



Ahadada Books

Chapbook

The Milton Poems

Simon Perchik

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Simon Perchik, an attorney, was born 1923 in Paterson, NJ, was educated at New York University (BA English, LLB Law). His poems have appeared in various literary journals including *Partisan Review*, *Poetry*, *The Nation*, *The New Yorker*, among others



The Milton Poems

A grateful acknowledgement is extended to the editors of the following literary journals in which these poems appeared: *A C M*, *American Letters & Commentary*, *Aurorean*, *Berkeley Poetry Review*, *Black Fly Review*, *Black Moon*, *Centennial Review*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Curbstone Review*, *Defined Providence*, *Descant*, *Dog River Review*, *GW Review*, *Madison Review*, *Manzanita*, *Marlboro Review*, *Miller's Pond*, *Osiris*, *Pavement Saw*, *Phantamagoria*, *Poet Lore*, *Poetry Depth Quarterly*, *Poetry New York*, *Poetry Now*, *Re:al*, *Riverrun*, *Shearsman*, *South Dakota Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Thorny Locust*, *Verse*, *Weber Studies*, *Whisky Island*, *Widener Review*, *Zillah*.

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To Casey, Vaughn, Marieke and Katherine



*

They use the dead for bricks, three, four
piled till the wrecks, half fender, half
engine block, half cloudburst will fit

another car, take hold and this transmission
has a name with numbers, grease-caked
to steady the Earth as if next Spring

the leaves won't fall the way these cars
are stacked—they leave the dead in the open
so rain can enter through a gate, is welcome

can tell you are at home with rust
crusting over each headstone stripped
as if this one, that, was remembered

would someday ride past you
carry away the sound that works
moves, comes true and you take a seat.

*

As if each puddle had a shoreline
needed waves, ships, pilings
—you plunk down continents

the way the Earth still tries
for a toe-hold, your laces left untied
already whirlwinds, whitecaps

mornings that are not the sun
though this mud is heated
by a rain almost falling on your footsteps

and islands—with each splash
you will grow taller from those songs
a sailor sings when your mouth

is cooled with water—you will drink
slowly, step by step, still, a throat
can forget the words and the sea

comes out as dust—ankle deep these sails
should help, spin as if the Earth
once had a twin and all that's left

is rain and bottom sand and
...My wild Irish rose
...The sweetest flower that-- it's enough!

You will remember halfway-through-August
holding fast to some song
lost at sea and you stomp

to loosen its deadly grip



waving your hands faster and faster
before you forget again.

*

You teach these fish alarm
shake and from a small box
rattled the way babies already bathed
are powdered, fed –it's a milky world

with gills sobbing against a wall
and the glass swaying in barely sunset
–goldfish are not used to clocks

and though you teach them time
it's always with seconds to spare
to jump, the flakes explode
even before they strike the ground

as rain covered with flames
till all that's left from the sky
is its water and smoke, its flakes
floating on the surface

–you point out how each speck
is picked off as if it were an apple
and between your teeth the headwind
falling to the bottom to be rocked asleep

–you use a manual, at 12 o'clock
midnight and noon the way twins, one
in darkness, one reading directions
and though you hold the tank close

these fish learn when it's time
for the lid to open –from above
a weight half crumpled, half
breathing in and breathing in.

*

You are weeding glass, eyes closed
spray the way each night is flooded
and from the darkness another sun
is harvested with just one finger
and mist –you squeeze till the window
ices over your fist and the rag

is choking –who complains except this bug
sniffing for dust from some lake on Mars
or the moon or the sill half stranglehold
half frozen, half lost

–it's here in the directions
and though outside every farmer
inside you comfort the pest
cover it with towels, curtains



–it likes looking out the window
at the ghostly cloud you can buy
from any hardware store
–it's amazed how openly
you gas what gets in the way

and follows the stench from a rag
piled one behind the other
as if leaving for good and you
are too weak to open your eyes
are sifting the dust for someone you know.

*

And though the sun is years away
it's hard to say its sky
hasn't the same passion

–where else did all those storms
come from? telling this tree
what's what –its branch still wet

already has the mother's leaves
and this ribbon you brought
for the crucial hours

–you tie two knots as if the tree
was giving birth to twins
and slowly one shadow that won't cry

will just lie close
already being bitten
by flies nobody needs

–it was a difficult labor
the belly swollen, torn
but who can say who was the first

to reach the sun
and carry back those flames
that bleed forever

–even at night these dead twigs
have your emptiness, your fingers
freezing with cradlesong.

*

You're used to turbulence
half ice, half more gunpowder
and the windshield reeking
from medicine bottles

–it's contagious! even without gloves
you need more height –these airpockets
set out the way mountain climbers



bring back their dead fingers

and the road has given up
trying to heal, infected with the stench
that made it safely through the frostline
and each year this time.

You're not there now
though the rain has stopped
and you rewind the mileage
trying to remember their names

—day after day each Spring these trucks
almost in formation, engines on
drop the asphalt and lime
on a hole lying motionless

—this dark foam over the runway
has made the planes invisible
the tires torn open, almost empty
the wings ripped down off a map

that shows the sky in daylight
and under these fleece-lined sleeves
pulling back on the wheel
—everything else is moving forward.

*

As if this roughed-up cup
does all the work while your fingers
wait on the road past the cemetery
—the handle too, gouged out
by a child's clasp in the dark
and against your lips a trumpet
lifted the way each wellstone
is stacked into a circle
so nothing is forgotten and you drink
only from this faucet named Cold
from what's left though the cup
clings to a marrow that won't rinse out
or know you're calling
when you throw back your throat
to howl without moving your jaw.

It's 2 o'clock in the morning!
Who would come? Who else but you
stalks beside a sink as if the sky
was just starting, still in its cradle
—before all the animals
the hunters :the stars still ice
and you give the sink a sip too
gently, the casket left open
to weaken and rust —with just a cup
you cover your lips
till everything is frozen.



*

With the power that draws lips together
this orchard grows row by row
the way rivers around the world
bend from grief and emptiness

—you come here holding a rotted-out can
and always the dark suit
as if evenings could heal
and one by one each stone

rise up as sunlight to begin again
only this time without the winding streams
that grind the dark-blue nights
to cinders—for each stone

you ruffle its petals
till the breeze covers these graves
with feathers and leaves and upward
—sprinkled with ashes and mountainside

and from each branch
you wave your arms on their way
off the ground, on course
and the mornings just as young.

*

This plant can't wait for Halloween
practices its death by the hour
—knocking against your door
it teaches its shadow to grow
and that deep breath
enough to block the light.

Its leaves want water
the way the sun sweeps the Earth aside
for its darkness :the mask it needs
to die after a lingering life
with no shadow, nothing dark enough
to call its own—all evening the branches

banging behind this door
and the drowned man who rises from your bed
pours out cup by cup then moves back in
waits for a morning that will look like
his outstretched hands only younger
and the buried space under the door

—it's a scary scratching, squeaks
right through the heart as when falling stars
cry out the light that is not morning
and leaf by leaf, surrounded by a fence.

*



Who can breathe such a word!
Its letters are the same ones
that have always dried to stone

—it's not easy to drown, the throat
coats with soot :a gutted raft
that is not a cliff, drifts

as if its name was broken off
—just Goodbye, the word
doesn't have you to hold close

and hurry off with, trembles alone
the way even a lifeless stone
will reach into the torn sea floor

send up its ripples
wider and wider for a place
to rest and nothing will burn.

*

This twig needs leaves, its bark
half snow, half mountainside
but what brought you?

Don't be fooled by its icy glaze
crouched over your gravestone
as if the prowling sun
would devour it on the way
to your lips that are not mornings

—by now you should be used to twigs
trying to warm you, make a nest
and the Earth little by little so tiny
a sky has begun to circle my fingertip

—a simple touch from overhead
and even a stone comes to life
cries out from hunger
as if my mouth is filled
with kisses, with roots and birdsong.

*

Even this envelope carries in its breath
the breeze from distant wings, planes
hidden the way birds change color
and with each sunset gather in

though the runway is overgrown, is feeble
has become your fingers :flaps raised
as if the sky inside
needs more altitude and slowly

lifting you over an old airfield
that has fallen across the Earth



as a shadow torn apart, half paper, half
roadway and the truck from the Post Office

makes the run to some city
and back, midair, tighter and tighter
till every letter breaks into pieces
into chaff, into rain and headwind.

*

As if with a beginner's scissors
you peel the sun and on your arms
each strip hung out to dry—you too

need steps, reaching up to plant
the way all grapevines clasp
something still damp, careful

how to fold and your child's sleeves
almost singing, almost
one holds the other, up, up and you

are picking a small blouse
already pink, opening
for your warm mouth and wings.

*

For your birth date a raft
kept low, inscribed—you need
a cake that juts
just above the waterline :every cornerstone

stays wet so the days
will cling, the sky each year
warmer, weaker, on its way and home

—it takes balloons, icing
and always in orbit, currents
half spray, half drift, half
sodapop breaking apart
from inside, windows tugged
by a paper straw, songs whose center
is the exact place
only the sound a shore makes

—it takes your name
stuffed into stone the way every bottle
will hug some note
still calling out, lost—it takes
that deep breath :a sea
blown off course and fleets
sent across with the smoke
with these candles even now
bending over and the darkness.



*

What you hear could be a mountain
--this is more than just a toy, it's bent
the way every arch sucks up the ground
makes a fountain from trees and galaxies
--take it! use both hands

in case there's a wing
or the light that never closes
leaves a space where the darkness between
pulls your arms overhead
--what you hear

could be grass, it's hard to guess
but the silence must come
from what once was nothing but sunlight
was only a feathery whisper
taking so long, and this flower
even you have forgotten.

*

I can't find the ground --you almost wave
as if some stone could work loose
what light was left from the dirt
and you are still asleep

--you don't sleep anymore, leaves
get in the way and evenings
fall off --your eyes are your lips
fixed forever on that kiss thrown open
and everyone on Earth airborne
having the same dream the same night
so childlike and at last

you sleep, mouth to rotting mouth
with the stench from my shadow
and the sky too is sent ahead
spreading, holding fast
and swallowing my arms.

*

From some catalog
and I'm still lifting the Earth
for valleys and more shadow

--I have three shadows now, one
kept dark, covered with moonlight
and between my shoulders

broken mountainside :the huge UPS truck
creaking as if the shovel
and leverage --a cardboard lid

and everything I touch is brown
taking hold the way all boxes



open the ground then turn away

and though there's no dirt inside
my hand already aches
—I don't know where to sign my name.

*

It takes more flickering, wires
tied the way a harp is held
and my wrist further till it turns
between two suns at once

—they don't last long, one
already night, tired
though my fingers still give it milk
and lullabies —one

throwing away its light
as if my arm would rest for awhile
and on this table with dishes
set for flowers, skies side to side

—I can't hold on, my hands
half lightning, half this bulb
already twinkle, twinkle, little
singing and the dark.

*

They work these clams the way a hypnotist
will snap two fingers, take a bow
though you won't remember lifting moons
waving them, letting them dry —tides

know how to lull a moon till its light
lets go, cools —you learn to forget
in front an audience half sand
half rake, half your arms tied together

—twice each day every day this water
sifts the shallows for a place to dry
and you throw back your blue eyes
as if all moons begin as a flower

kept underwater to press against your body
—a fluttering that passes through the Earth
through your heart and loneliness

and slowly, slowly, even asleep
you forget in front your hands
suddenly smooth, shining on the water.

*

You limp the way a caterpillar
is already forgetting how to crawl



scrapes its wings for the controls
growing wider in sunlight

to get a better grip
and over you the sky again, so close
though one leg weighs too much

—you almost make liftoff, the cane
aluminum, almost rain and marble
and the fuselage dragging on the ice
as if it would remember why stillness

heals and your plaster cast
dreading the thaw, the slow turn
pressed lifeless and against your thighs
the softening wingtips, the rain and bone.

*

Again both hands! this pen
half foam, half frost
half held for its heft
its breaking apart :the pair

useless, my left arm
the way every heart empties
from just one side though here

is where as if by changing hands
you return to read the light
and under this pen
its waterfall —always two hands

scrapping more paper
for its grass
twigs and dry stones.

*

As if this rock still had musk
could even now bring down
some boundary line —with both shoulders

Casey rubs against the moat
the great hall —once inside
yells for blankets, more string, the kid

rigs the hillside closer, a sky
side by side with kitchen chairs
grazing on the huge tapestries

still scented with the way snow
will cling to this castle door
he lets me open, let in his steaming horses

bridles, robes open at the magnificent throat
spreading my arms —let in



the stones for drinking water.

*

You walk the way these leaves
learn from each other, are lowered
and slow behind their root
that still needs the darkness
is anchored into those sunsets
long ago extinct and what one knee
can get away with
by judging the other –your stride

is inherited though this tree and moonlight
that now longs for what the sun
left over –one leg spreading out
as if it could pick this apple
just by caressing it
and one knee stuck in the ice

–you limp the way each star senses
how the others survive the cold
–you tamper with darkness! step by step
more dirt pulled loose, kissed, covered
behind your brightening lips and heels.

*

Inside this sling the kitchen table
half hooves, half wings and mountainside
though the doctor says it's how stone
helps my wristbones rest and flowers
slipping off the rocky edges

–it's not the time! you don't yodel
not in the same room, not with the window
open as if words mean nothing now

and still some mountain wail
grabbing those god-awful branches

the way this tablecloth is carried up
and around just one arm the neighbors
even here think you're crazy, your throat
joyous for no reason at all.

*

At night and this beach bathed
as if it had two mothers, half sand
half stench and loving you

till your still soft heart
and the sun survives
by hiding, seeps from the surface

and the devouring light –in the dark



you will learn to splash
sooner than the others

get the jump, each shoulder
rinsed, taught to cool
and this great ocean from inside.

*

Till the darkness lets go a path and you
lift both arms, one lower so the spin
begins clockwise, shapes those waves

where one hand can't keep up
is pulled by the other –you dance
the way the earth reaches up for air

takes hold one arm half foam
half gills, half faster and faster
as if you too would drown

let go the clear headwind
squeezed from this dirt and reeling
–you lift till some well

reaches for one knee wobbling nearer
to the other and the dead
lean from this dirt stirred to exhaustion.

*

Yet the moon barely mutters
pinpoints its lips the way seawater
pours into your lap, giving birth
to drifts and heaviness –your arms

weigh more, the marrow
flowing into some dried ditch
you nurse with snow, let it settle
in your arms, filling them with tides

that match the moon's still warm lips
its voice and lullabies –you sing
making snowballs, naming them so they float
between the mornings and faster.

*

Your stillness must come from this hammer
from the umpteen zillion years and every star
waiting to strike what it hears

–do I have to hold you too, by the hand
though this roof means nothing now
half letting go, half as if the ridge

is falling off balance –do you think you learned



by yourself, from nowhere, that only you
know how, surviving among the footsteps
the silence you need more than ever now

—that only you can hear your heart
this hammer taking shape
slowly step by step on your own.

*

Your left hand first and this cellar pipe
thaws the way all roots
pressure the ice, begin adding on

—you will decorate the attic
and every Spring more paint, the plumber
shaking his head, the pipe

should be drained. It makes no sense
while you tack on the solder
drop by overflowing drop

—you will scrub the stairs
as if a fountain means something to you
and your bedroom even in winter its window

broken open for someone coming with flowers
—you make sure, offer him the old wrench
rusted shut, the family heirloom

you know he won't use, will let you hold it
folded in waxpaper and in the other hand
you carry the sun closer, the headwaters

from its mountainsides —both hands
lifting this abandoned pipe
to your lips, to the warming rags

and dust —once each year and the mist
invisible —you tell him you didn't know, you
just forgot, you weren't there.

*

And the usual dented cup held back
—you don't drink till the steam
stinks from coal, from the spokes
spreading for water made invisible
by slow climbing turns —you stir

as if this cup would open the Earth
filling it with skies you don't recognize
—you wait for a cloud, for ashes
half sweet, half the low calm whistle
burning this stove to the ground

—you can't be trusted with winter



letting it cool, pouring one hand
over the other the way every fire
needs more air—you will bite this cup

—another notch, keeping count
till the spill smells from the soft dirt
melting in your hands, in the walls and floor.

*

And the wave waiting in this sand
the way each child hour after hour
digs where the sea once was mountainside
burning just below the surface

—at the right moment another tide
settles in, covers this beach
with a small gesture that's familiar
worn smooth by calling forever

—twice each day you rake for a stone
still filled with water, with currents
grinding its shell into a small pond
—to get a laugh you brush

one stone into each eye, say to the kid
you see the Earth before the first rain
when rock was nothing then but rock
devouring rock, you say the peaks

for a long time now
don't cool in your mouth as morning, the kid
thinks you're nuts, covers the hole
for the first time and starts again
without the word for darkness.

*

Leftovers from the sun that once
had seas, filled as if your eyes
and even before you were born
more tears already adrift in coastlines

and salt—what did you see on the sun
that now your skin is collapsing above one eye
pulling the darkness closer, sifts
a great river still cooling the sky

—you depend on this sweat
the way all mourners squint
looking inside the ground
for a sister-sun, a twin

making the fly-by every Spring
as a fountain, a pond
and this dilapidated shovel still wet
rusting in your eyes.



*

You cough on a pillow now, use the height
and snowcovered mountainside spreading out
falling off the Earth

—you breathe as if your headstone
had feathers, wings and on the downstroke
would lift off without you the way all stone
is covered with smaller stones
with whispers and your lips pressed close

—you hear the ground drinking water
to keep your throat open, the dirt
breaking into bits, into snow
and stones every child learns to throw.



The Passion of Phineas Gage & Selected Poems (Jesse Glass)

0-9732233-8-3

The Passion of Phineas Gage & Selected Poems presents the best of Glass' experimental writing in a single volume. Glass' ground-breaking work has been hailed by poets as diverse as Jerome Rothenberg, William Bronk and Jim Daniels for its insight into human nature and its exploration of forms. Glass uses the tools of postmodernism: collaging, fragmentation, and Oulipo-like processes along with a keen understanding of poetic forms and traditions that stretches back to Beowulf and beyond. Moreover, Glass finds his subject matter in larger than life figures like Phineas Gage—the man whose life was changed in an instant when an iron bar was sent rocketing through his brain in a freak accident—as well as in ants processing up a wall in time to harpsichord music in order to steal salt crystals from the inner lip of a cowrie shell. The range and ambition of his work sets it apart. The product of over 30 years of engagement with the avant-garde, *Passion of Phineas Gage & Selected Poems* is the work of a mature poet who continues to reinvent himself with every text he produces.

Secret, but Kept it Room (Mike Gubser)

0-9732233-7-5

Secret, but Kept it Room explores the development and stasis over time of self as image—at once real and artificial, subjective and perspectival, engaged in the physical world and torn from it, a self often disappearing into non-self. Mike Gubser treats the art of poetry as, in some sense, the art of experiment and problem-solving by placing the notion of self in various contexts—romance, depression, friendship, travel, memory, isolation—and poetic forms—visual, musical, lyrical modernist, numeric—to see how it reacts.

At That (Skip Fox)

0-9732233-6-7

Skip Fox, with the concern of an entomologist, presents passages sprawling and pinned in a shadow box of observations and odd lots. Framed under double glass, the mounting board of *At That* writhes with a cast of freaks: Ezekiel in the streets, a kitty bomb squad, sadists on steroids, the shadow of Cadmus, kingfishers, omen clad apertures of evening with cicada wings, heart attacks of clouds rolling in off the Gulf, a city mouse, spastic proctologists, and so forth, all projecting their "goods" in spate: smatterings, obsolete creeds, mordacious stumps, "furious opinions, exaggerations, fabrications," neo-prophetic stylings, verbal molestations, elegiac mumblings, the silence above a shallow grave, etc.

Ahadada Reader (Alan Halsey, John Byrum, Geraldine Monk)

0-9732233-3-2

Combines the lively, challenging work of three experimental poets, Alan Halsey, John Byrum, and Geraldine Monk. Halsey's group of poems resurrects past versions of English, turning with peculiar spellings and striking frictions of their grammar. Byrum's work, entitled "Approximations," is a shifting visual text work mainly utilizing the text block, pointing to the form of a word as art itself. The final selection of Monk's work rounds out the book with her varying forms and sharply constructed lines.

Ahadada Books is a small press first begun in 1999, publishing titles both online and in print. The aim of the press is to present new writers and literature that, to paraphrase Francis Picabia, speak with you, envelope everything, and belong to every religion. We present broadsides, limited-run chapbooks, and perfect bound books of diverse literary forms.

Online publishing is an integral component of the Ahadada Books project: to get important voices heard. The World Wide Web facilitates this endeavour, allowing a potential audience of millions to access our site and read authors that they might never find in their local bookstores.

[HTTP://WWW.AHADADABOOKS.COM/](http://www.ahadadabooks.com/)

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