

THE SIMON POEMS



Allen Bell

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Bayeux



Arts

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BAYEUX ARTS

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Thy Harry's Company

Puppet Poems

The Simon Poems [1976 - 1980]

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SIMON

Looking at your golden body
The dross
Seems vague
The nonstop seconds
So far removed
From any terminus
And now resembling always
I have a cough Daddy
I have a fever
Innocuous
Devoid of import
Part of the toxic charm
Every third word Daddy
Your Daddy's cough and fever
Keep him from hearing the pain
The dissonant changes

SIMON

When Simon cries
Tidal waves crash against the world
Statesmen are engulfed
Banks inundated
Buildings totter and capitulate
The salt in Simon's tears
Plays havoc with automotive bodies
Rust and corrosion pour onto the streets
Even the pavement occasionally bifurcates
Even weapons are appropriated
Spare parts perish
When Simon cries
The tenuous day to which I cling
Loses its elasticity
Those tears threaten my world too

SIMON

Simon

The 'burning to sheathe it'

The generic imbroglio

The carnivorous fears

The compulsive manipulation

Daddy worries

You will be caught in the maelstrom

Swept into the vortex of

SIMON

Simon

I liked Judy Goodchild
She had brown eyes, brown hair
I met her on a blind date
I heard about her in a delicatessen

It's a funny thing about delicatessens
I was hungry
And had gone to buy some food
The wife of the delicatessen owner asked me who I was
And what I did
And I told her
And next thing I knew she was giving me a phone number
Just a minute I said
What does she look like
She's pretty
And a nice Jewish girl
Okay I said
And bought some corned beef
And pastrami
And a rye bread
I didn't know delicatessens were so dangerous
Or there was so much misery
In a corned beef sandwich

SIMON

Simon

I like Stravinsky's music
I love the brutal sounds
And melodic panache
And I like Penderecki's Violin Concerto
And Kosmogonia
And De Natura Sonoris
Conductors are wrong to prettify Stravinsky
They should listen to how he conducts
And not be asses like Haitink

Simon

These composers
And others
Write violent music
And fantasize
But they don't hurt
They give pleasure
Pulcinella hardly shoots us
And the bloodletting
And corporeal maiming
Of l'Histoire du Soldat
Is just pretend
The violence is subsumed
And charming
And nice
And that is the violence
Your Daddy likes

Simon

All this is by way of preamble
Because I worry

Because I am your Daddy
And you are a child
And not all fantasies are innocuous
And not all violence is art
There are so many people
And some are destructive
And hurt grown-ups
And children
A few years
Before you were born
Millions of adults and children
Were slaughtered
In concentration camps
But I can't talk about that
And I can't talk about
The children being murdered
And the countless children
Maltreated and brutalized
What Dickens called
The heap
Spawned for violence he said
And growing up to be violent

Simon
The feeling is undistinctive
I can't particularize
And I don't have the distance

Simon
Shakespeare took Hamlet out of Denmark
Insight through oversight
The character needed some distance

Then it was okay to come back
Denmark was rotten
But now he had distance

Simon
You're good
And gentle
And for your age
Quite intellectual
But you're four years old
And you don't understand
That Daddy worries
And to talk
About things
That are bad
I have to look for an incident
The particular incident
That elicits a subjective reaction
And has the requisite distance
And with which one can cope
Comprenez-vous
In other words
Violence is ubiquitous
And a bubonic plague
And Daddy's poems
Can't cope
With generalities
Except indirectly
I have to latch onto an incident
One such occurred
In Port Moody, British Columbia
A year before you were born

Simon
This was a fantasy that went askew
A twelve year old girl
Abby Drover
Was kidnapped
And sequestered
In a neighbour's bomb shelter
And kept there
For 181 days
The neighbour
Donald Alexander Hay
Was known to the child
As was the woman
With whom he was living
And the woman's children
The families were friends
And went on outings
And visited
And he seemed a nice adult
And the child assumed he was
And when he phoned
And said he would drive her to school
And would be in the garage
She walked the distance
That separated
Their houses
And when she was in the garage
Donald Alexander Hay
Overpowered her
And forced her into a bomb shelter
That she didn't know existed
Nor did anyone else

Simon
There was a cupboard
With a false bottom
And underneath
A ladder
That led to a plank door
One and a half"
In thickness
And lined
On the inside
With two"
Of foam rubber
And locked
On the outside
With a two-by-four
In brackets
The bomb shelter per se
Was seven' by eight"
And six' seven" high
And complete
With bed
Chemical toilet
Shelves
Wash basin
Mirror
Lengths of chain attached to the wall
Metal handcuffs
Belts
Dog collar
Etc
All the accoutrements
Of a bomb shelter

Abby was handcuffed
And chained to the wall
And Donald Alexander Hay
Attempted to copulate
Standing up
She remained
In the bomb shelter
The aforementioned 181 days
And the one person
To whom she had access
Was Donald Alexander Hay
He would come to the bomb shelter
For intercourse etc
And threaten to kill her
And in the lining
Of her boot
Abby concealed a note
And said whoever this may concern
If you find me died
My killer is Don Hay
Of 1601 Gore Street Port Moody
He kidnapped me March 10 1976
In the morning
I also died if so
After my thirteenth birthday

Abby was often unattended
Donald Alexander Hay
Being absent
Sometimes for days
And once for two weeks
She was fed sporadically

Usually chocolate bars

After the disappearance
Donald Alexander Hay
Was questioned
And denied all knowledge
Of same
And participated
In search parties
And was a good neighbour
And citizen

On or about
September 6 1976
Donald Alexander Hay
Said he wanted to die
And would waste himself
In the garage
And the woman
With whom he was living
Called the police
And the garage was locked
And they forced the door
And no one was in the garage
And they left
And the woman's daughter
Said something was under the cupboard
And the woman went back
And opened the cupboard
And lifted the false bottom
And looked down the shaft
And saw feet

And surmised he was dead
And called the police
And the dispatcher said go back
And they went into the garage
And Donald Alexander Hay
Had climbed up the ladder
And was doing up his pants
And the police heard a whimpering
And looked into the hole
And Abby was trying to climb up the ladder
And was completely hysterical
And said she wanted her Mom

And Donald Alexander Hay said
Why don't you guys blow me
And at the police station he said
Let me out the back door
And blow my head
And the prosecutor said
It was a tempting request
And he said
It spoke well
For the discipline
Of our police forces
And their regard
For the rule of law
That the request was not acted on
And the judge asked about Abby's condition
And the prosecutor said
She had a vaginal infection
And her personality had changed
And she'd lost weight

Otherwise she was okay

And Donald Alexander Hay
Was charged
With unlawfully kidnapping Abby Drover
On or about the 10th day of March
A.D. 1976
At the City of Port Moody
Province of British Columbia
With intent
To cause her
To be confined
Against her will
Contrary to the form
Of statute
In such case made and provided
And he said he was guilty

And Donald Alexander Hay
Was charged
With unlawfully having sexual intercourse
With Abby Drover
A female person
Not his wife
And under the age
Of fourteen years
Contrary to the form
Of statute
In such case made and provided
And he said he was guilty
And the judge said
He must not be allowed

To get his hands
On another child

And before the trial
He was questioned
And he said the morning it started
She came
For a ride
To school
It just so happened
She came
At the wrong time
And got tangled up
And ended up
In the room
She didn't go down voluntarily
But I didn't mean to keep her
But once I started
I didn't know how to stop
I told her
She should write a story
And sell it
And she would get money
I only used handcuffs
The first few days
But once she got out of them
She's a clever girl
After a while I didn't use force
We were on good terms
And had a good relationship
It didn't do her any good mind you
But it didn't do her any harm

Sometimes we'd talk for two or three hours
I started seeing her less
When the room got messy
She wouldn't clean up
And the garbage spilled over
And she plugged up the vent
And the smell got terrible
And her clothes smelled
I didn't buy her new ones
But I brought her my younger daughter's bra
Because she had outgrown her own
During the summer
The wife and kids were on holidays
And were around all the time
A policeman interjected
Did you make sexual advances
And have intercourse
And Donald Alexander Hay said
She's all right
She's a healthy girl
And then talked about blackouts
And said he didn't want to remember
Some things he had done
And when asked what things
He said a variety of things

Abby was also questioned
And said after Mom left for work
Don phoned
And said he would give me a ride
To school
And to come to the garage

And I went there
And he grabbed me
And pushed me into a hole
And made me go down a ladder
And when I was in the room
He said we are going to play house
And took off my pants and underpants
And my top
And tried to put in his penis
But couldn't get in
And handcuffed me
And chained me to the wall
And tried again
Then he went out
And came back with my books
And took off my chains and handcuffs
And let me get dressed
And he came every day
And used chains and handcuffs
To keep me tied up
Sometimes he'd talk about letting me go
And sometimes he'd threaten to kill me
And he said if I made any noise he would strangle me
He kept me in the room all the time
And used boards and chains
To close the door
He kept promising
To let me go
Finally I didn't believe him
The night the police came
He came down
And made me take off my clothes

And entered me
And climaxed in me too
And sat there afterwards
Touching my breasts
And smoking with his pants off
Then we heard noises
And he put one hand over my mouth
And one around my neck
And said don't make a sound
And if I did he would kill me
Then he went out
And left the door open
And I climbed out
And the police helped me
He was always saying he would kill me all the time
If I did anything bad
He said he would strangle me

Simon
Mommy and Daddy are here
And we have to love you
And look after you
And keep you away from bomb shelters
And Donald Alexander Hays
And we will be here
Till our trysting days
And we want you to be secure
And not need us
And of course we worry
But though she worries
And is very protective
Your Mommy has a lot of common sense

But your Daddy is an out of control worrier
And now that I've gone on ad nauseum
I expect it's time
As when I visit you
At your house
In Victoria
And it's windy and raining
And we want to go out
And I tell you to put on a sweater
Or a warmer jacket
And you say don't talk Daddy
Stop it Daddy
Or when you scare me
And I say Simon I'm scared
And you say don't cry
It's just pretend Daddy
I expect it's time to say stop it
And it's just pretend
And to play a scary record
Pulcinella
Or Kosmogonia
Or one of the other records
You like to listen to
With your Daddy

SIMON

Simon
Paper money is burgeoning inflation
And metals oscillate wildly
Governments don't know what to do
Or what they are doing
Keynesian balderdash
Cartesian crap

Simon
In addition to the sundry other conundrums
Of this capacious century
One's currency is enigmatic

SIMON

Simon

When my mother died
I was a bit upset
Had it been my father or my brother
I would have cried
But it was mother
Not father or brother
But mother
And I was a bit upset
For though she was coarse and vulgar
And a neurotic on the side
She loved me
And though her love made me incapable of love
She was, as it were, my fellow conversationalist
Someone with whom I could talk
When there was nothing to say
In her harmless way
She spoiled my life
But she told me I did not appreciate
What she had done for me
And was doing for me
And though I assured her
She was never convinced

The cancer was a surprise
She had been “full of life”
And now the doctor said “a few months”
And in those few months her body changed
And she lost not merely her strength but appearance
And she become not merely old but ugly
And no longer functional
Her legs stilts on which she could not walk

And the arms that had inflicted
So many remembered beatings
Were now hopelessly inept
And I had to lift her out of the bathtub
And into the bathtub
And . . .
And she knew I was not at ease

But I wanted to tell her I loved her
And would miss her
And was sorry . . . a waste
And wished we could have a few days of health
And we would speak with calm voices
And I would be eloquent
And she would be kind
And the past . . . a mirage
And the present a masterpiece

A few hours before the hospital phoned
She phoned
And I said no
And slammed the receiver
And she phoned again
And told me to listen
And I listened
And she repeated herself
And I said yes
And she told me to promise
And I promised
And there was silence
And I said goodbye
And she said goodbye A
And we put down our receivers

SIMON

Simon
Your Mommy and Daddy
Have had their ups and downs
The downs on the whole
Predominating the ups
She treats me very badly
And belabours my presence
And makes it hard for me to see you

Simon
She has gone out of her way to be bitter
And has told all and sundry
That I betrayed her
Though it was your Mommy's idea to have you
I did not know
When I saw her burgeoning body
When I waited out that long gestation
That she was bringing forth my son Simon
I thought you were another baby
One who cried
And with whom it would be difficult
To live
And your Mommy was so hard to be with
She demanded a commitment
That was not forthcoming
And so she changed
She no longer liked
Or had time for
The grown-up baby in her life
And when a job in another city came up out of the blue
I encouraged her
And she acquiesced
And blamed your Daddy

Simon
She has tried to hurt me
And to some extent succeeded
Because you are my Achilles heel
Because of you
She can throw me into a mud puddle
And make me apologize
Because a drop of water
Splashed her
And it hurts me that strangers see you more than I do
That she begrudges your Daddy his time with you
That she doesn't listen
When you say you want Daddy to stay with you forever
She begrudges me even one day with you Simon

Simon
Sometimes I wish your Mommy had inserted her diaphragm
Had not decided to run the risk of Daddy's semen
Which could then have been protected
From your conception

Simon
She once tried to like me
The Jewish professor she believed to be the object of her quest
We did it every day
Often several times a day
With polymorphous abandon
Your Mommy has no inhibitions
And she knew how to hold me
She used to write me notes
And bring me food
And call me darling
Once she was in bed

With the flu
And told me not to come too close
And I got into bed
And we talked
And were very close

SIMON

Simon

In the course of the conversation she said she would like a child
I did not reply
But thought for several minutes
Then said I would discuss it with him

She said she already had
And he was of a like mind
I said why not let him be the father
She said they had tried for years
Unsuccessfully
Well why not adopt a child
She said they would prefer my being the father
Did he say that
She said he had

For some reason I was angry
I wanted to hurt her
I would have like to have bloodied her nose
I wanted to clobber her
And punch her stomach
The idea of her writhing on the floor
Appealed to me
At that moment
I might even have kicked her

But . . .
There was so to speak
A contract
No emotional predilection . . .
She could screw with impunity

SIMON

Simon

Once Daddy was arrested
By the RCMP
And photographed
And fingerprinted
And charged with damaging
The University of British Columbia

Simon

When Daddy is in Vancouver
He stays at the Sylvia Hotel
Always the same room
A Friday morning
Sleeping in as usual
A pounding on my door
Who is it I yelled
More pounding
This was not the first time
Daddy had been subjected
To pounded doors
So to speak
So with more equanimity
Than the circumstances warranted
I opened the door
Then I opened it wide
What happened I said
Who did that
I'm leaving him
I've already packed
Don't do anything precipitate I said
I'll go and see him right now
Went to his office at UBC

And made a shambles of same
Including his Eskimo carving through a window
Also verbal pyrotechnics
Shouted something about interfering
You mean you don't like your children
No of course he didn't mean that
Well the prerequisite was impregnation I said
There had to be interference
The children come under the rubric of interference
Said he meant interference between a man and wife
Shut up I said
And threw something on his desk
Against the wall
If you do that again
You can forget about this man and wife crap
She'll leave you I said
It's already touch and go I said

The noise and commotion
Pervaded the adjoining offices
And a small crowd gathered on the lawn outside
And attracted – or someone called –
The security people
Three of whom barged into his office
And to some extent
Roughed me up
Then subsequently the RCMP
And the aforementioned photographs
And fingerprints
But the damage was paid for
And the charges dropped
UBC not wanting the publicity

Simon
Things are better now
I don't get dinner invitations anymore
But occasionally go there
Albeit infrequently
She has told me privately
That things have improved
He's different
I see her once in a blue moon
But what with the children etc
She doesn't have time for me
Nor is she interested

And Simon
I am gradually losing my friend
We don't play chess anymore
And seldom see each other
Our friendship has encountered desuetude
The last time
I had occasion
To be
In Vancouver
He said to me
In a nice way
It would probably be a good idea
To call
Before I dropped in
In case it wasn't convenient

SIMON

Simon

You're spoiled

And intemperate

And a four year old potentate

And tell Mommy and Daddy what to do

And are always peremptory

Sometimes your behaviour drives me up the wall

And it is hard to recall

That you are perfect

And sometimes nice

And put your arms around me

And say you love me

And call me Daddy

SIMON

Simon

It took so long

For the race

To evolve

So many years

And a few seconds

To create a technology

That may destroy it

In minutes

Simon

The nuclear guillotine

Will chop off your head

And there is nothing Daddy can do

Except worry

Even heroic fantasies are impotent

Penderecki wrote Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima

But there may not be anyone

To write

Anything

And there is nothing Daddy can do

Except talk about how the ball bounces

Before it touches the ground

SIMON

Simon

The ologies are very much in vogue

But don't succumb

But run if necessary like hell

And be wary of ologists

Theocratic practitioners

Putrid minds

Committed to jargon

And linguistic destruction

SIMON

Simon

Once at university
Having missed a few classes
And not knowing the seating arrangements
I inadvertently usurped a chair
And she sat next to me
And said you took my place
And of course I apologized

Simon

That woman left Winnipeg
And didn't answer the phone
And doesn't remember
Or like me
And I have forgotten her
But Simon
She is a wound
That festers
That doesn't heal

SIMON

Simon

If you are married
And haven't eaten for days
And your wife is deprived
And your children are crying
And you visit your friends
And they don't have enough
But still want to share
Then say you're not hungry
And wait till they're sleeping
And go to the garbage
And look for potato peels

SIMON

Simon

If you are old enough to read these poems

You will not know the boy I wrote about

But I wanted to write you a poem

And talk about things

And tell you that I was your Daddy

And loved you

SIMON

Simon

I can write sonnets

I can write villanelles

I can write heroic couplets

And I love these forms

And it's a relief to have a ready-made form

And Simon

I let them go

And opted for poetry

The voice . . .

And I hope you find your voice

Simon

That life is 'scary' is secondary

What is paramount is that you find your own voice

That is the gesture

That will sustain you

SIMON

Simon

When Victoria is wind and rain

We like to walk

We like walking in the rain don't we Daddy

And I say my feet are wet and you laugh and say I don't care

And we walk

And when we cross a street

You hold my hand

And sometimes you talk about Castlegar

And I reassure you

And say I don't have to go there

I can stay in Victoria for awhile

But you don't have to go now do you Daddy

And I say no

Not for a few days yet

We have lots of time to have fun

And you hold my hand

And we walk in the rain

And you say we're having fun aren't we Daddy

And I say we always have fun when we're together

And you say I know Daddy

We always have fun Daddy

And we hold hands

And talk

But sometimes it's too windy

And my eyes water

SIMON

Simon
Daddy lives
In Castlegar
Years ago
I realized
My life here
Was not satisfactory
But at least
Before you became extant
I pretended to be free
I could live or die
I wasn't beholden
I was free
Now I have this godawful responsibility
I'd always been able
To jettison entanglements
To extricate myself from
Now I'm enthralled
Simon
I was goaded into marriage
But I let that marriage go
And I shied away from living with anyone
Including your Mommy
And I fought off manipulation
Many women
With whom I would be happier
Than I am being alone
Have moved outside the parameters
Of my life
And Simon
The truth is
I don't like being by myself

In Castlegar
There isn't anyone
With whom I can talk
Your Daddy is an anomaly
And interloper
In the context
Of Castlegar
And I can't find a sensibility
That appeals to me
And it is a couple-oriented society
And for a single person
The social focal point
Is the High Arrow Arms beer parlour
All in all
The place
To put it euphemistically
Is a bummer
I've ended up in a hellhole
But Simon
As the years evolve
A residual agoraphobia
Makes me want to stay in my house
And read
And listen to music
And sleep
And not encounter that species
Of which I am one example
I've tried to leave Castlegar
I've taken unassisted leaves
They've cost me a lot of money
Not to mention all that lost salary
But eventually there is tension

And to some extent fear
And I look forward
To Castlegar
My sanctuary
And Simon
It's hard when one is in transit
And if something does stick
It quickly dispulverates
Once in Israel
A beautiful woman
A teacher
Became fond of me
Her husband was gutted in one of the wars
There's a shortage of men in Israel
A lot of the young ones are in cemeteries
And I think she found me a change
From the macho Israelies
And it was a relief
To meet a woman
Whose sensibility I liked
But as things became serious
I began to pull back
The day before Pesach
Her father phoned me from Tel Aviv
I had moved to Jerusalem
And asked me to come to the Seder
And I said I'd get back to him
And hung up
And packed
And a sherut to the airport
And flew out of the country

And continued flying
Till I was ensconced
In Castlegar
And Simon
This is where I work
And I need my job
On one level it's demeaning
A mediocre community college
Dottards and clods for students
Illiterate shit for essays
And I teach a semester
Of composition
They can't comprehend
A poem
And I have to teach composition
But Simon
The job compels a routine
Without which I'm disfunctional
Some people need leisure
To write
But I need the pressure
Of a job
Some semblance of routine
Otherwise I flounder
And the job is easy
I like talking about books
And it's nice to have a captive audience
And the pay is okay
When I think of what some people do for their pittance
Which is less than mine
It amazes me
That this college

Pays me to talk
A dollar would be exorbitant
So I can put up with
The inanity of composition
The acts of administrative absurdity
My horrific colleagues
These 'students'
Because I can talk about
Chaucer and Swift
And other people I like
And have something
To look forward to
And I have my paycheck
To look forward to
Daddy's salary is thirty-seven thousand dollars
And it goes up every year
Perhaps it's not that great
But at the present time
It's enough to live on
And I have my investments
I've made piles of money
And am probably more affluent
Than one Billy Cain
The resident Croesus
Of Castlegar
And every few years
My net worth doubles or trebles
Though I keep few assets in dollars
Having a jaundiced opinion of paper money
So I live
In Castlegar
Letting time dwindle

And you
Materialize
As Claggart says in Benjamin Britten's opera
Billy Budd
Would that I ne'er encountered you
Would that I lived in my own world always
There I found peace of a sort
There I established an order
But alas alas
The light shines in the darkness
And the darkness comprehends
And suffers
Simon
You are playing havoc
With my life
Can your four year old brain
Assimilate that
Everytime I visit you
At your house
In Victoria
It takes me a month
To partially recuperate
It entails readjustment re Castlegar
Last time I visited you
You wanted to see the ocean
Which you stared at for twenty minutes
And then said
Daddy the water has wrinkles on it
Simon
I don't want to hear things like that
Say something
That might make me dislike you

Keep me from dwelling on you
I have to think about the stock market
I'm in the middle of a real estate deal
Don't say things that endear me to you
Try to make things easier for your Daddy
And don't jump on me
Or say you want to play a scary record
Or go to a scary movie
Or to Sealand
Or the museum
Or the bus depot
And don't cry so much
When Daddy has to go
To Castlegar
Simon
Daddy is mad
You shoved your way into my life
I was free
Now I'm enthralled
Alas Alas

SIMON

Today I went to the College
Where I work in Castlegar
And talked to my students
About books
And I told them about you
And about how much I miss you
And love you

Simon
Sometimes Mommys and Daddys
Don't live in the same house
Or the same city
But you know how much Mommy loves you
And you know Daddy loves you
And we will always love you
And take care of you
Because we are your Mommy and Daddy
And you are our wonderful Simon

And if you want to talk
Then call me
On the phone
And when I fly over the mountains
And come to see you
We can go downtown on the bus
And go to the bus depot
And get a drink
You can have orange juice
And I will have soup
But Simon
If we go to the museum
I don't want to see the scary lady

But I don't think she is there anymore
Because she was in the movie
And they are showing a different movie
I miss you

Love Daddy