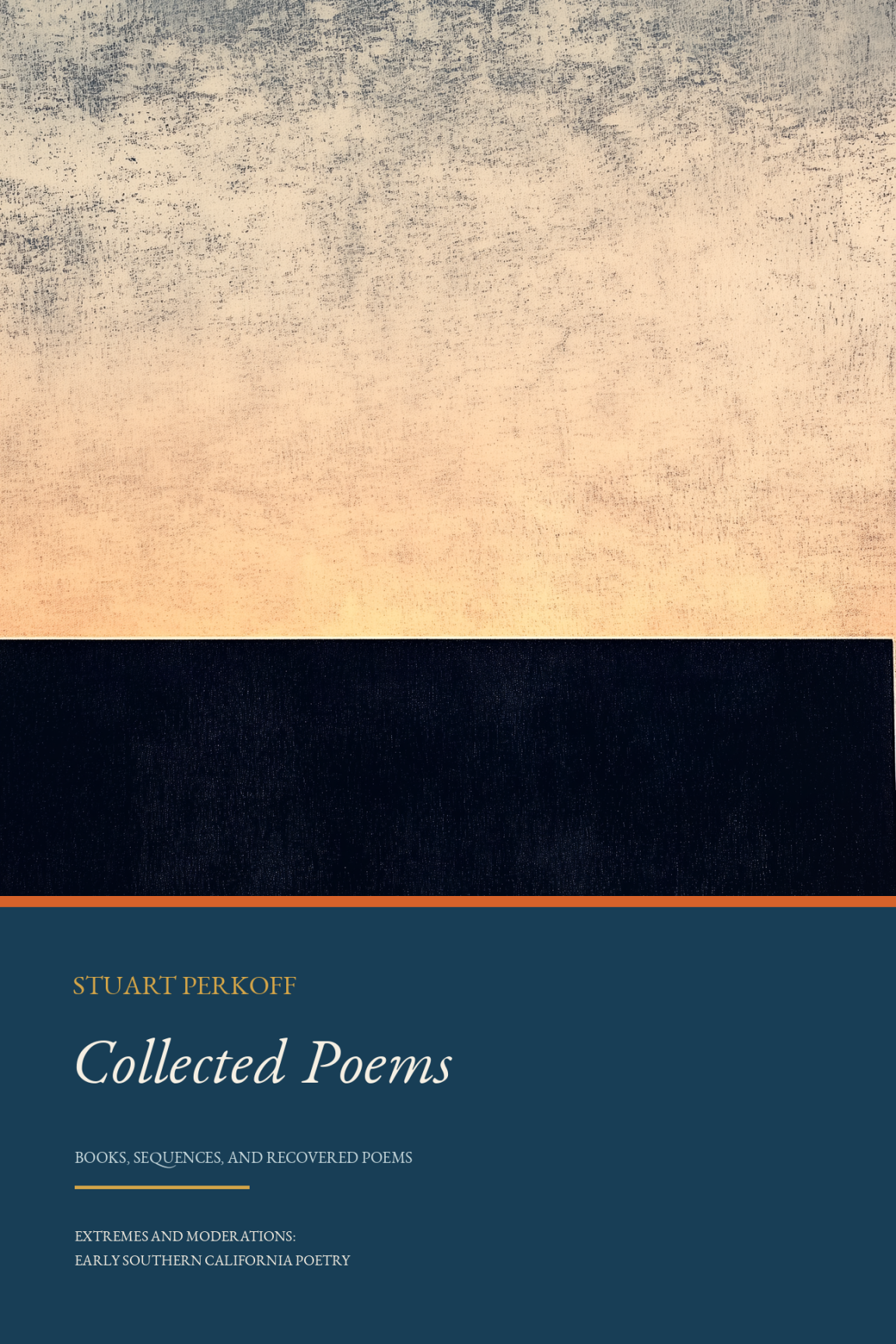




STUART PERKOFF

Collected Poems

BOOKS, SEQUENCES, AND RECOVERED POEMS

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

A TEXT-TECH PAPERS PROJECT

Extremes and Moderations

Early Southern California Poetry

Extremes and Moderations is a Text-Tech Papers project devoted to recovering poetry written, published, and circulated in Los Angeles and Southern California. Each volume brings neglected books and poems back into view through carefully prepared texts, archival images, biographical context, and a clear record of the surviving sources.

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

The Text-Tech Papers | Los Angeles, 2026

STUART PERKOFF

Collected Poems

1930–1974

A CRITICAL READING EDITION

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The Text-Tech Papers

Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry

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Prepared from original books, anthology pages, archival records, and period recordings.

This is a reset critical reading edition, not a facsimile.

The Text-Tech Papers · Los Angeles, California

CONTENTS

Poems and editorial matter

Archival Images	4
Introduction	8
Editorial Note and Sources	13
Early Poems	14
<i>Flowers for Luis Buñuel</i>	15
<i>The Recluses</i>	17
<i>Feasts of Death, Feasts of Love</i>	18
<i>Only Just Above the Ground</i>	25
<i>[O all prisoners, madmen, terrified jailers & wives]</i>	26
<i>The Barbarian from the North</i>	29
<i>[A blond face / a black face / a no face]</i>	30
<i>The Summer: An Elegy</i>	32
<i>[The murderers of children are among us]</i>	36
<i>[Turned loose in the streets]</i>	37
<i>[That which is man]</i>	39
<i>Kowboy Pomes</i>	41
<i>One</i>	42
<i>Two</i>	43
<i>Three: Orpheus</i>	44
<i>Four: Peyote Poem</i>	45
<i>Five: The Heroes</i>	46
<i>Six: Pioneer Wives</i>	48
<i>Seven: The Buffalo</i>	50

Alphabet 54

<i>Aleph</i>	55
<i>Beth</i>	56
<i>Gimel</i>	57
<i>Daleth</i>	58
<i>Hai</i>	59
<i>Vav</i>	60
<i>Zayeen</i>	61
<i>Cheth</i>	62
<i>Teth</i>	63
<i>Yod</i>	64
<i>Kaf</i>	65
<i>Lamed</i>	66
<i>Mem</i>	67
<i>Nun</i>	69
<i>Samech</i>	70
<i>Ayeen</i>	71
<i>Pei</i>	72
<i>Tzaddi</i>	73
<i>Kof</i>	74
<i>Resh</i>	75
<i>Sheen</i>	76
<i>Tav</i>	77

From Love Is the Silence 78

<i>A Token</i>	79
<i>Pansies</i>	80
<i>The Suicide Room</i>	81
<i>No Travelers down This Road</i>	82
<i>Poem in My Thirtieth Summer</i>	83
<i>Saturday Afternoon in the 1930's</i>	86
<i>A Collage for Tristan Tzara</i>	87
<i>In Memoriam, Gary Cooper</i>	90
<i>Some Aspects of Prison</i>	93
<i>Love Is the Silence</i>	95
<i>Letter to Jack Hirschman</i>	96

Recorded Works	97
Bibliography	99
Textual Record	101
Colophon	102

ARCHIVAL IMAGES

The poet, the books, and the surviving visual field



Stuart Perkoff at the Venice West Café, ca. 1960. Photograph by Austin Anton; reproduced from the Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument documentation.

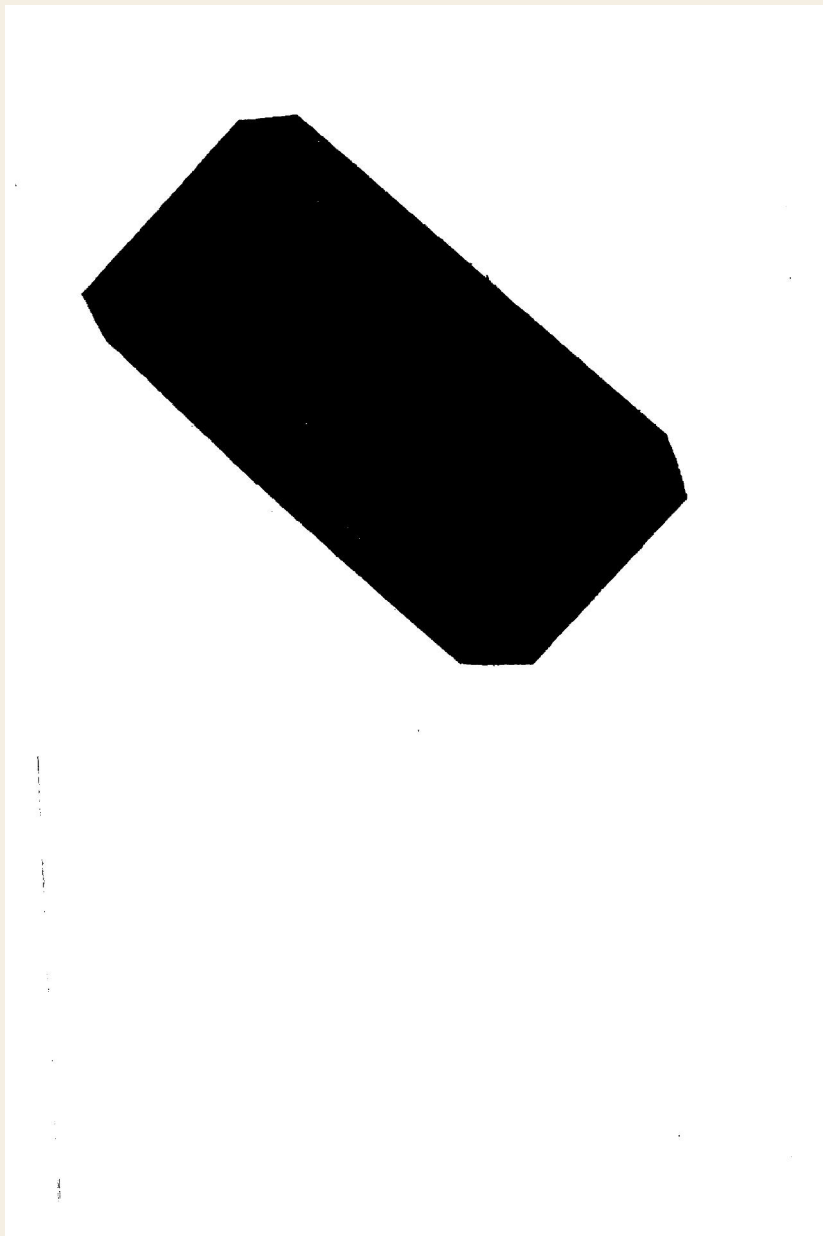
alphabet

Stuart Z. Perkoff

Cover by Wallace Berman

THE RED HILL PRESS
Los Angeles & Fairfax
1973

Title page of Alphabet (Red Hill Press, 1973), with Wallace Berman credited for the cover.



*A full-page abstract field from *Only Just Above the Ground* (1973). The edition records this visual vocabulary here and resets the verbal poems in the reading text.*

INTRODUCTION

Venice West, the late books, and the recovered corpus

Stuart Perkoff came to Venice carrying the compressed histories of a St. Louis Jewish household, a restless postwar youth, and a poetry already willing to make the damaged body its measure of truth. In Los Angeles he became one of the central voices of Venice West: a poet of rooms, beaches, prisons, city streets, erotic bonds, heroin, Jewish memory, American violence, and the stubborn possibility of revelation. He helped open the Venice West Café in 1958, read through the night in storefronts and apartments, appeared in Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry, 1945–1960*, and carried a local scene into the national record without smoothing away its hunger or danger.

His work did not remain fixed in the public idea of Beat poetry. *The Suicide Room* established an early lyric of inward extremity; the poems gathered after his imprisonment turn hard experience into social anatomy; *Kowboy Pomes* dismantles the American West through appetite, conquest, and performance; *Only Just Above the Ground* sets language against murder, madness, and the limits of the human; and *Alphabet* builds a late cosmology from the Hebrew letters. Across these changes, Perkoff's characteristic line stays alert to breath. Its short measures, sudden insets, slashes, ampersands, and abrupt stanza turns are not casual roughness but the score of a voice thinking under pressure.

This edition resets every poem recoverable from the complete local copies of *Alphabet*, *Kowboy Pomes*, and *Only Just Above the Ground*, together with the nonduplicative contents of *Love Is the Silence* and Perkoff's section in *The New American Poetry*. Exact reprints are represented once and their other appearances recorded in the notes. Narrow-page wraps have been rejoined only when the scan shows that they are mechanical; authorial indentation, sequence numbering, epigraphs, stanza breaks, lowercase openings, punctuation, and spellings such as "lite," "thru," and "yr" are retained. The abstract shapes in *Only Just Above the Ground* are documented in the archival plates rather than

treated as detachable poems. Surviving recordings add a large performance record, but audio-only works are listed rather than silently converted into conjectural print lineation.

St. Louis, family, and first writing

Stuart Z. Perkoff was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on 29 July 1930, the son of Nathan (often called Nat) Perkoff and Ann Schwartz Perkoff. Biographical reference sources describe his father as a bookmaker. His older brother Gerald Thomas Perkoff became a physician, medical educator, and later the editor of Stuart's posthumous collected poems; another brother, Simon or "Sy" Perkoff, became a jazz musician. The family's Jewish life, urban working culture, and the memory of the Depression remained active materials in Perkoff's poetry, particularly in "Feasts of Death, Feasts of Love" and "Saturday Afternoon in the 1930's."

Perkoff began writing young and left conventional schooling early. Accounts derived from Paul Vangelisti's *Dictionary of Literary Biography* essay describe an itinerant adolescence and early adulthood between St. Louis, New York, and the West Coast, a refusal of military service, and an attachment to radical politics that included Communist Party membership. These details are best treated as documented elements of the surviving biographical tradition rather than simplified into a single conversion story. In 1949 he married Suzan Blanchard; their daughter Sasha was born during the marriage. Later reference accounts name other important relationships, including Jana Baragan and Susan Berman.

Venice West

By the middle 1950s Perkoff had become part of the loose Los Angeles poetry community that gathered around Lawrence Lipton, Wallace Berman, John Thomas, Bruce Boyd, Mel Weisburd, and others. Jonathan Williams published *The Suicide Room* as Jargon 22 in 1956, with a drawing by Fielding Dawson and a photograph by Charles Kessler. The Jargon Society record describes an edition of two hundred copies in wrappers and twenty-five in boards. Perkoff's inclusion in Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry, 1945–1960* placed him among the poets Allen grouped under the San Francisco Renaissance and gave national circulation to “Flowers for Luis Buñuel,” “The Recluses,” and “Feasts of Death, Feasts of Love.”

In 1958 Perkoff helped establish the Venice West Café at 7 East Dudley Avenue, a narrow storefront that became the most visible meeting place of the local scene. City landmark research records readings, jazz, discussion, and informal publication networks there; Perkoff transferred day-to-day responsibility by about 1960, while the café continued under later operators until 1966. His voice survives in USC's Lawrence Lipton recordings: he discusses the making of *The Venice Poems*, Blake, Yeats, Pound, Ginsberg, Theodore Roethke, therapy, the Beat label, Suzan Blanchard, and the café, then reads poems whose breath and timing cannot be inferred from the page alone. He also appeared as a poetry reader in Jonas Mekas's film *Guns of the Trees* (1961).

Addiction, prison, and return

The openness of Perkoff's poetry about drugs and psychic extremity corresponded to a long heroin addiction that damaged his health and interrupted his work. In 1968 he was convicted on a narcotics charge and imprisoned until 1971. The broadside *Poems from Prison* appeared in 1969, followed by *Eat the Earth* and other small-press publications. “Some Aspects of Prison” refuses penitentiary melodrama: its machine, guardians, priests, and human flow make incarceration a social system whose violence depends on everyone's inability to name the structure that consumes them.

After release, Perkoff attempted a bookstore venture in northern California and then returned to Venice in 1973. The return produced an extraordinary concentration of books. Croupier Press issued *Kowboy Pomes*;

The Smith devoted special issue 28 to *Only Just Above the Ground*; and Red Hill Press published *Alphabet* in an edition designed with Wallace Berman. These books revise the familiar Venice West Perkoff. Their fields widen from the immediate room and street to conquest, ecology, Hebrew letter mysticism, cosmology, and the unstable boundary between the human and the animal, while the diction stays compressed, spoken, and physically exact.

Final months and posthumous books

Paul Vangelisti and Perkoff planned the selection that became *Love Is the Silence: Poems 1948–1974*, but Perkoff's illness advanced before Vangelisti could return with a final group of texts. Perkoff died of cancer in Venice in June 1974, aged forty-three. Reference sources disagree on the exact day—14, 24, or 25 June—and no primary civil record has yet resolved the conflict, so this edition does not force a false precision. Philomene Long, his companion late in life and later Venice's poet laureate, preserved memories of his final period, including the declaration "All love is holy" that she said he wrote on her wall.

Red Hill Press published *Love Is the Silence* in 1975, explicitly presenting it as a posthumous selection rather than a definitive corpus. *Visions for the Tribe* and *How It Is, Doing What I Do* followed from the Black Ace, Bowery, and Temple of Man small-press network. Gerald T. Perkoff then spent years organizing his brother's work. The National Poetry Foundation published *Voices of the Lady* in 1998, with Gerald's introduction and a preface by Robert Creeley. Reviewers noted that it gathered eight books and more than two hundred pages of previously unpublished poems, restoring the scale of a body of work often reduced to a handful of Beat-era lyrics.

Archive and continuing record

The Stuart Z. Perkoff Papers at UCLA, collection 1573, occupy six boxes and approximately three linear feet. The finding aid describes manuscripts, typescripts, correspondence, photographs, printed matter, and forty-six handwritten journals dating from about 1952 to 1974. UCLA notes that literary rights remain with the creators and their heirs. The Lawrence Lipton papers at USC preserve interviews, readings, and group events from Venice West; the Mel Weisburd collection adds a 1957 reading with Guy Daniels. These recordings include “A Token,” “Boplicity,” “Alba,” “Bird,” “Invocation,” “For Dylan Thomas,” portions of *The Venice Poems*, and other titles not all represented by verifiable print witnesses in the present archive.

Perkoff’s reputation has grown through several overlapping histories: the national story of the Beats, the more local account of Venice West, the postwar Los Angeles poetry renaissance described by Bill Mohr, and the material history of tiny presses and performance tapes. John Arthur Maynard’s *Venice West*, Paul Vangelisti’s biographical essay, oral-history work, the preservation campaign for the Venice West Café, and the publication of *Voices of the Lady* have each widened the record. What remains most compelling is the poems’ resistance to legend. They return again and again to the exact instant when a body, a word, or a social structure reveals both its damage and its capacity to change.

EDITORIAL NOTE AND SOURCES

Corpus, lineation, duplication, and the audio record

The reading text is controlled by the complete local scans of *Alphabet*, *Kowboy Pomes*, *Only Just Above the Ground*, *Love Is the Silence*, and Perkoff's pages in *The New American Poetry, 1945–1960*. Earlier project PDFs were used only as finding aids. Each poem begins on a new page; exact duplicate reprints are represented once and cross-referenced in the publication note.

Line beginnings, stanza breaks, ampersands, slashes, lowercase forms, and intentional relative indents follow the scans. Mechanical wraps created by narrow pages are rejoined, and an automatically wrapped line returns to the poem's established left margin. Epigraphs and dedications are separated from the poem body. The prose poem "Saturday Afternoon in the 1930's" is reset as prose. Obvious scan debris and unmistakable OCR substitutions are silently corrected against the page images.

The surviving recordings document a wider performance corpus than the present print archive. Their titles are listed in the back matter, but audio-only poems are not assigned conjectural line breaks. Full witnesses have not yet been recovered locally for several small-press books, including *The Suicide Room*, *Poems from Prison*, *Eat the Earth*, *Song for Max Finstein*, *The Moonwash Sea*, *Visions for the Tribe*, *How It Is*, *Doing What I Do*, and *Voices of the Lady*. Poems from these books are included only where a verified text appears in one of the source volumes above.

EARLY POEMS

Three poems published in The New American Poetry, 1945–1960

Flowers for Luis Buñuel

What is the word for 'death'
in French? What word triggers
laughter at slit eyes and guttered
cripples?

What is the word for
the language of eye, the montage of
blood?

Buñuel, Buñuel,
the musicians in the buildings play no tune
comparable to the whirring lens
of hideous glare of light and blood.
The knives and dwarfs and round firm tits
say death in French for a language too
strong to hold in the gut.

Buñuel, Buñuel,
is the world? A place?

such dirty
cunts and open flies! an unwiped ass
editing the noise of the city,
the wind an instrument of long black hair,
all the mothers dying.

Let us go to the cinema.
Let us go
to the sinema.

Every rock depends for life upon
the spilling of blood, and torn flesh.
Every death creates a small quiver,
a hatred of mirrors.

Who knew guilt
before this? The eye, the eye,
burning too steadily through the ugly night
in the theatre dark with the smells
of all our hatred. The cinema of
the slit, the wound, the crawling ants.

Buñuel, did you do it? Did you?
Have you built the handless queer,
the only sighted murderer? Have you
built them?

Let the misshapen dance
around the rock. Only a priest can eat
this shit and not vomit. This is the
cross made of bones. Prayers? Never!

Buñuel, Buñuel,
is the world? Did you?

Publication. Donald M. Allen, ed., *The New American Poetry, 1945–1960* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), pp. 298–99.

The Recluses

They paper the walls of their world
with their strange rhythms,
visions of this, their sighted dreams.
They have within their deepest eardooms
fragments of freshest wildness.

That of a woman
never feeling breastingly through their eyes,
they have no sin. But on their walls
of rhythmized visioned scenes
they often have lines about a mountain.

That black which is the greedy of the mind,
that reaches up and grasps from
the perceiving eye
all of the memoric stanzas brought on by the world
is their fine house.

They live there.
They have their own dark lines.
They are always

Inside

Publication. Donald M. Allen, ed., *The New American Poetry, 1945–1960* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 299.

Feasts of Death, Feasts of Love

ONE

I.

down the Wolf river
backs to the sun thru water shallow & flat
beautiful girls & boys

the birds wing tip to tip
swinging thru & around
calling calling

we carried city eyes
over the rushing water
the stunned vision of scene after changing
scene
expanding & including
as our shouts & grunts & songs
wailed outward

(i had to get out, once, & push the canoe from behind, my body from the ankles up was hot, sweaty, sun gleaming, my feet cool in the river, lifting & pushing the heavy canoe.

i thought the others wd get too far ahead, & we wd be lost, off in the wisconsin woods, where there were neither jews nor cities, a world hot & in winter my feet wd be like encased in the cement of the river, & the canoe wd never be pushed over the flat scrapey sand.)

the river movement
coiled around our eyes
the quiet sound of the breathing of work
set the beat
of our songs

2.

¶ the next year we took a different trip, out lake tomahawk & an adjacent lake, i dont remember which one. in that part of wisconsin the lakes lay on the land like a thousand eyes, peering

into & thru each other.

from lake to lake
between two mountains
all blue green quiet movement water
in the air & eye
the huge walls rising

a great grass field
covered the inlet
& the canoe went thru
as over land, it looked
so quiet

rustling of grass

the soft voices

hot beautiful girls & boys

hot beautiful summer day

TWO

I.

wake up! to a morning
sun shining thru even newspaper
headlines
sun on
men in sand wading thru
blood

“woe, woe unto
the bloody city of litchfield”
he cried with his bare feet
in the gutters of blood

naked feet
naked legs
naked eyes

into the market place howling
along the streets howling

in the living rooms howling
the sun! shining shining
in our eyes

2.

at the edge of the water
the glass house eye of God
embraced us, pure
in white

clean after communal showers
& communal food

“boruch ataw Adonai
Elohenu melech ha’olam
ha’motzi lechem
min ha’awritz”

reverberating thru the food
the eyes
the air out out into many rhythms
& tongues

sitting on the benches, bodies warm & throats filled with joy & love
we offered worship
sitting warm, our eyes & skins touching, love flowing
we offered worship

we sang
& spoke languages & poems
offered worship & love
mixing the birds of passion & the swords of God
in our beautiful young eyes

it wd always be dark by the time the services were over. & secure, in the glass house, lit by the God that shined all our faces, the burning candles of love in our bodies, sharing the glow outward to trees & wind. & the younger kids went to their cabins while the older ones had a dance, & carried on intrigues & political arguments & love affairs until 11:30, when the boys walked the joyous road back to their portion of the camp, singing & shouting, clean & alive.

by the time the saturday morning services were over, we were so full & whole
that anything was possible.

3. political song

the people circle the room
coming together

the blood circles the body
coming together

the earth circles the sun
coming together

hangon, man
as it
wobbles around

hand to hand
as it
wobbles around

o living communities
men & women who love & are loved
o living bodies
men & women who love & are loved
o loving cities
men & women who live & are lived

eat
drink
embrace
each
other
inner
face

THREE

I.

i see clothes piled in great heaps
against grey sky

with the smoke & sun in the air
of human flesh
& in the pockets of those beasts
who wear my name
things of value jingle & clank
in those black pockets
teeth & eyes & skulls & skin
in those black pockets

there are bodies
naked
not talking of love

in their last waters
naked
not talking of love

naked hunger
naked hatred
naked minds

howling in the crowded boxcars
howling in the dark barracks
howling in the hot showers
howling & whimpering in the final chambers

silent
in the furnaces

2.

such visions
wove their shroudeyes
thru our songs

such knowledge
blackened the edge
of every flame

each kiss
bittered with the salt
of their blood

(many summers later i hitchhiked over a thousand miles back to the wisconsin holy lakes, to speak anguish to a wise man, seeking seeking peace.

& we sat outside under a fat moon, at the edge of an open field of grass, scenes of love & myth echoing in my mind.

i asked him why the six million had died. i thought somehow, this man, an aronin, descendant of the first & holiest priests of israel, humble seeker & generous fountain of love, wd have an insight, a knowledge, a hope.

God's plan? if there had not been such blood & terror in his mouth, he wd have laughed. & told me he had no answer, no peace. & told me of the many nites & days he had fasted & prayed.

& found nothing?

found only hope that came from the realisation of the cleansing & purification of pain.

whose? i so young, so bitter, so needing an answer, sd, whose? good for their souls? or ours!

so bitter, so young
such needs.)

even now
it is difficult for me to fix
in my mind's eye, the image
of the God/Priest
lifting sin from the souls of the people

my soul, my sin
clothing these six million in my sins
& thrusting them in their foreign wrappings
into the flaming mouths of agony.

FOUR

when the sun dies

many other suns will still flame

all things contain the seeds
of their own completion.
all seeds contain the things
of their own destruction.

the sun
makes a morning
bright descending on hooded eyes

the sun's morning
floods into the sands
of war

wake up
hangon

coming together

coming together

coming together

Publication. *Love Is the Silence: Poems 1948–1974*, ed. Paul Vangelisti (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1975), pp. 9–16; first collected in Donald M. Allen, ed., *The New American Poetry, 1945–1960*.

ONLY JUST ABOVE THE GROUND

The complete 1973 sequence

[O all prisoners, madmen, terrified jailers & wives]

o all prisoners, madmen, terrified jailers & wives
halt in yr day's destruction
to homage the queen
hands wrapped around steel bars across blind eyes
windows to nowhere where the sunset is black
& the stars are ashamed to blink their million universes
songs of lite

the swing rocking gently maddened
bloody hands with nails torn
clutching at the dust of ageless pain
digging in the airless desert
for the sweet freshets of holy death

lady, my ten fingers freeze in fright
lady, my gut screams for yr love
lady, my eyes havent the strength to stay open
& what they see when you are not my lens
is more than human eye can bear. anywhere

o blood my arms with manna
smash my bones with love .
tenderly my heart gently its sad wounds
ripped tongue of silent scream
tom lungs emptied of fetid air

the death i breathe is only what i can without hope
there is the road but my feet shrivel
the fat & holy pigeons mock my tears
my city lifts its claws and turns on me
the children ring me with signs & curses
all my demons tumble out my mouth

o fold my crumpled tongue into yr mouth
my darling, my darling
sew my gaping heart with yr strong fingers

not that it matters to the pavement if my blood
washes its grime

the trees can drink the air which i cannot breathe
the children's laughter will dance by my ruptured ear

is all this just to say i love you?
o i love you my muse
my muse
my muse

hard to know
whether the place surrounds
or springs from my
own core

but has to touch, anyway
eyes closed or
running, dont
matter. the place, the
name, the hands
that hold
the thing made, they
come with

down
the nite, it
dont matter who
is crying. salt &
water, the
blinding lites
all that talking. these
do not vary

if birds fear
the gun, if the dead
cow fears the jackals
vultures, wild
dogs, we have no way to
know. only man is
human, has that inaccurate
tongue

yet my concern remains
the poem. i am pushed
to the edges, now they

leave me to my dyings

but the hands touch the
place. dirt sifts thru
the fingers. under the
arms it smells. strong

makes the place somehow a
woman, as most
things are. by which i
mean/ to eat

Publication. *Only Just Above the Ground, The Smith*, special issue 28 (1 March 1973), pp. 4–6.

The Barbarian from the North

for Allen Ginsberg

for allen ginsberg

blind as roses

we sit in the evenings in rooms of our own choosing
rooms filled with intricacies of many delicately structured parts
which dazzle & fascinate, & alter appearances & statements

everything with its clear limits
everything marked & classified
all aspects known
all new structures viewed with distaste
everything of the utmost seriousness

what are we to say, then, of a man
who takes off his clothes in someone else's living room?
are we to applaud?
what is his nakedness to us?
what do we care about his poems?
do you realize that he is in the lite? how can i
be expected to read?

he makes too much noise!
he says dirty words!
he needs a bath!
he is certainly
drunk!

i hope he soon realizes that is, after all
now
& we have many wonderful things to amuse us
when we want to see clowns
we go to the circus

is he gone yet? can i come out
now?

Publication. *Only Just Above the Ground, The Smith*, special issue 28 (1 March 1973), pp. 7–8.

[A blond face / a black face / a no face]

"a blond face / a black face / a no face" —James Ryan Morris

difficult to be
human.
no news that.

one known thing / pain
seems integral/ unremitting

few still traversable
roads. dream
works erratic. the
poem, yes, another.

have to learn to expand
what doesnt want to.
risk.

limits, the limits
of pain.
i know no other
way. wearing
this face. you
wearing yrs.

pleases me because it's
actual / human to not
touch / to ease

a different mirror
is required. to see man
become an angel / his ultimate
destiny

it is a matter
of time. if only it were
not real.

i wd rather not sing
the images of my visions
thru which men stumble in clumps
bodys pounding unfeeling against

each other, against walls, fences, closed doors

as tho the world built so huge
piece by uniquely structured piece
had been ripped from its balanced swing thru stars
smashed apart & gummed together tite & strained
then jammed into a tiny room
a dark room, room without air
to find its movements strangled rigid
rhythms locked & choking

all are moved inside this airless cage
not by memory of rhythm, not by desire
but only as great clumps of flesh might twitch
in empty lust for quiet. for the grave.

what does not live cannot know death.
what giant hand with master falseness
offers not even honest oblivion?
memory, memory
move across my eyes
that i may know the visions once were real
a song, a touch, a total giving
each to each
one to one
one more song

Publication. *Only Just Above the Ground, The Smith*, special issue 28 (1 March 1973), pp. 9–11.

The Summer: An Elegy

for James Ryan Morris

I.

the killers swarm the city
it is a summer madness
they look thru faces of mirror
they call my name

deep deep in the earth
the earth has eaten their bone
knives
their knives of bronze, stone axe honed axe
now their blades flash lite exactly as we have been taught
to expect
secret pockets in their flesh
contain other weapons

i pretend it is my city
but they have full charge
of the graves
death is longer than life
this gives them their seniority & power
the blood in the summer
streets is
thick sticky as it dries in the sun
stinking like any animal matter
rotting for the children of flies

we are covered with it. with them. their blades
are steel. they flower
their own time & gesture. as nijinsky did impossible
· entrechats as the flower's
ghost

graves now. flesh/ eye/ tongue
gone, only the bone remains

2.

mike magdalani, this yr
death poem. cdnt wait
for summer you killed in the spring, killed
mike magdalani
this yr death yr death
the poem of our
summer thru which the killers
move. under the full
moon or the half or any phase. even
a black sky or in the
rain which washes the blood into the soil where
grass bloats rust tinged gorging itself
on vein spill

row after row, flashing in the electric sun
a dance of thrust & slash

summer flares & thickens the rich flow

i pretend it is my city, as tho
love gives me the right to anything but
the act of loving

you did not wait
for them to seek you
out. to take the
city with blades brite
& faces twisted

the summer
the hot summer
intensifies. to touch scalds
flesh mike
mike this yr death

the knife / the knife / the knife in
the silver lite
it is polished with a knowledge of
the nature of edges.
at the end of the summer edges
draw in. there is no
protection there. they breed & swarm & infect.

it is too easy to be one of them.
how to kill.
if only it were not so difficult to distinguish
the faces. why
is my mouth lowered
to the red river?
i see yr face mike bending
to the blood.
thirst will not be denied.

4.

mad mike the painter
became the first of the summer killers
murdered
mad mike the painter

he stumbled thru the streets
his body he hung like butchered meat in a window of his
stolen visions
he loved with fear
his killer head was shaved
they burned his warped & gorgeous brain with electricity
in the fury of his brush
he saw himself saint prophet
sent to paint the end of terror
wd have transformed all all
wanted man to suck his cock give him dope take as a simple
gift his eyes his eyes to see thru his eyes
to fly with his wings of dead birds

his eyes his eyes his hands
the visions that crippled them
he offered up as he
mad all the time whirling deranged desire stole
typewriters to
pay for june / as who hasnt / something
as bill burroughs sd:
'wdnt you?' you bet!

the killer goes direct / to the core / the root / where

life is
my killer brother
strangled my own brother killer
as i might murder my brother
murder me
explode any flesh. even as my city
is exploded

graves / all graves
desolate my city my soul
desolate the fragments of my murdered brother
desolate the mirrors of blood
flowing the crude paths
between the burial mounds

Publication. *Only Just Above the Ground, The Smith*, special issue 28 (1 March 1973), pp. 12–16.

[The murderers of children are among us]

the murderers
of children are among
us. disguised as clowns
& drunkards, they are often seen
carrying suitcases of unknown
content. they imperceptibly
switch names, noses, worlds.
none have yet been apprehended.
they wear the human shape
with ease. as tho
it were their own.

Publication. *Only Just Above the Ground*, *The Smith*, special issue 28 (1 March 1973), p. 17.

[Turned loose in the streets]

turned loose in the streets
we eat the earth itself in
search of visions

earth tastes like 50 billion years
earth tastes
like everything that ever died is in yr mouth clot—
ting yr teeth filling & packing
the throat. earth
tastes the tree that will
it tastes like grow
from the bellied earth we eat

when i began eating earth
i hoped i wd soon learn somehow
thru the taste, texture, consistency
of each mouth full /
 somehow
know the
taste of the earth fleeing the sun, the
taste of the moon's rejection, the taste
or god's own hand moving aside the void
to thrust his own mouth
into the earth, to eat
the earth

hoped i cd devour, ingest, make
integral with my flesh
all the time of man & not man
cities, graves, blood
the goddess descending, the murders of gods, the lovers,
 the water

the water
everything
must be there it seemed logical i
hoped. eating the earth
seeking vision

vision to vision, eating to mouth

out of earth grows flesh
& to the flesh earth eager returns
to fill the eyes & belly with its rich self
to send out feelers within, to
mate, sprout
begin to seed

Publication. *Only Just Above the Ground, The Smith*, special issue 28 (1 March 1973), pp. 18–19.

[That which is man]

that which is
man. called by that name.
with clumsy articulation
he pretends to sing. not
hearing its aged laughter, he .
cultivates the earth. he has gods.
they wear his face.

structures man builds, intricate
graphs he draws, speak to him
in his own words / that he is a
pinnacle, a completion.

the gods made of mirrors cannot
hide the clenched fist. bloody,
it is his arm.

2.

clever at changing his shattered masks
he hides the process from himself. purified
man is his only
vision as he crushes ants.
his proud walk prevents his
seeing himself a collection
of separate animals. gross in his own
image, his is their functioning.
he sees a moving thru
time / himself its ultimate.

something will be pleased
when his image collapses. that
the struggled climb
was no waste.

machine gun the belly of a crowd. winter
protects, the murderers sleep. even it is cold.

some things last, some dont seem to. what hurts is
true. can be touched. touches.

in cities bells ring. history is blind as it touches
the mouth.

even at best the race don't seem solid.
here. i have little faith in it.

Publication. *Only Just Above the Ground, The Smith*, special issue 28 (1 March 1973), pp. 20–23.

KOWBOY POMES

The complete 1973 sequence; for John Thomas

One

given, even, the drive
is towards life, how
do they deal with it?

the cock, the
cunt hidden: nobody sucks anybody
off.

whatever they do in their private mouths
dont interest me.

they ride into town
the heads of their horses high
their faces brown & windcracked.
i am not interested in their hands.

everyone
has to come over the mountain, on
this side it's
no great thing.

but what do they say of
fucking? of me? you? & all
the rest /

church bells
baseball

crapgames
wooden buildings & mud
streets frighten them

i say it like an old sounding /
who cant or wont chew
tobacco can hardly be expected to
suck a cunt, or to love
in any simple fashion

Publication. *Kowboy Pomes* (Golden, Colorado: Croupier Press, 1973), pp. 1–2.

Two

cant see it. getting
in them wagons with everything
walking the cattle gut-gaunted
kids & women, too, i hear

greed. greed.
hunger's
different.
flowers that sing & stones that
bud forth shoots?
hmp. crawl
over a thousand
mountains
they wont find no
true word

i asked a stranger on a
salt caked horse
& he sd: "never mind, y're
safe old
timer."

Publication. *Kowboy Pomes* (Golden, Colorado: Croupier Press, 1973), pp. 3–4.

Three: Orpheus

i rode into town
my voice & my horse & my legs
one melted thing

looking
for it, you cd say. dust in the nose
clogged runny eyes

i guess i smelled bad. i
stank. i smell bad now.
stink.

to sing & be
home, two things dont
seem to come together

no one had to say
anything. i just kept
moving, just keep moving

sometimes i think perhaps someone
will kill me.

i look as fierce as
cracked tongue
permits.

but it is the nature of
such places
not to be kind to
strange riders

once, tho, they broke
my guitar.
now i have a
jews harp.

Publication. *Kowboy Pomes* (Golden, Colorado: Croupier Press, 1973), pp. 5–6.

Four: Peyote Poem

no wonder those bones
white dry in the
 limitless
hot space
 lie there.

they get to.

Publication. *Kowboy Pomes* (Golden, Colorado: Croupier Press, 1973), p. 7.

Five: The Heroes

I.

face to face. is the gun
the poem?
is the sound the
poem, or the
echo?

face to
face.

dancing in &
out of the four naked eyes
the whole thing jumbled, too fast for tally or
style

the crumpled flesh, the birds that
hover for the invitation
of rot/

something is
hidden, there, something
waits

2.

it is on consideration of time that
the past cannot blind
us, cannot bring the sweat
rigid on the body

as tho to say
there is now no sun
no dust
no street
no risk & need that dance in the shimmering air
no visions of distance & of
that face so close & deadly on our own

3.

i wd think to look
where the vultures look: at the
meat. the dead
flesh. the broken face that
stalked & stared & took careful
watch, &
fell

at what even now
in these narrowed rooms
raises the smell of blood
to the nostrils

Publication. *Kowboy Pomes* (Golden, Colorado: Croupier Press, 1973), pp. 8–10.

Six: Pioneer Wives

women, women
you can crack that
whip, snap yr man
into place, slap the tobacco
from his mouth
buy sheep, build churches, sneer
at whores, wear
too many
clothes, whatever you
want I uplift, culture, you can even
give the place
tone

it's an economic law
about who's got what who wants
how badly

you all look very dignified in
old photos.
yr power shows in yr faces & yr men
are tired.

did you know you wd. become
great harridens
with huge hats?
 & look,
you never even
wiggled, just looked
martyred while he
did it
& now yr land is rotten & yr blood
is thin
yr faces are hard on the
faces of yr breed

only where there is still
space, yr smell
dont remind us all we
are strangling.

Publication. *Kowboy Pomes* (Golden, Colorado: Croupier Press, 1973), pp. 11–12.

Seven: The Buffalo

I.

as tho it all
swung on
the belly, the
gut being core &
pulse. the floor
of earth stinking
under its strange rug / rotting
flesh, stripped
naked.

man, who shivers & is mostly
hairless, wraps in such
skin.

yes, to be warm. not to say
it is good
to be warm, but
it is warm.

but wore no
mask with horns, drew no
stark pictures, begged no permission
for murder. was not brother
to the flesh stink, the slam
sharp hoof
against the ground.

after all, the
rails must be cleared, that's
money, the
crews must be
fed, that's
money.

the heroes must be given
their strut & lie, their
validity.

2.

so much flesh: man & jackal

greedy feeding
gutswelling glutting
snuffing snorting stuffing
faces into it

blood irrigates, grass
grows thick, cows
munch, the
rest is known

rot fertilizes, wheat
grows. steel
binds, the huge trains
bring touching
bring death
bring people
while he whose land it was
(must still
be)

is driven back by the stink
of decay. that was his
manna, those herds, those
shagged wise heads. meat his
unborn sons will cry for.
praying he has not committed
his gods to some evil thing
brooding over their own
deaths

his gods are warped
as his land is. the great
beasts his brothers his food
all bloat & belch & fat
& mean flesh of
furious futility

3.

what a gig that was. i dont know the wages, but each
morning into the unblooded sunlite white leather emblems
of virtue chewed soft by woman-tooth streaming straight
the wind. honor. carefully groomed, the beard, the mustache.

to bring in food. fresh meat running blood down work
& laugh twisted faces. as tho the whole thing swings on
the belly. & honor.

4.

we are a naked race
humans our skins unlovely & worth
little. makes good lampshades, is too thin
for practical purpose, so we steal
the skin & mount the great head & leave the flesh
behind. & hold our heads
high. we have pride.

they sought water, & so
moved. also the challenge of
horn to horn I those massive
heads clattered. as tho all swung on
power. & grass, who can
find it. grass which
the great beast clump munched
like the one beast it was

indian hunters, after prayer
& dance hid within
sacred skins. to see thru his eyes, crawl
to the core of his world

feed, sleep
nurse the young? what of those
transformed, who never
returned, moving over the rich
land, eating
grass, begetting
grass eaters?

weight & balance. the limits
long established.

5.

we put him on

money, stacked the money
into cities. now
we have america
& the buffalo
live fenced they are
innoculated & counted
each year there is an official
hunt & buffalo roast
appears in select
butcher cases

proving the
marketplace has memory &
honor, tradition selling the beast's
haunch & eye, his name, giving him stance with
superman & firecrackers

the gut primary
the ear anesthetized eyes
right! from metal
casts children
wd recognize him if his huge
head thrust thru electric doors
but he wd be sick as his
gods & brothers are, the buffalo
bird & buffalo flea
no longer with us or him. new
parasites, new relationships. no
space for him, anyway

even the coin he rides
so proud
dont buy much anymore.

venice, california, 1959/1960

Publication. *Kowboy Pomes* (Golden, Colorado: Croupier Press, 1973), pp. 13–20.

ALPHABET

The complete 1973 book; for Joan Thornton

Aleph

it is the man, himself
man
lord & master, the center
of his own
structured cosmology

it is
he is
the central point, the line
the direction taken
the road life walks thru his cells & stars

the power of the single
thrust, the pure
gesture of
self

its arithmetical value is 1

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 1.

Beth

a soft sound. a mouth
speaking. chanting. calling
the universe to account
for all pain / crippled growth / our world.

it is the entrance to
within himself, the interior
another
enclosed cosmos
protected
dark

who demands judgment?
man demands judgment
who is the victim?
man is the victim
who is the criminal?
man is the criminal
who is the singer?
man is the singer
who is the song?
who is the song?

its arithmetical value is 2

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 2.

Gimel

within the cave, it is dark. safe
tunneled deep into the mountain. safe
in the womb

traveling the long passage, moving
like song thru the throat to ultimate shaping
we see
the fire, the lite, day, the brite openness
dancing. darkness fragments. all known
patterns dissolve into shifting brilliances

now voices are raised in fear
now questions echo from the walls of the enclosure
some insist only the flickering shadows have reality
they make their prayers a worship of measurement & reflection
some try to turn back, to the black
their chants celebrate blindness

it is a natural rhythm brings forth
all, all, spewed into the lite
to take form
to sing, cry, fear, dance, love, pray, move
to be
to be flesh
to be man
within the totality
of his functioning

its arithmetical value is 3

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 3.

Daleth

the warm source. where we
suckle & worship. nipples streaming
the power that nourishes.
all that lives must eat. perhaps
that which does not live
eats also. drinking from
other breasts. a symmetry of
hunger & transformation
from which flows
the fact of our abundant flesh
the world we touch & move thru
the whole physical universe
nuzzles here, at this firm
flesh assurance of joy & energy

its arithmetical value is 4

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 4.

Hai

the divine winds upon the waters
before there was lite & dark
before there was beast, man, angel
the winds
the breath
moved

the divine breath entered the clay
entered the stolen bone
to become
life. spirit & flesh
breathing, flowing, moving
the waters &
the generations

the rhythm of our lungs echoes the movements of the waves
all air is spirit in which the souls fly free
i breathe the souls of all the dead & all the living
i breathe the poisons which man feeds the winds
i breathe the power & the death
i take it in, let it out, take it in, i am revived, i am alive
the waters move & i am alive

its arithmetical number is 5

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 5.

Vav

that which sees: the eye
that which is seen: the lite

what which hears: the ear
that which is heard: the wind, speaking

that which hungers: the need
that which tastes: the need

all are balanced on this precise
point, where eye & lite combine
to banish darkness
ear interlocks with the songs of the air
hungers feed

from darkness
 revelation

from silence
 revelation

from hunger
 revelation

its arithmetical number is 6

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 6.

Zayeen

the sound of a dropped
bomb, before it
hits, the long high shriek
piercing the air, opening the
air, before the earth
is erupted
is not language

the sound enormous exploding
fragmenting the stroke of the scream
definite, given, the point of
culmination
is not language

language demands
connections. delicate structures
must be firm
at the core

its arithmetical number is 7

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 7.

Cheth

from his perception of the fact of existence, man deduces purpose, visualises direction. a consecrated journey. he is driven by the hunger for its culmination. but he cannot devote his energies solely to its achievement.

all is movement, direction is multiple. perspective alone determines who is going up & who is going down. at each point there are critical demands.

two hands must carry many tools. all concerns insist upon absolute care & the equilibrium of craft skills.

the gestures of reality demand attention. there is no lens thru which the patterns themselves are revealed. there is a flow from need to need. the sum of the actions is its own completion.

its arithmetical number is 8

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 8.

Teth

a secret enclosure
is the best refuge
walled, protected

demons of despair cannot enter
mirror-faced terrors cannot penetrate
frozen wind fingers cannot reach

it is safe. not thieves' hands
nor corruption's breath
can touch
what is kept here, watched over
guarded constantly
in its holiness

its arithmetical value is 9

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 9.

Yod

with a thumb & four fingers anything can be held. the
hand. all power made visible in five fingers so structured.
history is the hand's fingers reaching, reaching for power.
history is the hand's finger pointing to the future. unknown,
unknowable. no tool held can carve its image. man as angel.
as debased monster. potential is infinite.

plato that it designated
everything tender
& delicate

its arithmetical number is 10

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 10.

Kaf

in the half-closed hand

is a fist

is a caress

is a tool

is a weapon

a hand raised in anger

searching

shaping & hanging on

a hand to drive nails thru

a hand to put wedding rings on

a hand to touch

a hand with which to wave farewell to life as it passes

its arithmetical value is 20

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 11.

Lamed

the wing: f

i am an extension
of the sky herself, who grasps
the bird's hollow-boned flesh
& flings it thru her vastness

the arm:

i am from
earth. i am her projection
towards
towards the sky
towards god's face
rooted, i reach

arm & wing:

together we are interwoven
to & from each other we move
we join, separate, fly, grow
rest as the bird
on the outstretched branch
sky feeding earth
earth thrusting upward

its arithmetical value is 30

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 12.

Mem

she is the mother
she is the lover
she is the mother
she is the companion
she is the mother
she is the friend
she stands unique

she is the mother
she is all giving
she is the lover
she is the source
she is the mother

she is the moon
she is the earth
she is the breasts
she is the blood
she is the sky
she is all flying
she is the trees
she is the food

she is both taken in & given out
she is both nourishment & death
she is all embracing & all forgiving
she is all tender & merciless
she knows & she does not forget

she is deceptive
she is seductive
she lies
she makes poems
she guards our lives from terror & gives ease
she destroys

she is She
she is She

its arithmetical number is 40

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), pp. 13–14.

Nun

here is
continuity. father to
son. this
is the son. the son
of man.

 living flesh
generation to generation
unending

it coils back upon itself
it perpetuates
it expands outward, encompassing
beginnings & endings
its arithmetical number is 50

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 15.

Samech

“ssssssss” sd the glittering
slitherer. & the mother of us all
understood. & by her wisdom
gave us our knowing, our searching
gave us our whole turbulent awareness

all she took in return
was a weary burden, an endlessness
for which we are not strong enuf

a hiss that echoes thru our cosmos

its arithmetical number is 60

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 16.

Ayeen

sound, sound, noise, a chaos
of noise is trapped inside the head
by an intricate balance of
echoing tunnelways, thinnest
of membranes
resounding

 meaningless. a
jumble. the total
sound.

 how then, does
it imply
everything crooked, low, perverted?

from confusion grows emptiness
from emptiness grows fear
from fear grows evil

its arithmetical number is 70

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 17.

Pei

the open mouth
thru which man makes himself
known. thru which
flows his inner world's voice
the songs of his spirit
the esoteric & the visible

its arithmetical value is 80

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 18.

Tzaddi

impaled on the hook of god, man is
pulled towards his true becoming

this holy wound is carried
as the living staff of healing

he is pulled thru the waters of his own growth
a fish not to be eaten but to be transformed

protected in his seeking
knowing his ultimate

destination

its arithmetical value is 90

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 19.

Kof

thru jungles of bones man stalks his family
tracing his history from the rocks
this letter implies the blackness of man's birthplace
the emptiness & terror from which his soul was formed
the ape, what we have left behind

but nothing is left behind, all is carried forward
on the threshold of angelhood
man will contain
his deepest beginnings

& none know
what will be lifted
to other levels

its arithmetical value is 100

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 20.

Resh

all questions resolve to one question: what is the real?
as we perceive it, within the head. making our sensing its
core.

from this point we move. the original centre, from which
radiates all direction. a standing alone.

its arithmetical number is 200

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 21.

Sheen

contained within
the bow's tense string
is the impelling music to which
all souls, all stars
dance time's festive halls
gowned! perfumed! jewelled! the dazzling
patterns intricate & courtly
a sweet rhyme eternal

its arithmetical value is 300

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 22.

Tav

rains fill the rivers which then fill the skies
man & the plants breathe mouth 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

8 april 1972 I 8 april 1973
larkspur, california

Publication. *Alphabet* (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1973), p. 23.

FROM *LOVE IS THE SILENCE*

Nonduplicative poems from the 1975 posthumous selection

A Token

“Why don’t you”

she said

“write poems any more

“to me?”

and indeed

why not?

neatly trimmed and limned and lined

have been

wheelbarrows as well as passions

a communication

across the room

of a marriage

“good morning darling

“is there coffee

“I’m late for work

“did the kids

eat lunch?”

Well,

did they?

What would it include?

a shout down the years of our mutual

enclosure.

the symbols of the loaf of bread

and

the

sharp

knife

read many different ways.

Publication. *Love Is the Silence: Poems 1948–1974*, ed. Paul Vangelisti (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1975), p. 6.

Pansies

D. H. Lawrence titled one of his last books of poems Pansies, a deliberate corruption of the French Pensees.

Pansies means thoughts, a book of quick sharp poems.
Or else it means young homosexuals, painted brittle
 blond colors for their lovers.
Didn't it use to mean a flower,
some sort of warm bright growing thing? I don't
even remember clearly what it looks like, but I always
 think of it
as having a face in the middle, and bright yellow
around itself, looking to the sun.

Well, the world changes around a flower, and now
in answer to its name the flower finds
a slender banned book,
and on the other hand the slender banned young men.
Book, flower, boys, all
with some sort of yellow around themselves,
looking for the sun.

Publication. *Love Is the Silence: Poems 1948–1974*, ed. Paul Vangelisti (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1975), p. 7.

The Suicide Room

I have within the head a room of death:
brown walls (the death of spring), a vague breath of
seasmell, a ring of knives of every kind
circling a centered mat.

The failing lives
to be accompanied by flat drums,
dovecooing horns, plucked strings.

The suppliant comes,
he sits upon the mat. Attendants bring
paper and pen. He wills his philosophy
to the world and binds his eyes. And blind he dies.

This is the room I go to when my mind
extends no further than its hidden doom.
I weld the music and the knives into
a power over deaths.

I leave the dead
within this room when I have held power
for long enough to go beyond the point
beyond which one cannot possibly go.

Publication. *Love Is the Silence: Poems 1948–1974*, ed. Paul Vangelisti (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1975), p. 8.

No Travelers down This Road

no travelers down this road
i wonder who's next
not to mention the birds! they're singing so loudly
goodbye, hello, whichever
is correct
i've misplaced my schedule
does the bus stop here?

brothers & sisters
husbands & wives
stunned & bewildered, stumbling
over anything

why are we crying? why?
& why are the birds so thunderous?
has someone got the time?

not only the names
have been lost
 (tho the names
 have been lost)
 even
 the desire for the names
has been lost

if this is the wrong road
(surely this is the wrong road!)
which is the right one?
if this is not me
who am i?
am i you?

Publication. *Love Is the Silence: Poems 1948–1974*, ed. Paul Vangelisti (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1975), p. 17.

Poem in My Thirtieth Summer

1.

i think others bleed to
feed my poems. christ may have
chosen, these seldom
know.

wounds / swallowed
into them, others
pain is what
i mean.

not to say no one
listens, that doesnt enter
it. ears & the tongue, the
breath, it is again
the flight of the bird, the whole
word. no. as the
attention turns
in, so might anything. the best
shown demands pity.

2.

i wont lick no sick
dont want to be leper-lover, dont want
to want it.

take yr hands off my
monster, he'll kill you, & i'll
laugh. the chimp
knows, ask
him if i hate. i do. & maybe
dig to see that blood.
nothing will grow, nothing
meet, no
touch. i havent choice.

3.

shd be obvious the birds
know what they have, laugh,

game.

can we know
& clumsy our loves to
each other?

the gull's morning is
real, up with the first lite, out
hungry, over the water, entering his
proper rhythm. yet i say
love. as tho to close
wounds, take blood taste from
the throat.

the body knows.
let the animal take
over. it is the single
voice, only, not
better or purer, not anything
but here. now. one man
saying one man's things

works clutter any street
no one tries to say
love
or touch
real
for good
reason

but what flows
my hand & draws blood, that
needs no sounding.

birds may
hurt with no
whimpers, but not men. no. i
cant do it.

4.

i move in
america, & still love
the tongue

surgeons were once
lowly, shops stank blood & piss.
who scrapes the bone of lie with dull & magic
knife now
differs but slightly.

walk close
to the ground. sing
close to the music. love
close to the body. that's all
i can say.

5.

any hand in any
life
destroys. the bird wing
tells me what i
am, that is to say, human.
the one
voice
is difficult enuf / here are
my own faces, here is
love. unspeakable. what but
the one man's
sound
isnt?

Publication. *Love Is the Silence: Poems 1948–1974*, ed. Paul Vangelisti (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1975), pp. 30–32.

Saturday Afternoon in the 1930's

to slip in while the usher is flashing his lite all thru the ththeatre & one of yr buddies got caught he's beginning to cry & will probably snitch. THEN TO WIN A PAIR OF ROLLER SKATES AT THE POPEYE CLUB TICKET STUB #691-183. that same day. & even munching popcorn, tho i dont know where it came from.

or how bob (curley) steele's hat never came off but after a fight he'd run his never his never took those tite gloves off hand thru his lhair. long & greasy. I always thot that he was wise to keep his hat on.

what do you call it? luck? or american magic? still, they closed one summer for repairs right at chapter nine of a buck rogers serial, & when they reopened in september they had a new serial entirely. they wdnt let my brother & me in in short pants one time. also once they threw me out for yelling too loudly for the hero.

to show all is not perfect.

but thru it all that hat stayed on that head: jump off an overhang, pull villain to the earth, bam! pow! the whole shot! roll in the dust, hat on head. swim in rivers, hat never comes off.

there's something special abt that kind of luck that kind of world too pure to be magic, & senseless, like so much of america

at least he didnt sing

it never bothered me, that strange american belief in its own purity. i was certainly not alone in my awareness that it was false.

flowers & revolutions grew in our ashpits. the adults of the world dont know how close they came in 1936 to losing the whole thing.

Publication. *Love Is the Silence: Poems 1948–1974*, ed. Paul Vangelisti (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1975), p. 33.

A Collage for Tristan Tzara

broken the
broken the
wood iron coal steel
an art gallery that sells collages in which there is a collage
 with a photograph of an art gallery that sells
 collages like the quaker oats man torn from a
 newspaper

tzara i am building this collage
of actual things because i no longer know
what is a poem
& because you are tristan tzara

heroin, tzara
marijuana
dreams & fears in many colors, dont forget them
on my wall it says:

wyatt earp
john garfield
dr fu manchu
pooh the poet
dr doolittle
dashiell hammett
the land of oz
i j singer
erich von stroheim
charlie chan
orson welles
captain midnite
the shadow
ben turpin
bunuel
alex berkman

the man who invented heroin
charlie parker
thelonious sphere monk
henry fonda

raymond chandler
tennyson
yeats
eliot
charlie brown
johnny mack brown
pound
john ford
wordsworth
sherlock holmes
jackson pollock
ma perkins
rembrandt
chaucer
raggedy ann
cocteau
dostoyevsky
edgar allen poe
michael gold
patchen
bob (curley) steele
robert creeley
kurt schwitters
people i dig
in no special order
She knows them all

& it says:

“remove the shoes which clothe yr feet, & you
will find that the ground upon which you stand
even now is holy ground.” —buber

into the collage with them, tzara, along with
MAN COMMITS SUICIDE WHEN HE DISCOVERS WORD WILL
NOT DESTROY RIPPED RIPPED RIPPED ANYTHING CD HAVE BE
A BABY'S FOOT MAYBE OR ANGEL WING TEAR TORN SLASHED
along with /
piles of bones
ththeatre tickets

do you think you recognise this collage, tzara?

no. it is the similarity of all chaos.

let me put me into the collage
tzara. let me put you in it
also.

tzara, they are glueing us
down. tzara, we are hanging in
a gallery. tzara, a fat rich woman is buying
us. for her house.

how's that, eh, tzara? never can tell
which way a collage
will go

Publication. *Love Is the Silence: Poems 1948–1974*, ed. Paul Vangelisti (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1975), pp. 34–36.

In Memoriam, Gary Cooper

coop because i know you
dont care i'll tell you
all my poems
are movies america electric blink blink blink
flashing neon zeon flicks flickering
heros heros heros big as the bond clothing people
on broadway or heads on rush
more

hey, coop! whoa! hey! shitkicking toe
no more.

dead.

great clumps of
hollywood burned the day you were
shot down by a warped orgone ray
yet old man reich died in federal jail for inventing
cancer but they wdnt have called
him in for you anyway cancer is sure
all american way to go coop
small consolation
doped up dieing while those ugly i mean to say
rich
houses under that
now dirty sign on that dirty brown hill: HOLLYWOOD
went to
flame
& you
just
went. toe digging dirty sly
eyeing jean arthur

dirty old man
jockstrap kept yr crotch flat
when the injuns were going to
burn you had you hanging

flat crotch hot katy jurade cdnt touch
yr lonely official tick tock cock at the
railroad train of terror

pure loo-
king cockless all
the way you

recognise me the director? my head turned
backwards legs tucked
tight into my feet? i dont know why
bother now y're dead
cancer eating your flesh like
a ranch breakfast flapjacks potatoes
bullets mimeographed scripts lots
of syrup eggs & no one puts
anything
in the coffee

whoa hi ho
makes me so jolly not just
the houses
burning burning burning
but the way you cancered so softly into
(did you gulp 'yup' just one more time?)
being dead is a
laugh, a big, tough (i'm laffing)
cowboy (i'm
laffing) you know
cant
die in bed while hollywood burns.

you
come back spit the fires
dead swoop on all out
laws & horses while yodeling
the canterbury tales & i'll
give you a comeback
role in the 'kowboy pomes'

dont pay much, but
beats dieing.

maybe.
anyway, so
long, coop.
yup!

Publication. *Love Is the Silence: Poems 1948–1974*, ed. Paul Vangelisti (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1975), pp. 37–39.

Some Aspects of Prison

for Frank Rios

5) THE HUMAN FLOW

the people are here because the machine is hungry
tho they know no more of this than do their guardians
not knowing, they must, as tho they knew
survive. or not survive. it is known some survive

(perhaps all are not equally appetizing
where there are so many the machine need not be gluttonous,

the history of this crowd of food
is hidden

as are the histories of the priests, the words, the machine itself
but the machine has the solidity of its own structure
the continuity of their functioning contains the guardians
the humans in their rhythms feed, but do not remember

there is an immediate recognition of danger
no man knows, as he walks
who next will be stricken, blinded, maddened
minds are withered, bodies broken, souls plucked out
seemingly at malicious random

the disputes at this level
are not over names
but over theories of effective action

if seven left leg limpers
were spared under the half-moon
while sixty-one others were devoured
the left leg limpers acquire manna

there is a great body of such beliefs
all magical in intention
they permeate the herd like seasoning

& none are reliable. some survive.
cd he sing? more song appears. & then
the singers are taken

was he servile? the boots of the guardians
shine brite under the slobber tongues
then three out of four footsuckers are taken

was he repentant? comes forth numerous sinners, loudly wailing
& all the saved, the safe ones, are taken

most find they are forced to depend on
quick footwork, peripheral vision, alertness, an ear for the rhythms
they find little security. most of them, also
the machine eats

in all its history of unbroken feeding
no portion of that flow has discovered
& passed on any awareness
of what they bring to that machine
the humans in their rhythms feed, but do not remember

not knowing they are machine-food
they blame the priests & guardians
who, not knowing they are only machine-feeders no matter what they name
their rituals
blame the animals they herd

the machine knows no concern with definition
its only interest is that its needs be met
a constant flow of humans is ingested

Publication. *Love Is the Silence: Poems 1948–1974*, ed. Paul Vangelisti (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1975), pp. 40–41.

Love Is the Silence

love is the silence out of which
woman speaks. the female
country, the grieving country.

i stole
those images from a
wild girl's mouth. i am a
witch. i deal with
death. she sd. i
struggle against it.

the poem
is my struggle, i sd. a different
craft.

tho once i hungered
where the two crafts cross
to take within my hands
that power
& jet it
at will.

her lips moved in the dark room. blue with
kissing that cold thing. woman is
silence, she sd.
a different craft.

Publication. *Love Is the Silence: Poems 1948–1974*, ed. Paul Vangelisti (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1975), p. 42.

Letter to Jack Hirschman

jack, let's talk

abt

the streets, OK? where

it's all

happening, right?

what do we want from them? not

more blood, no graduate courses

in human capabilities. dachau

was the streets. how many more

such roads

must we travel?

let's insist on vision

i will accept nothing less than miracles

all men are unhappy

camus sd

& everyone dies. a street

all share

perhaps it is a matter

of language

the sage says: man

is the language of

god. what creature or monster

forms our world

in its mouth?

where we walk

we know the dangers. if

the choice is between the streets

& literature

there is no choice

maybe we shd be talking

abt "joy". is that what you mean

by "streets" jack?

Publication. *Love Is the Silence: Poems 1948–1974*, ed. Paul Vangelisti (Los Angeles and Fairfax, California: Red Hill Press, 1975), p. 43.

RECORDED WORKS

Primary audio witnesses preserved with this edition

The recordings document the following titles and spoken openings. The list does not claim that every item is absent from later print collections; it identifies the performance record preserved in the downloaded primary sources.

A Token

We Are Forced to Wage War against Time

The Christian Philosphist in the White Cold Morning Said

On Unloading a Boxcar

Boplicity

At the End of the Uprising

The Barbarian from the North

Alba

After a Painting by John Hultberg

Bird

Black Burnt Hills Touch Snow at Their Backs

portions of The Venice Poems

A Child

For Dylan Thomas

Portrait

Invocation

Variation on a Letter to Jonathan Williams

Oh Para, Oh Dox

Alex Is Alex

The Birds, on the Beach

I Didn't Lift My Eyes from the Floor

Giant Numbskull Dingo

The Gulls Move through the Air

Blues for Billie Holiday

The Death of Arthur

The Clown

Letter to My Younger Brother

Peace

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TEXTUAL RECORD

Witnesses, variants, and unresolved bibliography

Feasts of Death, Feasts of Love. Set from the 1960 anthology witness, collated against the 1975 reprint. The anthology preserves undamaged text where the bound 1975 scan loses characters at the gutter.

Only Just Above the Ground. The seven verbal units are treated as discrete poems or sequence parts, including the prose-like opening field. The book prints sections 1, 2, and 4 in “The Summer: An Elegy”; no section 3 has been supplied. Abstract black fields are not transcribed as poems.

Kowboy Pomes. Set complete from the 1973 Croupier Press edition. Its internal numbering and insets are retained. The title page’s stylized letterforms do not govern the reset capitalization.

Alphabet. Set complete from the 1973 Red Hill Press edition. Hebrew-letter display glyphs are represented by the romanized poem titles; Wallace Berman’s book design remains documented by the archival plate.

Love Is the Silence. Eleven nonduplicative poems are reset. The book’s reprints of “Feasts of Death, Feasts of Love” and *Kowboy Pomes* are not duplicated. Paul Vangelisti’s prefatory note explicitly describes the volume as a posthumous selection rather than a definitive corpus.

The exact date of Perkoff’s death remains unresolved in reference sources, which give 14, 24, or 25 June 1974. The present edition therefore prints the verified year without selecting an unsupported day.

COLOPHON

Production record

This critical reading edition of *Stuart Perkoff: Collected Poems* was prepared for *Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry*. It is set in EB Garamond on a six-by-nine-inch page with mirrored inner and outer margins. All interior pages use the series cream stock color; the cover is built from clean source artwork with live Green-system typography. The final PDF includes embedded fonts, bookmarks, publication statements, and a linked contents structure.