

VENICE WEST

Christine Timm

*VOICES OF THE LADY: COLLECTED
POEMS*

Stuart Z. Perkoff

Edited by Gerald T. Perkoff

National Poetry Foundation

27 Mill Road, Fareham

Hampshire PO 16 OTH, England

473 pages; paper, \$19.95

At the turn of the twentieth century, real estate developer Abbot Kinney had a vision of a mock Venice that would be situated on the outskirts of LA. Kinney's maritime fantasy resulted in a Disneyfied version of Italy's romantic port, complete with a labyrinthine network of canals and a mock St. Mark's Plaza. Soon after construction, fiscal issues eclipsed Kinney's vain attempt at architectural aesthetic, and Venice's integrity was further compromised when oil was discovered and an industry quickly erected. While tourists were drawn to Venice for its seaside attractions and gambling in the guise of bingo halls lining the boardwalk, the flash and bustle of tourist activity provided a barely plausible veneer for the erosive contagion of oil derricks or the dismal existence of the struggling native inhabitants.

Perhaps because of its failure to realize Kinney's grandiose dreams of an elitist haven, Venice eventually attracted a significant artist community. Aspiring artists and beach bums alike inhabited the flimsy shacks, garages, and cottages of Venice's back roads. Here, where rent was cheap and worn beach attire the town uniform, one could raise a family on a bit of ingenuity and sporadic wisps of income. In the late 1940s, with its repudiation of capitalist materialism and dedication to a

lived aesthetics, the Venice artist community already had much in common ideologically with the Beat scene developing in Greenwich Village and just north in San Francisco. Seduced by the evolving Beat culture, local artists and poets aligned themselves with the maverick movement and comprised what would later become known as the Venice West Beats.

This Venice West version of the Beats first gained public notoriety in Lawrence Lipton's novel, *The Holy Barbarians*. Published in 1959, Lipton's *roman à clef* purports to illustrate the lifestyle and persona of Venice's prominent Beats. Aside from Lipton himself, the most imposing figure emerging from the text is Stuart Perkoff. Perkoff appears in *Holy Barbarians* under several guises: as Perkoff the quoted poet and as the character, Angel Dan Davies. As Angel Dan Davies, Lipton portrays Perkoff as a slightly rumpled artist-poet eking out an existence on love, art, and a series of pick-up jobs. Filtered through Lipton's vision of Perkoff and the Venice West community at large, the bearded, perennially destitute, but artistically brilliant Davies surfaces as the west coast Beat icon, manifesting all the physical markers and aesthetic sensibilities of the Venice Beat groove.

But Perkoff didn't discover these sensibilities in the streets of Venice or even in the poetry of the New York or San Francisco Beats. At an early age, Perkoff assumed the posture of renegade artist, chafing against the ideological props of social convention. The second son of Nat and Anne Perkoff was born in 1930 in St. Louis, Missouri. While still in high school, he joined the Communist Party and began to write poetry expressing his dissatisfaction with the establishment of the times. Just before his eighteenth birthday, armed with his journal and thespian aspirations, Perkoff took off for New York City. Here he

immersed himself in the downtown underground along with its music, poetry and drugs. A few months later, Perkoff was arrested for resisting the draft, and Nat Perkoff was summoned east to retrieve his son. Stuart then returned with his father to Santa Barbara, where the family had relocated. Here he met the statuesque Suzan Blanchard. They married in 1949 and a few months later moved to New York, where they gave birth to their son, Sasha. Unable to earn enough to support the family, Perkoff and company moved back west to San Francisco and eventually to the more affordable LA suburb, Venice.

Clearly, by the time he arrived in Venice, Perkoff had earned his anti-establishment stripes in both word and deed, yet in artistic terms he had only produced random bits of poetry. Venice, however, proved to be the stabilizing environment that enabled him to cultivate his art. Since one could get by on very little revenue, Perkoff was able to live out his vision of the anti-materialist Bohemian artist. Enlivened by economic freedom and the 1940s beatnik zeitgeist, Perkoff launched in earnest his Beat poet career. Perkoff easily merged with the Venice Bohemian milieu and endures today as the outstanding figure of the Venice West Beat movement.

Voices of the Lady: Collected Poems, edited by elder brother Gerald Perkoff, is the collected works of Stuart Perkoff. In the introduction, Gerald Perkoff delineates his methodology in collating and editing the 400+ pages of poems. Part and parcel of the anti-materialist sentiment was a tendency for the artist to disregard the fiscal and, by implication, social import of his work. As a result, Gerald Perkoff notes that the arduous process of collecting writings from journals, scraps of paper, transient broadsides, and even walls culminated in the realization that much of Perkoff's work may never be found or recognized. To chronologically place poems, the editor often had to resort to matching typescripts or observing period-specific content. Likewise, numerous pieces were not distinguished by caption or title; Gerald Perkoff has

preserved the author's intention in this regard, and so many of the poems in this volume appear simply as "Untitled." The collection begins with five volumes of poetry published during Stuart Perkoff's lifetime: *The Suicide Room* (1956), *Eat the Earth* (1971), *Kowboy Pomes* (1973), *Alphabet* (1973), and *Only Just Above the Ground* (1973). The three chapters that follow are three posthumously published volumes: *How It Is, Doing What I Do* (1976), *Visions for the Tribe* (1976), and *Love Is the Silence: Poems 1948-1974* (1975). The remaining chapters are "Poems Published in Magazines and Broadsides," an unpublished volume *The Venice Poems*, and unpublished poems from the 1950s, the 1960s, the 1970s.

As the poet's path winds through the urban terrain, the reader becomes privy to Venice's murky depravity as well as its meridian magic.

Aligning itself with the Greenwich Village and San Francisco movements, the composite collection reflects the stylistic and ideological tenets of the beatnik tradition. Like his Beat counterparts, Perkoff is clear progenitor to classic literary rebels like Thoreau, Vachel Lindsay, and William Carlos Williams. Thematically, Perkoff draws on the romantic anti-materialism of Thoreau. The poet possessed Thoreau's ingenuity for stretching a buck, and the texts relay this vitriolic aversion to establishment commerce as well as an eremite tendency to disengage his existence from the industry polluting the Venice landscape. Perkoff sculpts these maverick themes with an eye towards the visceral display and an ear towards rhythmic and tonal expression. Supporting the content is an inventive sense of imagery. Perkoff evinced inherent skill in the visual arts, and these insights produce a Williamsian penchant for channeling portentous emotion and doctrine through concise imagery.

Perkoff's aesthetic intuitions for visual art are also evident in the architecture of the poems. The lyric lines are orchestrated with an acknowledgment of the oral performance, which Perkoff deftly communicates on the printed page. To this purpose, the pages offer an animated visual display where both subtle and overt oral gestures sensitively underscore

attempt at architectural aesthetic, and Venice's integrity was further compromised when oil was discovered and an industry quickly erected. While tourists were drawn to Venice for its seaside attractions and gambling in the guise of bingo halls lining the boardwalk, the flash and bustle of tourist activity provided a barely plausible veneer for the erosive contagion of oil derricks or the dismal existence of the struggling native inhabitants.

Perhaps because of its failure to realize Kinney's grandiose dreams of an elitist haven, Venice eventually attracted a significant artist community. Aspiring artists and beach bums alike inhabited the flimsy shacks, garages, and cottages of Venice's back roads. Here, where rent was cheap and worn beach attire the town uniform, one could raise a family on a bit of ingenuity and sporadic wisps of income. In the late 1940s, with its repudiation of capitalist materialism and dedication to a lived aesthetics, the Venice artist community already had much in common ideologically with the Beat scene developing in Greenwich Village and just north in San Francisco. Seduced by the evolving Beat culture, local artists and poets aligned themselves with the maverick movement and comprised what would later become known as the Venice West Beats.

This Venice West version of the Beats first gained public notoriety in Lawrence Lipton's novel, *The Holy Barbarians*. Published in 1959, Lipton's *roman à clef* purports to illustrate the lifestyle and persona of Venice's prominent Beats. Aside from Lipton himself, the most imposing figure emerging from the text is Stuart Perkoff. Perkoff appears in *Holy Barbarians* under several guises: as Perkoff the quoted poet and as the character, Angel Dan Davies. As Angel Dan Davies, Lipton portrays Perkoff as a slightly rumpled artist-poet eking out an existence on love, art, and a series of pick-up jobs. Filtered through Lipton's vision of Perkoff and the Venice West community at large, the bearded, perennially destitute, but artistically brilliant Davies surfaces as the west coast Beat icon, manifesting all the physical markers and

aesthetic sensibilities of the Venice Beat groove.

But Perkoff didn't discover these sensibilities in the streets of Venice or even in the poetry of the New York or San Francisco Beats. At an early age, Perkoff assumed the posture of renegade artist, chafing against the ideological props of social convention. The second son of Nat and Anne Perkoff was born in 1930 in St. Louis, Missouri. While still in high school, he joined the Communist Party and began to write poetry expressing his dissatisfaction with the establishment of the times. Just before his eighteenth birthday, armed with his journal and thespian aspirations, Perkoff took off for New York City. Here he immersed himself in the downtown underground along with its music, poetry and drugs. A few months later, Perkoff was arrested for resisting the draft, and Nat Perkoff was summoned east to retrieve his son. Stuart then returned with his father to Santa Barbara, where the family had relocated. Here he met the statuesque Suzan Blanchard. They married in 1949 and a few months later moved to New York, where they gave birth to their son, Sasha. Unable to earn enough to support the family, Perkoff and company moved back west to San Francisco and eventually to the more affordable LA suburb, Venice.

Clearly, by the time he arrived in Venice, Perkoff had earned his anti-establishment stripes in both word and deed, yet in artistic terms he had only produced random bits of poetry. Venice, however, proved to be the stabilizing environment that enabled him to cultivate his art. Since one could get by on very little revenue, Perkoff was able to live out his vision of the anti-materialist Bohemian artist. Enlivened by economic freedom and the 1940s beatnik zeitgeist, Perkoff launched in earnest his Beat poet career. Perkoff easily merged with the Venice Bohemian milieu and endures today as the outstanding figure of the Venice West Beat movement.

Voices of the Lady: Collected Poems, edited by elder brother Gerald Perkoff, is the collected works of Stuart Perkoff. In the introduction, Gerald Perkoff delineates his methodology in collating and editing the 400+ pages of poems. Part and parcel of the anti-materialist sentiment was a tendency for the artist to disregard the fiscal and, by implication, social import of his work. As a result, Gerald Perkoff notes that the arduous process of collecting writings from journals, scraps of paper, transient broadsides, and even walls

culminated in the realization that much of Perkoff's work may never be found or recognized. To chronologically place poems, the editor often had to resort to matching typescripts or observing period-specific content. Likewise, numerous pieces were not distinguished by caption or title; Gerald Perkoff has preserved the author's intention in this regard, and so many of the poems in this volume appear simply as "Untitled." The collection begins with five volumes of poetry published during Stuart Perkoff's lifetime: *The Suicide Room* (1956), *Eat the Earth* (1971), *Kowboy Pomes* (1973), *Alphabet* (1973), and *Only Just Above the Ground* (1973). The three chapters that follow are three posthumously published volumes: *How It Is, Doing What I Do* (1976), *Visions for the Tribe* (1976), and *Love Is the Silence: Poems 1948-1974* (1975). The remaining chapters are "Poems Published in Magazines and Broad-sides," an unpublished volume *The Venice Poems*, and unpublished poems from the 1950s, the 1960s, the 1970s.

As the poet's path winds through the urban terrain, the reader becomes privy to Venice's murky depravity as well as its meridian magic.

Aligning itself with the Greenwich Village and San Francisco movements, the composite collection reflects the stylistic and ideological tenets of the beatnik tradition. Like his Beat counterparts, Perkoff is clear progenitor to classic literary rebels like Thoreau, Vachel Lindsay, and William Carlos Williams. Thematically, Perkoff draws on the romantic anti-materialism of Thoreau. The poet possessed Thoreau's ingenuity for stretching a buck, and the texts relay this vitriolic aversion to establishment commerce as well as an eremite tendency to disengage his existence from the industry polluting the Venice landscape. Perkoff sculpts these maverick themes with an eye towards the visceral display and an ear towards rhythmic and tonal expression. Supporting the content is an inventive sense of imagery. Perkoff evinced inherent skill in the visual arts, and these insights produce a Williamsian penchant for channeling portentous emotion and doctrine through concise imagery.

Perkoff's aesthetic intuitions for visual art are also evident in the architecture of the poems. The lyric lines are orchestrated with an acknowledgment of the oral performance, which Perkoff deftly communicates on the printed page. To this purpose, the pages offer an animated visual display where both subtle and overt oral gestures sensitively underscore the oft intense passion of the prose. Supporting the design, the influence of Vachel Lindsay's declamatory, confessional orality echoes throughout Perkoff's work.

Hey frankie, tony, let's get high
& dream our verse & paint to the purest sin
huffle scuffle madman shuffle like streetcorner
dancers
with kazoo & jug singing the people's secret
jazzsins
they're heating the coins before they toss
them, because
it's sunday.

Initially published out of New York by Jonathan Williams in 1956, *The Suicide Room* was Perkoff's first publication and is an important first chapter in *Voices of the Lady*, as it foregrounds the poet's stylistic and philosophic inclinations. In this section, we get a range of narrative voices and, perhaps most significantly, an assortment of themes that will prove to be consistently salient in the corpus of work. Autobiographical lyric sounds out madness, extending the beat tradition of mental energy transgressing social convention: "I live with madmen, and sing among their mirrored dreams," claims the poet's voice in the revelatory "Song." In other pieces, drug induced visions merge with hazy ideological musings. In "The Chess Players at the Beach," we get a chronicle of Venice urban activity, a theme that will also figure prominently in future pieces. "Spring," the final piece in the chapter, offers a more classical construction both in voice and inspiration.

Other highlights of the anthology include the chapter, *How It Is, Doing What I Do*, originally published in 1976, two years after the author's death. This portion of the collection was edited by Tony Scibella, a fellow Venice West Beat and one of Perkoff's intimate cohorts. In his introduction, Scibella relates the importance of "the Lady" to Perkoff's work—the same Lady to whom the anthology's title

pays homage. For Perkoff, the Lady was more than a muse; she was a veritable deity who channeled her poetry through mortals. As one of the Lady's chosen people, Perkoff felt both indebted to the goddess for her artistic gifts and accountable for the creation of art in her name. The poet initiated a select few of his colleagues, like Scibella, into his religion. The best representation of Perkoff's devotion can be heard in the substantial "How It Is Doing What I Do," for which the chapter is named. In this piece, we find an explicit expression of the Lady's dominion. Here the art of creating poetry is configured as sacred ritual where the scribe is less devotee and more vessel for the goddess's creative endeavors.

the object
the best
She likes
poems made
of what is. is real.
at the core of what I do
is the Muse. She
the source / Hers the flow / my human
hands attempt to shape
it, to learn
to shape it
to Her purpose
as I am owned & used &
transformed by the very craft
i learn to use to see Her
rage appeased. to make
a precise
tool. the accuracy
of her needs.

Alphabet, first published in 1973, is the chapter that arguably offers Perkoff's most sophisticated efforts, as the polished prose contrasts with the spontaneous, hipster voice found in other chapters. In this section, Perkoff draws on his Semitic heritage for creative inspiration. Each of the poems is based on a letter from the Hebrew alphabet. Perkoff ingeniously weaves the graphic configuration of each letter with its oral property to cast a prosaic evocation that sparkles with contour and tone. The hissing of "Samech" is as vibrant and lucid as the ethereal winged motility of "Lamed." Throughout the poems, one notes a fluid vacillation between the spiritual and

physical realms so that demarcations of the corporeal and the celestial are obscured by the poet's nimble movements. The culmination of the theme is felt in the final "Tav." In this climactic piece, the physical cosmos merges so that humanity becomes one with nature while the harmonic movements of the physical and supernatural synchronize, like the clear tone of a single pitch with its related overtones.

rains fill the rivers which then fill the
skies
man & the plants breathe moth to mouth
who eats, is eaten, who feeds, is fed
giving & taking, a universal flow
this is the breath of life itself
flawless
unstained
forever
resonant
its arithmetical value is 400.

While there are many other wonderful moments in *Voices of the Lady*, my personal favorite is the *The Venice Poems* chapter. Editor Gerald Perkoff relates that although this volume had never been published, it was famous in the Venice community and among Perkoff's friends and relatives. I can understand why. Like Williams's *Paterson*, *The Venice Poems* takes the reader on a sensory tour of a town's byways. As the poet's path winds through the urban terrain, the reader becomes privy to Venice's murky depravity as well as its meridian magic. The first division explores the image and function of a city. This musing is recapitulated in the final segment and so frames the tour in such a way that the journey takes on an ideological as well as graphic character.

The internal material of this substantial (34-page) work generates a series of Venetian tableaux. Within these sections, the prosaic rhythms of the city animate the images and collaborate with the graphic movement of the lines to conduct kinetic waves of emotion that propel the reader along Perkoff's virtual tour.

the moonbeat heartbeat swing of tides
subtle

rhythm
canals make homage
to the sea
 their flowers
gently
sing the moondance
love
to unwalled houses.

The erratic beat of the city's populace often clashes, to a syncopated effect, with the more predictable pulse of the canal streams wending through Venice's heart and soul. This collision of off-art beat with systemic city beat contributes to the madness inherent in the town. Venice's corrupt genetics, steeped in capitalist aspirations, provides further groundwork for madness. The city's inherent madness proves infectious as it contaminates the inhabitants. The most notable victim is Perkoff's wife, Suzan, and the poet chronicles her hospitalization and their respective struggle:

there came that boundary
& i exhausted
 had nothing more to give
& only saw insanity in her eyes
& in my own.

Ultimately, though, the madness seems not to overwhelm the chimeric spirit of Venice or her people. The tour also offers vibrant designs of artists, poets, and musicians gathering at the beach shore, united in music, poetry, and love.

There are many pleasurable moments in Stuart Perkoff's *Voices of the Lady*—in fact, some of the more electrifying pieces, like “Pas de Deux,” “Prelude to Percussion,” and “On Sinai,” are buried in the final chapters of previously unpublished poems. All in all, *Voices of the Lady: Collected Poems* proves to be a significant text. While working within the Beat tradition, the poet spins his own brand of Beat consciousness: Buddhism is supplanted by devotion to the Lady while Venice's urban-pastoral landscape shapes a distinctive prose. As the generative force in the Venice West movement, Perkoff documents the development of a distinct voice, a voice that warrants recognition and regard. At the turn of the

twentieth century, real estate developer Abbot Kinney had a vision of a mock Venice that would be situated on the outskirts of LA. Kinney's maritime fantasy resulted in a Disneyfied version of Italy's romantic port, complete with a labyrinthine network of canals and a mock St. Mark's Plaza. Soon after construction, fiscal issues eclipsed Kinney's vain attempt at architectural aesthetic, and Venice's integrity was further compromised when oil was discovered and an industry quickly erected. While tourists were drawn to Venice for its seaside attractions and gambling in the guise of bingo halls lining the boardwalk, the flash and bustle of tourist activity provided a barely plausible veneer for the erosive contagion of oil derricks or the dismal existence of the struggling native inhabitants.

Perhaps because of its failure to realize Kinney's grandiose dreams of an elitist haven, Venice eventually attracted a significant artist community. Aspiring artists and beach bums alike inhabited the flimsy shacks, garages, and cottages of Venice's back roads. Here, where rent was cheap and worn beach attire the town uniform, one could raise a family on a bit of ingenuity and sporadic wisps of income. In the late 1940s, with its repudiation of capitalist materialism and dedication to a lived aesthetics, the Venice artist community already had much in common ideologically with the Beat scene developing in Greenwich Village and just north in San Francisco. Seduced by the evolving Beat culture, local artists and poets aligned themselves with the maverick movement and comprised what would later become known as the Venice West Beats.

This Venice West version of the Beats first gained public notoriety in Lawrence Lipton's novel, *The Holy Barbarians*. Published in 1959, Lipton's *roman à clef* purports to illustrate the lifestyle and persona of Venice's prominent Beats. Aside from Lipton himself, the most imposing figure emerging from the text is Stuart Perkoff. Perkoff appears in *Holy Barbarians* under several guises: as

Perkoff the quoted poet and as the character, Angel Dan Davies. As Angel Dan Davies, Lipton portrays Perkoff as a slightly rumped artist-poet eking out an existence on love, art, and a series of pick-up jobs. Filtered through Lipton's vision of Perkoff and the Venice West community at large, the bearded, perennially destitute, but artistically brilliant Davies surfaces as the west coast Beat icon, manifesting all the physical markers and aesthetic sensibilities of the Venice Beat groove.

But Perkoff didn't discover these sensibilities in the streets of Venice or even in the poetry of the New York or San Francisco Beats. At an early age, Perkoff assumed the posture of renegade artist, chafing against the ideological props of social convention. The second son of Nat and Anne Perkoff was born in 1930 in St. Louis, Missouri. While still in high school, he joined the Communist Party and began to write poetry expressing his dissatisfaction with the establishment of the times. Just before his eighteenth birthday, armed with his journal and thespian aspirations, Perkoff took off for New York City. Here he immersed himself in the downtown underground along with its music, poetry and drugs. A few months later, Perkoff was arrested for resisting the draft, and Nat Perkoff was summoned east to retrieve his son. Stuart then returned with his father to Santa Barbara, where the family had relocated. Here he met the statuesque Suzan Blanchard. They married in 1949 and a few months later moved to New York, where they gave birth to their son, Sasha. Unable to earn enough to support the family, Perkoff and company moved back west to San Francisco and eventually to the more affordable LA suburb, Venice.

Clearly, by the time he arrived in Venice, Perkoff had earned his anti-establishment stripes in both word and deed, yet in artistic terms he had only produced random bits of poetry. Venice, however, proved to be the stabilizing environment that enabled him to

cultivate his art. Since one could get by on very little revenue, Perkoff was able to live out his vision of the anti-materialist Bohemian artist. Enlivened by economic freedom and the 1940s beatnik zeitgeist, Perkoff launched in earnest his Beat poet career. Perkoff easily merged with the Venice Bohemian milieu and endures today as the outstanding figure of the Venice West Beat movement.

Voices of the Lady: Collected Poems, edited by elder brother Gerald Perkoff, is the collected works of Stuart Perkoff. In the introduction, Gerald Perkoff delineates his methodology in collating and editing the 400+ pages of poems. Part and parcel of the anti-materialist sentiment was a tendency for the artist to disregard the fiscal and, by implication, social import of his work. As a result, Gerald Perkoff notes that the arduous process of collecting writings from journals, scraps of paper, transient broadsides, and even walls culminated in the realization that much of Perkoff's work may never be found or recognized. To chronologically place poems, the editor often had to resort to matching typescripts or observing period-specific content. Likewise, numerous pieces were not distinguished by caption or title; Gerald Perkoff has preserved the author's intention in this regard, and so many of the poems in this volume appear simply as "Untitled." The collection begins with five volumes of poetry published during Stuart Perkoff's lifetime: *The Suicide Room* (1956), *Eat the Earth* (1971), *Kowboy Pomes* (1973), *Alphabet* (1973), and *Only Just Above the Ground* (1973). The three chapters that follow are three posthumously published volumes: *How It Is, Doing What I Do* (1976), *Visions for the Tribe* (1976), and *Love Is the Silence: Poems 1948-1974* (1975). The remaining chapters are "Poems Published in Magazines and Broad-sides," an unpublished volume *The Venice Poems*, and unpublished poems from the 1950s, the 1960s, the 1970s.

As the poet's path winds through the urban terrain, the reader becomes privy to Venice's murky depravity as well as its meridian magic.

Aligning itself with the Greenwich Village and San Francisco movements, the composite collection

to Her purpose
as I am owned & used &
transformed by the very craft
i learn to use to see Her
rage appeased. to make
a precise
tool. the accuracy
of her needs.

Alphabet, first published in 1973, is the chapter that arguably offers Perkoff's most sophisticated efforts, as the polished prose contrasts with the spontaneous, hipster voice found in other chapters. In this section, Perkoff draws on his Semitic heritage for creative inspiration. Each of the poems is based on a letter from the Hebrew alphabet. Perkoff ingeniously weaves the graphic configuration of each letter with its oral property to cast a prosaic evocation that sparkles with contour and tone. The hissing of "Samech" is as vibrant and lucid as the ethereal winged motility of "Lamed." Throughout the poems, one notes a fluid vacillation between the spiritual and physical realms so that demarcations of the corporeal and the celestial are obscured by the poet's nimble movements. The culmination of the theme is felt in the final "Tav." In this climactic piece, the physical cosmos merges so that humanity becomes one with nature while the harmonic movements of the physical and supernatural synchronize, like the clear tone of a single pitch with its related overtones.

rains fill the rivers which then fill the
skies
man & the plants breathe moth to
mouth
who eats, is eaten, who feeds, is fed
giving & taking, a universal flow
this is the breath of life itself
flawless
unstained
forever
resonant
its arithmetical value is 400.

While there are many other wonderful

moments in *Voices of the Lady*, my personal favorite is the *The Venice Poems* chapter. Editor Gerald Perkoff relates that although this volume had never been published, it was famous in the Venice community and among Perkoff's friends and relatives. I can understand why. Like Williams's *Paterson*, *The Venice Poems* takes the reader on a sensory tour of a town's byways. As the poet's path winds through the urban terrain, the reader becomes privy to Venice's murky depravity as well as its meridian magic. The first division explores the image and function of a city. This musing is recapitulated in the final segment and so frames the tour in such a way that the journey takes on an ideological as well as graphic character.

The internal material of this substantial (34-page) work generates a series of Venetian tableaux. Within these sections, the prosaic rhythms of the city animate the images and collaborate with the graphic movement of the lines to conduct kinetic waves of emotion that propel the reader along Perkoff's virtual tour.

the moonbeat heartbeat swing of tides
subtle
rhythm
canals make homage
to the sea
their flowers
gently
sing the moondance
love
to unwallled houses.

The erratic beat of the city's populace often clashes, to a syncopated effect, with the more predictable pulse of the canal streams wending through Venice's heart and soul. This collision of off-art beat with systemic city beat contributes to the madness inherent in the town. Venice's corrupt genetics, steeped in capitalist aspirations, provides further groundwork for madness. The city's inherent madness proves infectious as it contaminates the inhabitants. The most notable victim is Perkoff's wife, Suzan, and the poet chronicles her hospitalization and their respective struggle:

there came that boundary
& i exhausted
had nothing more to give
& only saw insanity in her eyes
& in my own.

Ultimately, though, the madness seems not to overwhelm the chimeric spirit of Venice or her people. The tour also offers vibrant designs of artists, poets, and musicians gathering at the beach shore, united in music, poetry, and love.

There are many pleasurable moments in Stuart Perkoff's *Voices of the Lady*—in fact, some of the more electrifying pieces, like “Pas de Deux,” “Prelude to Percussion,” and “On Sinai,” are buried in the final chapters of previously unpublished poems. All in all, *Voices of the Lady: Collected Poems* proves to be a significant text. While working within the Beat tradition, the poet spins his own brand of Beat consciousness: Buddhism is supplanted by devotion to the Lady while Venice's urban-pastoral landscape shapes a distinctive prose. As the generative force in the Venice West movement, Perkoff documents the development of a distinct voice, a voice that warrants recognition and regard. evocation that sparkles with contour and tone. The hissing of “Samech” is as vibrant and lucid as the ethereal winged motility of “Lamed.” Throughout the poems, one notes a fluid vacillation between the spiritual and physical realms so that demarcations of the corporeal and the celestial are obscured by the poet's nimble movements. The culmination of the theme is felt in the final “Tav.” In this climactic piece, the physical cosmos merges so that humanity becomes one with nature while the harmonic movements of the physical and supernatural synchronize, like the clear tone of a single pitch with its related overtones.

rains fill the rivers which then fill the
skies
man & the plants breathe moth to mouth
who eats, is eaten, who feeds, is fed
giving & taking, a universal flow
this is the breath of life itself
flawless
unstained
forever
 resonant
its arithmetical value is 400.

While there are many other wonderful moments in *Voices of the Lady*, my personal

favorite is the *The Venice Poems* chapter. Editor Gerald Perkoff relates that although this volume had never been published, it was famous in the Venice community and among Perkoff's friends and relatives. I can understand why. Like Williams's *Paterson*, *The Venice Poems* takes the reader on a sensory tour of a town's byways. As the poet's path winds through the urban terrain, the reader becomes privy to Venice's murky depravity as well as its meridian magic. The first division explores the image and function of a city. This musing is recapitulated in the final segment and so frames the tour in such a way that the journey takes on an ideological as well as graphic character.

The internal material of this substantial (34-page) work generates a series of Venetian tableaux. Within these sections, the prosaic rhythms of the city animate the images and collaborate with the graphic movement of the lines to conduct kinetic waves of emotion that propel the reader along Perkoff's virtual tour.

the moonbeat heartbeat swing of tides
subtle
 rhythm
canals make homage
to the sea
 their flowers
gently
sing the moondance
love
to unwallled houses.

The erratic beat of the city's populace often clashes, to a syncopated effect, with the more predictable pulse of the canal streams wending through Venice's heart and soul. This collision of off-art beat with systemic city beat contributes to the madness inherent in the town. Venice's corrupt genetics, steeped in capitalist aspirations, provides further groundwork for madness. The city's inherent madness proves infectious as it contaminates the inhabitants. The most notable victim is Perkoff's wife, Suzan, and the poet chronicles her hospitalization and their respective struggle:

there came that boundary
& i exhausted
 had nothing more to give

& only saw insanity in her eyes
& in my own.

Ultimately, though, the madness seems not to overwhelm the chimeric spirit of Venice or her people. The tour also offers vibrant designs of artists, poets, and musicians gathering at the beach shore, united in music, poetry, and love.

There are many pleasurable moments in Stuart Perkoff's *Voices of the Lady*—in fact, some of the more electrifying pieces, like “Pas de Deux,” “Prelude to Percussion,” and “On Sinai,” are buried in the final chapters of previously unpublished poems. All in all, *Voices of the Lady: Collected Poems* proves to be a significant text. While working within the Beat tradition, the poet spins his own brand of Beat consciousness: Buddhism is supplanted by devotion to the Lady while Venice's urban-pastoral landscape shapes a distinctive prose. As the generative force in the Venice West movement, Perkoff documents the development of a distinct voice, a voice that warrants recognition and regard.

Christine Timm has published articles on Beat literature and African orature and was producer for the award winning documentary on Allen Ginsberg, Van Gogh's Ear. She is currently teaching in the English Department at Queens College/City University of New York.