

POETRY MICROREVIEWS

Hands Collected: The Books of Simon Perchik (Poems 1949–1999)

Simon Perchik

Edited by David Baratier

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Perchik is a poet who can hand us a few loaves and fishes, and out of that offering an abundant feast is laid across our table: “The table too has come to stay / though each morning its crust / is ground for flour, sifted, stones / unfolding into arms, legs, breasts.” The son of a silk weaver, Perchik was born in Paterson, New Jersey in 1923, and like his memory of the twin sister he lost in childhood, the poems shadow Goethe’s observation that the content of poetry is “the content of one’s own life”: “Every flash is that silk / every pain a spindle broken :a rope / bleeding with banners, tags, bulbs / shining across the street :a roadblock / cheering the return that goes no further.” Perchik has been referred to by one reviewer as “the most widely published unknown poet in America,” and *Hands Collected* gathers work from no fewer than sixteen previous books along with fifty-nine new pieces, including “All the huskies are eaten”: “. . . my knuckles / reek from gangrene, the sled :beds / have their limits and the nurse / leans as if I could read the chart / would turn back and the scented ink / only flames make legible.” Perchik’s signature use of the displaced colon alerts the reader that a metaphor is taking place, and there’s music here—but no soothing cadence. Instead, words clash and clatter more in the manner of plates breaking, and commonplace images such as stones, cups, and apples leap into the extraordinary: “he must dread the splash / is trained to wade slowly and where / the waves are buried, where these stones / harden, climb to that same altitude / they once flew—a sky / still slippery, filled all at once / with 12 dark-green stones.” For the poet, matter is ever-changing—skies become mountainsides, ice and valleys become drops, then mourners—as is life itself, and we are asked to remember that we “come here to leave / and this rain before it dies / at its loudest, calls you into the sea.”

—Susan Tepper