter  
(making modest or pretentious autobiography  
and lightening a moment but not daring  
further)...

2. Wild or passionate purple fountains  
of blood, arms, fire, sun, lakes  
showing stomach love, longings, fulfilment...

3. Nights and dawns and skulls and deserts  
showing questions of life, death, reason, hope,  
but locked in one-against-world...

4. Seas and storms and flags and seasons  
of struggle and class,  
freely given love, victory, power, control,  
Daring to see the world for the workers come  
true...

There is a poem I have to write for you,  
Speaking mostly of colours and vision.

## Poetry

Children  
and, perhaps, railway stations.

## **For G.** (after Pablo Neruda)

I am hungry for your mouth, for your voice, for  
your hair.

Down the streets I wander, without food or  
words.

Bread cannot sustain me, the dawn upsets me  
As I search for the flowing sound of your feet  
in the day.

I hunger for your fluid laughter,  
For your hands, colour of wheat in fury.  
I hunger for the pale stone of your fingernails,  
I want to eat your flesh like a whole almond.

I want to eat the lightning burnt into your  
beauty,  
Your nose supreme on your proud face.  
I want to eat the twinkling shadows of your  
eyelashes.

And hungry I come and go sniffing the dusk,  
Looking for you, looking for your warm heart,  
Like a puma lost in Quitratue.

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## **Anke**

You have eyes which are pebbles  
On a cool and average beach,  
They shine out and dart forward  
To grasp the passerby,  
To wake the sleeping, stir the weary  
And herald a new age.

All of life could be like you,  
In your slow solid transparent leap,  
through walls of decay towards  
oceans of strawberry milk shake.

## **Autumn**

The children want to play in the fallen leaves,  
But the man is paid to rake them away.

## Poem for L.

Dark eyes and violet jeans  
Show touches of passion for living,  
and the way you crease your lips,  
in a way no adverb can capture,  
as if to say  
"Life is cruel but interesting".

There is fire in your eyes when I talk of Neruda  
fire in your silence while you watch people  
move  
and do not tell what you see.

I know that you buried your books  
while the dictator was not looking,  
that you love to understand  
and to hold out your hands.

I know your fiery honesty and your fiery child  
and I am hungry for more.

How can I burn in rhythm with you,  
kindle with you some months or years or  
eternities ?

I am a grain of sand in your life  
But I want to be your beach.

## Line 13

Dazed poets  
herded into trains  
off to day jobs.

Razed hopes  
not yet destroyed  
but real bruised.

Eight oh six  
Seven minutes spare  
Time for a cigarette.

Run out of poetry  
at Saint Lazare  
All change.

Dazed poets  
come round  
Rise up.

## **EDF Morning.**

How would I know  
If I had become a hardened bachelor  
If I had lost the capacity to feel  
The sparkle and disappointment  
of childhood love ?

Is the atomised scream for more  
dulling my brain forever  
Or around the next grove is there  
a new lambswool drink  
a fresh cotton embrace  
A wild silken head of hair to caress me  
and love ?

## **Chaos**

The beating of a butterfly's wing in Tokyo  
has, most times, no effect at all  
even on the butterfly.

## **Poetry is a loaded weapon of the future**

(from Gabriel Celaya)

When you ask for nothing more  
And can hope for nothing,  
Savagely attending and blindly insisting,  
Like a pulse beating the darkness.  
Pulse beat the darkness.

When the dizzy clear eyes of death  
Are staring at you,  
Truths and loving cruelties can be spoken.  
Truths and loving cruelties.

Poetry for the poor,  
Poetry needed like the bread is every evening,  
Like the air we take thirteen times a minute  
To just exist.

Since we live only fighting,  
Since they'll hardly even let us say  
We are who we are.  
Our songs cannot be pure and spotless.  
We are touching the bottom,  
We are touching the bottom.



I'll have no truck with poetry seen as luxury,  
Cultural luxury for the neutral.  
Who washing hands are blind to all.  
I hate the poetry of those who won't take sides,  
Take sides and get dirty.

I feel the hungers and I feel when people suffer,  
I sing breathing, sing singing,  
Above my own personal troubles,  
I expand and expand.

I want to give you life, provoke new acts.  
And that is why I write with what skill I have.  
I feel an engineer of words, a worker,  
Forging the future with others.

It is not drop by drop thought out poetry,  
It is no lovely product, no perfect fruit.  
It is the deepest need which has no name,  
In heaven it is cries and on the earth acts.

Since we live only fighting,  
Since they'll hardly even let us say  
We are who we are.  
Our songs cannot be pure and spotless.  
We are touching the bottom,  
We are touching the bottom.

## **Dilemma**

Maybe there is no poetry to be written,  
While black young die and white grain rots,  
While profit grows though life cannot.

Maybe there is no poetry to be written,  
Since ruler's page and owner's screen  
Decide whose violence should be seen.

Maybe there is no poetry to be written,  
For dead men crushed or backbones cracked  
By speedup, dole or safety cutback.

Till women's wrists are freed of chains,  
Till children's power relieves their pain,  
Maybe there is no poetry to be written.

# **The Distorted Reflection of Your Strong Arms**

(for Anke)

"Unterwasser die Arme fortbewegen.  
Dreimal links, dreimal rechts."

I didn't understand and only the distorted  
reflection of your strong arms led me.  
The reflection of you playing with your friends,  
Knowing how to touch their soul.

Back in Zoppoterstrasse, we argued about your  
pacifism.  
My certainty unnerved you,  
pushing against the water of the times,  
and I hoped it would not distance us  
and tried to be tactful  
first to the front, then to the back.

Thank you for  
Your face afire which leads me still  
and the distorted reflection of your strong arms.

## Revolution

The reign is acid now.  
Tidal forces contend.  
Capital and confusion in the Blue Corner,  
Labour and clarity in the Red.  
In the middle of the outer arm  
of a small galaxy,  
we look for survival and leisure.

The first great battle we won long ago  
against extinction through hunger and cold.  
The stage is set for the second.

Out of these restless waters can rise  
a burning orange tsunami edged in lilac,  
flocks of turquoise starlings,  
sprinkle of soft new rains.

Power will come sooner than we think.