

SAMPLER

*More Flowers Than You Could Possibly Carry*

*Also by Simon Smith*

North Star

LEXICON

Night Shift

Juicy Fruit

Fifteen Exits

Reverdy Road

Mercury

London Bridge

Gravesend

11781 W. Sunset Boulevard

Half a dozen just like you

Navy

Salon Noir

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# Simon Smith

*More Flowers Than You  
Could Possibly Carry*

*Selected Poems 1989-2012*

Edited by Barry Schwabsky

Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2016 by  
Shearsman Books  
50 Westons Hill Drive  
Emersons Green  
BRISTOL  
BS16 7DF

Shearsman Books Ltd Registered Office  
30–31 St. James Place, Mangotsfield, Bristol BS16 9JB  
*(this address not for correspondence)*

[www.shearsman.com](http://www.shearsman.com)

ISBN 978-1-84861-510-6

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*again, for Flick, always*

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## Acknowledgements

These poems first appeared in: *Creeping Bent* Winter/Spring 1989 (no. 8); *Night Shift* (red letter, 1991; Prest Roots Press, 1994); *Laura's Lifetime* (GRILLE, 1995); *Juicy Fruit* (Gratton Street Irregulars, 1999); *Fifteen Exits* (Waterloo Press, 2001); *Reverdy Road* (Salt, 2003); *Mercury* (Salt, 2006); *Telegraph Cottage* [with Felicity Allen] (Mindmade Books, 2007); *Browning Variations* (Landfill Press, 2009); *London Bridge* (Salt, 2010); *Content* (vErlsImIIIUdE, 2015).

I offer my grateful thanks to the following for the publication of the poems in this book: Guy Bennett, Jennifer Cooke, Kelvin Corcoran, Andrew Duncan, Tony Frazer, Chris and Jen Hamilton-Emery, Simon Jenner, John Kinsella, Peter Larkin, Joe Lucia, Jeremy Noel-Tod, Richard Price, Peter Riley.

Other poems and translations not included in this selection were published in books, pamphlets, magazines, broadsides and online by: Mary Agnes, Tim Atkins, Charles Bainbridge, Anthony Barnett, Robyn Bolam, Martin Booth, Andrea Brady, Huw Briggs, Ian Brinton, David Caddy, Chan Ky-Yut, cris cheek, Eleanor Cleghorn, Ian Davidson, Lyndon Davies, Jean Farrow, Allen Fisher, Harry Gilonis, Jon Glover, Wolfgang Görtschacher, David Herd, Ben Hickman, Jeff Hilson, Alex Houen, Peter Hughes, Vincent Katz, Caleb Klaces, Dorothy Lehane, Chris McCabe, Anthony Mellors, Rod Mengham, Peter Middleton, Drew Milne, Stephen Mooney, Jan Montefiore, Alec Newman, Kevin Nolan, Kat Peddie, Nell Perry, Peter Philpott, Adam Piette, Robert Potts, Nicole Presentey, Peter Quartermain, David Rees, Ian Robinson, Peter Robinson, Will Rowe, Fiona Sampson, Michael Schmidt, Aidan Semmens, J.D. Taylor, James Taylor, Philip Terry, Tony Trehy, Matthew Welton, Rebecca Wolff. Many thanks to all of them for help and support along the way.

The present publication is made possible by the scrupulous attention of editor Barry Schwabsky, and the patient generosity of publisher Tony Frazer, to both, many, many thanks.

## Editor's Note

I've told the story before and I'll repeat it here: I didn't know the British poets of my own generation when I moved from New York to London in the summer of 2001. Shortly afterward, Bill Berkson suggested I get in touch with Simon Smith. Being shy, I didn't act on the suggestion right away, but eventually got around to googling him just out of curiosity. I learned that he had a new book coming out called *Reverdy Road* and was immediately intrigued: Not only do I love Pierre Reverdy's poetry, but having come across the street near where I was living in south-east London, I had written a poem called 'On Reverdy Road.' So I got the book as soon as it came out. It was a revelation: resembling nothing I was familiar with in American poetry despite name-checking Jack Spicer and clear affinities with the New York School's love of speed, wit, and variousness of tone, it had a music I could tune right into, something very much its own though it has also helped me, I think, hear my way into the work of some of Smith's British contemporaries.

Finally I took up Bill's suggestion and contacted Simon; we did a reading together. Over the years our friendship grew, and has continued to deepen even since my move back to New York in 2011. Yet I was as surprised as I was honored that Simon asked me to edit his selected poems. I've carried out the responsibility in the way that suits me best: by letting pleasure take the lead. How could I pass up the excuse to re-read all his books as well as to delve into uncollected or unpublished works that were new to me? From them I have not chosen systematically, but simply cherry-picked the ones that please me most without concerning myself too much how representative or not the resulting selection would be, whether from a technical or a thematic point of view. In this I surprised myself, because I conceive of each of Simon's book as that wonderfully paradoxical theme, a unity of fragments—meaning that I might well have tried to select from each book in such a way as to suggest its shape as a whole. But in practice I found this to be impossible, and have had to content myself with picking out the most striking single jewels in Simon's treasury. In order to understand how his books function, you will simply have to go on to read them whole. One aim of this selection is to persuade as many readers as possible to do so.

Barry Schwabsky

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# Uncollected Poems

1989-1990s

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# VI

the good eye cultivates the delicate light

streaming through the jewel

to emerge in amber

earthworks cut

the golden light

of paradise a solid

figure end &

source

from the chalk the white

horse at Uffington

hovers between thing & function

disintegrating time

a skylark made

invisible

reaching out

the skilled hands tell the facts

meet in blossom & crystal

this city

of summer & snow

the mirror

the stream knotted

break & grow

## *from* Laura's Lifetime

Hello, hello sleepless.  
'You' or 'me' which  
'he' or 'she' without  
you I walk the streets  
and I walk the streets.

The simple flesh I enter  
trees and sky studded  
the mired networks above,  
shoot the long route  
to the stars,

and you embrace more flowers  
than you could possibly carry.

Your breath flutters on,  
not linear more a contour  
in air like a rollercoaster.  
The tears tear airborne  
over the precipice,  
each one seeks out  
the trophy of you

where our voices carry  
and only footsteps remain.  
Easily we destroy things;  
some people you want  
and nobody else will do,  
the aimless wind  
homing on blowy rain.

It rains all the days  
for someone who reads a lot.

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*Once, deep in the forest  
there lived a little bear  
shy and unable to speak.  
Until the tree whispered  
her name she growled  
at shadows caged and restless  
locked up without a key.*

Of course, you can't *write* that.

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# Night Shift

1.

As generations failed to see *it* coming, survey the plot  
or challenge the beast-system, so scions dreamt the gold  
while swearing generosity. They've got your vote:  
ignore need, encourage want. Cheat. Forget names, the honied  
plaudits froth above those Elysian fields, *those*  
*inner cities* a temperate clime, fingers on buzzers & Eden  
undone. The sales rep twitters, shilly-shallys by the damp-course  
his feelings miscellaneous, the pick & mix of grubby reform.  
Amendments, corrected texts, depravity & ignorance almost lyrical  
rehearse monologues to embroider separation with myth,  
the air between us. Myriad appetites drain the dread citadel;  
borrowings, trifles, eroded profit margins the proof,  
sharp-eyed monkeys crank hurdy-gurdys sewing leaves with notes,  
sample pastures, every square foot for profit, tightening the rope.

2.

The many & various stars rain-drenched opals  
grounded pieces from the crystal night.  
Hard coins chafe a mess of tales, chosen right,  
letters boxed: for caring *is* profit, & theories accumulate  
like dust. Tongue tied, it's all over now, inaudible  
on the point of closure the world itself the dark realm.  
We want a normal life; you speak down  
to us the grand design. Others follow

onto grainy streets, just visible faces loom.  
These are humans too, rattling the can. No passer-  
by will help. There's an end to it, offer  
them up for slaughter, caught,  
you see. But the stars expand, heaven netting care  
& hope, the voices to be heard by night.

3.

Our land flowers orange, then scarlet  
the house shattered. You shelter in its form  
raising your head above the gloom.  
'Politicians let my people die,' rot

your heart; then clerks shouting oyez through foil masks  
toss palliatives & mendacities,

stacking doubloons with laughter.

The sale of information sparkles

in the dark; choose Baked Alaska

the stalest loaf. That's us, the dim row you needn't ask.

'We're chuffed with the logo'. Collect your pay,  
munch a neighbour's limb, cashing in your luck.  
You count the bonus, skulls shine through the muck,  
a *belovèd's crown*, business as usual, you might say.

You pass along the night trench, your progress metered  
to enter the crumple zone. *Riot or usite* you fall mute.

4.

Thrall to the brutish & the wind's ceaseless trade  
the sun is grey for me. Copper follows silver  
smothers day for the grubby pence we ventured south  
to haul home. I am sleepwalking ... spare me  
*some change*, mister, my days & nights are lead.  
Someone has taken my place, or might as well have,  
pressing the flesh sublime. Sealed with tape, chained  
to their gratitude, resolved into knots, that lone, sad

flautist. A migrant device shews up in product  
networks, countless stratagems, padlocked breath,  
theft to the bone ... the northern music

of exile. Across this surface a garden of effects  
blooms like mould, across this state security is now  
an industry, pressing the blades softly to our mouths.

5.

Banker's foreclose on ranked participants  
delayed with packets of Kleenex, their gaps retouched.  
These passengers swept from platforms leave no impression:  
the stations cleared, the ease of users paramount.  
Tickets clipped serve the purpose of motif, trapped  
within the given & last payments. They will not return.  
And business will not suffer, but trades on their chorus  
(the language of crowds) collects their *lustre*: its quiet address.

But do right by the good folk. You must. To hold is to care;  
they cannot avoid harm, lapped by the heared winds into controlled  
response. Work-tired, they offer all, a bright regard to share.  
Their breath freezes to sugared night, to no kind word.  
And the brokers, by-products of detachment staring at the wall,  
cold players helping themselves define some inner chill.

6.

The mother (her sentence), grasping the notelet of accident  
& experiment, files into Personnel: their empty  
shoes mere storage. Her life decorates labour  
braided, embroidered as speech glitters across the tent:  
varieties netting choice; her life mere formality  
will run & run. Research & Development gather  
the heat in booklet legislation, data correct  
field-defined. But rosy contusions spread unchecked:  
no word spared expression. The lyric-system takes charge.  
The delta of veins magnify her brilliance as day & night converge  
& what is held in grit glistens, dissecting rain to mend

at the shared expense bright sensings. Each one runs to her end.  
She was found by stories where field-surgeons turn back the sheet,  
identify the victim with nowhere to hide or seek.

7.

'It moved me,' the face buried in ice, a lover's  
complaint. Letters rain onto the street  
picking out the thread, a combination of characters  
& us the crossed-gates. *Do you copy?*  
Flick the job: the portrait lifted from masks  
of flesh pegs back tradesmen's dreams  
their carved lusts honeycomb the cart  
& coin the appeal. A bright new shirt.  
This homogenised carolling just won't do;  
reading the empty journals the wreckage shakes  
rattles their mortgaged souls. Stress levels high.  
Next stop the hospitality suite. Oval faces  
like pennies, dirty tales plugged in the shade.  
The face decayed meat, fuck it, I'm telling you.

8.

The reach of desire beyond the neural,  
the lark's endless song at summer's edge.  
O, I could laugh, warble & win the appeal,  
when after rain we walk across the grass:  
memory for comfort only we cannot return, of course,  
but apply through proper channels, catch the thread  
crystalline at heart. That bird, he's a civil engineer,  
trembles before the blade of light, pressing the mid-

point to knot the heart & leaf: *this* the pilgrim's share,  
who stood great witness, language lodged  
in his throat, heard but seen nowhere

to float above the verdure, an airy fugitive ledged.  
As one speaks too soon we meet & part,  
but there it is, our pilot, 'til we find port.

9.

The carcass takes on personality wrested from the swamp,  
his freedom tied back, hands fixed with lard  
& twine. Sinews we exquisitely map  
the sylvan scene, the crazed Perspex  
of his shattered cockpit. Zephyrs over the ridge  
balance this cube of light & with the key-pad  
purge the system. Greasy stars rehearse the safe percentage  
river's web, a shadow surface occluding the hideous muzak.  
Under the canopy, 'Bang! Bang! Bang!' Driven home with verve  
to reach deep coma: there was no Paradise *only exit*  
*to next concept. Cut at source.* We are the strawmen  
inhabited by meanings, the shades with stitched lips.  
O, to walk across the grass again, the light's sinews record  
the shattered pavilion in kisses & bees laid out in living code.

10.

Oak-framed that oat field: its intricate  
map with infinite depth. We inhabit the scenic pull  
locate the root, encoding by multiple  
efflorescence every unit, any item of fruit.  
Like walking into a clearing, clean & new,  
like aspirations reflected in silicate, written with rain;  
the air hisses a rhapsody of grasses. Shreds laid in my palm  
singing the gap: strands tabulate the grain *in situ*.

The valencies of want & plenty were designed out of synch,  
won't add up the dust from our eyes; they circle  
instead, settle a haze (*rosé*) on silos of grain & missiles:

a science gleaned from rubble, broken apples & flint.  
As order *is* love, radiating seed for a crown of grasses,  
precisions in salt, galleries of light, many voices.

11.

*What-You-See-Is-What-You-Get*

reflecting on the gilded carriage human units  
attached at the form; roads in bland networks fit  
our sovereign's coat. The reactor ghosts the crown like a fist.

The chart starts here & cells divide. An apparition  
peeling the foil, he survives to occupy the shell,  
offices unlit: bid him sup the packet a future perfect  
with sense. Turpentine pours down his chin.

He reads the meter for the frisson of sculpted tint:  
the trickster's clouded glass programmed to connive,  
'We believe the machine will live'. as it does, star-  
labelled, the motto's salt clarity encrusts the beaker's rim.

The king reads off formulae, sampling signs of adversity  
from beauteous forecasts & wraps the tattooed fantasy.

12.

We live with our neighbour's radio locked in crystal.  
Launched down the echo avenue, voyaged forth  
between lips, a sodium flare to guide the cough's thick trawl,  
tourist of his own life & the whole sad charade torched.

At least one side of the conversation was entirely lucid  
blind as paper sucking us down. The lark's scorched tongue  
exposed for flowering. Derangements flood unimpeded.  
Dug at the piano, he made a soft quilt of your cheek,

the tattoo – bluish dream-girl – ghostly beneath flesh.  
Thus he spake forth the goofy fantasia,  
his own tongue called an ambassador to escort the silhouette,  
tuning the fetish, prelude to ambrosia.

We smile, things are well & wish the day over again.  
Consume the sleeping draught, for the dream lays ashen.

13.

Mutton attests the hit, flaming coupon to the  
urban stew, & forgetting our need for drink, or water  
rushing over shingle, the rough speech leads to  
disarray. It won't amount to much, a little blood from the  
ear. *Our hero* notes the glistening firmament (the reason why)  
returns the nightmare to the city. Trade our human  
enclave for vile medallions, charm the drug to guard a last  
dead crater of sky, the broken spell his price.

Mark the eye, its socket lanced, his face  
an anagram for pain. That jellied orb  
runs down his cheek, a screen of blood. He sang  
like a nightingale. Against *that* our communicator howled on &  
on, '*The recknynge! The recknynge!*' smiled a grinning  
wound, jabbed the dagger & ripped right through.

14.

By night we searched the landscape for lost dreams.  
None recall enchanted fields nor soft rains,  
but capital confined to crop lines, the restrictions  
in birdsong. Tonight the hunt for blood descends  
again, assails the tissue webbed with frost.  
Famished hordes hunger for atrocity, marbles viands,  
their *jumbo meat*, spiced kill astride the spangled ditch,  
breath steams singing the pulse as fingers tingle.

Branches pursue the hopeless through thicket & copse,  
victims prayerless as vermin who mount greed on blood:  
meat stapled to the grid. A brassy trumpet calls the halt.  
Beaters thrashing bracken stop. Blue crack at water's brim;  
the hunt chases more than harts – to beat darkness,  
the forest itself, with flash of red tunic & scarlet harness.

15.

Cloth laid on the grass of common ground,  
clean linen. An orange spills its zest,  
our breakfast at first light, as the dispossessed  
we walk among rootless, homeless, drift around.  
*These the Innocents* wear dresses like tombstones,  
lives already posthumous. *Her laundered effects creased,*  
*neat.* Abandoned. *Love* lost in translation *eased*  
*from her child's broken mouth.* *Common ground:* dream on  
loquacious stream relume intricacies of water,  
the plaited chronicles,  
as clouds shunt the twilight into valley shade  
of desolate architecture, tail-lights ...  
our points of reference fade;  
we are entering forever a picture untroubled, endless,  
dreaming paradise we cross the stile, lengthen our stride  
with home in sight & the hard north star our guide.