



Ahadada Books

# Chapbook

## The Milton Poems

*Simon Perchik*

### **Simon Perchik**

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*.

I further acknowledge my debt to James L. Weil, Edward Butscher and Anselm Parlatore for their poetry and friendship; to John Milton for his photography, to Deborah Light for the generous access to her voluminous collection of myths; to the owners, employees and customers of both *Fierro's Pizzeria* and *The Golden Pear* where these poems were written.

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

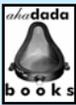
the way this tablecloth is carried up  
and around just one arm the neighbors  
even here think you're crazy, your throat  
joyous for no reason at all.

\*

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.

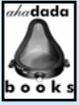


\*

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/)

**Copyright**

The content of all pages in this document (except where otherwise expressly stated) is copyright © 2006 by Dan Sargent. Reproduction of part or all of the contents in any form is prohibited other than in accordance with the following permission.

You may print or download to a local or network hard disk extracts from or whole pages for your personal use only if you include an appropriate copyright notice in or on all such printouts or downloads stating that the copyright in the information printed or downloaded belongs to Ahadada Books. It is your legal responsibility to ensure that such copyright notices comply with the legal requirements of all nations.

This licence to print or copy does not permit incorporation of the material or any part of it in any other work or publication, whether in hard copy or electronic or any other form. In particular, but without prejudice to the foregoing generality, no part of this publication may be distributed or copied for any commercial purpose whatsoever.

**OFFICES**

**Toronto**

Daniel Sendeci  
3158 Bentworth Drive  
Burlington, Ontario  
Canada  
L7M 1M2

**Tokyo**

Jesse Glass  
Meikai University  
8 Akemi  
Urayasu  
Chiba 279-8550  
Japan