A POEM FOR VIPERS

I sit in Lees. At 11:40 PM with
Jimmy the pusher. He teaches me
Ju Ju. Hot on the table before us
shrimp foo yong, rice and mushroom
chow yuke. Up the street under the wheels
of a strange car is his stash—The ritual.
We make it. And have made it.
For months now together after midnight.
Soon I know the fuzz will
interrupt, will arrest Jimmy and
I shall be placed on probation. The poem
does not lie to us. We lie under
its law, alive in the glamour of this hour
able to enter into the sacred places
of his dark people, who carry secrets
glassed in their eyes and hide words
under coats of their tongue.

(The Hotel Wentley Poems, 6.16.58)
A POEM FOR PAINTERS

Our age bereft of nobility
How can our faces show it?
I look for love.
My lips stand out
dry and cracked with want
of it.
Oh it is well.
My poem shall show the need for it.

Again we go driven by forces
we have no control over. Only
in the poem
comes an image that we rule
the line by the pen
in the painter's hand one foot
away from me.

Drawing the face
and its torture
That is why no one dares tackle it.
Held as they are in the hands
of forces they
cannot understand.
That despair
is on my face and shall show
in the fine lines of any man.

I had love once in the palm of my hand.
See the lines there.
How we played
its games, are playing now
in the bounds of white and heartless fields.

Fall down on my head, love,
drench my flesh in the streams
of fine sprays. Like
French perfume
so that I light up as
mountain glorys
and I am showered by the scent
of the finished line.
No circles
but that two parallels do cross
And carry our souls and bodies
together as the planets,
Showing light on the surface
of our skin, knowing
that so much of it flows through
the veins underneath.
Our cheeks puffed with it.
The pockets full.

2.

Pushed on by the incompletion
of what goes before me
I hesitate before this paper
scratching for the right words.

Paul Klee scratched for seven years
on smoked glass, to develop
his line, LaVigne says, look
at his face! he who has spent
all night drawing mine.

The sun also
rises on the rooftops, beginning
w/ violet. I begin in blue
knowing why we are cool.

3.

My middle name is Joseph and I
walk beside an ass on the way to what
Bethlehem, where a new babe is born.

Not the second hand of Yeats but
first prints on a cloudy windowpane.

America, you boil over

4.
The cauldron scalds.
Flesh is scarred.
Eyes shot.

The street aswarm with
vipers and heavy armed bandits.
There are bandages on the wounds
but blood flows unabated. The bath-
rooms are full. Oh stop up
the drains.
We are run over.

5.
Let me ramble here.
yet stay within my yardliness.
I go out of bounds
without defense,
oh attack.

6.
At last the game is over
and the line lengthens.
Let us stay with what we know.
That love is my strength, that
I am overpowered by it:
desire
that too
is on the face: gone stale.
When green was the bed my love
and I laid down upon.
Such it is, heart's complaint,
You hear upon a day in June.
And I see no end in view
when summer goes, as it will,
upon the roads, like singing
companions across the land.

Go with it man, if you must,
but leave us markers on the way.
South of Mission, Seattle, 
over the Sierra Mountains, 
the Middle West and Michigan, 
moving east again, easy 
coming into Chicago and 
the cattle country, calling 
to each other over canyons, 
careful not to be caught 
at night, they are still out, 
the destroyers, and down 
into the South, familiar land, 
lush places, blue mountains 
of Carolina, into Black Mountain 
and you can sleep out, or 
straight across the States

I cannot think of their names.

This nation is so large, like 
our hands, our love it lives 
with no lover, looking only 
for the beloved, back home 
into the heart, New York, 
New England, Vermont green 
mountains, and Massachusetts 
my city, Boston and the sea. 
Again to smell what this calm 
ocean cannot tell us. The seasons. 
Only the heart remembers 
and records in the words 
of works 
we lay down for those men 
who can come to them.

7.

At last. I come to the last defense.

My poems contain no 
    wilde beestes, no 
lady of the lake music 
of the spheres, or organ chants,
yet by these lines
I betray what little given me.

One needs no defense.

Only the score of a man's
struggle to stay with
what is his own, what
lies within him to do.

Without which is nothing,
for him or those who hear him
And I come to this,
knowing the waste, leaving

the rest up to love
and its twisted faces
my hands claw out at
only to draw back from the
blood already running there.

Oh come back, whatever heart
you have left. It is my life
you save. The poem is done.

(The Hotel Wentley Poems, 6.18.58)
A POEM FOR EARLY RISERS

I'm infused with the day
I'm out in it.

from the demons
who sit in blue
coats, carping
at us across the
tables. Oh they
go out the doors.
I am done with
them. I am
done with faces
I have seen before.

For me now the new.
The unturned tricks
of the trade: the Place
of the heart where man
is afraid to go.

It is not doors. It is
the ground of my soul
where dinosaurs left
their marks. Their tracks
are upon me. They
walk flatfooted.
Leave heavy heels
and turn sour the green
fields where I eat with
ease. It is good to
throw them up. Good
to have my stomach growl.
After all, I am possessed
by wild animals and
long haired men and
women who gallop
breaking over my beloved
places. Oh pull down
thy vanity man the
old man told us under
the tent. You are over-
run with ants.
2.

Man lines up for his breakfast in the dawn unawares of the jungle he has left behind in his sleep. Where the fields flourished with cacti, cauliflower, all the uneatable foods that the morning man perishes, if he remembered.

3.

And yet, we must remember. The old forest, the wild screams in the backyard or cries in the bedroom. It is ours to nourish. The nature to nurture. Dark places where the woman holds, hands us, herself handles an orange ball. Throwing it up for spring. Like the clot my grandfather vomited / months before he died of cancer. And spoke of later in terror.

(The Hotel Wentley Poems, 6.20.58)
A POEM FOR COCKSUCKERS

Well we can go
in the queer bars w/
our long hair reaching
down to the ground and
we can sing our songs
of love like the black mama
on the juke box, after all
what have we got left.

On our right the fairies
giggle in their lacquered
voices & blow
smoke in your eyes let them
it's a nigger's world
and we retain strength.
The gifts do no desert us,
fountains do no dry
up there are rivers running,
there are mountains
swelling for spring to cascade.

It is all here between
the powdered legs &
painted eyes of the fairy
friend who do not fail us
in our hour of
despair. Take not
away from me the small fires
I burn in the memory of love.

(The Hotel Wentley Poems, 6.20.58)
A GLIMPSE

There is a knot in the middle of my head
that will never be untied.

Two monkeys sit there
one on the right turned towards me, the
other crouched and turned

away. They
have red hair and do not play
with their chains. But sit on a ledge
above Venice? Anyway a city with canals
painted by Breughel, I see
them in a mirror when I look for my own face.

(unpublished manuscript, dated 1959)
KING SOLOMON'S MAGNETIC QUIZ

And when I went to the woods
   I heard the whispering of lovers
   ages ago. Was it
lights or my eyes playing tricks on me? The trees were
forms, was rain dropping on the ground like feet,
   fog and my own game at hand.
   On my back I saw

The stars creeping up the hill and thought of sex in the dark,
catching him surprised coming around some corner, cradling
   his cock in his hands. Hard it was
   on me to lay there
with only the ground under me. Bits of it stuck
   to my coat. Let it go
   I think; Rise up from this waste. There is no lover
   in the dark. No nightmare stallion

turning into a tree to see
   you; are alone. I rose and went out
   by the street bush I came in.

(for RC)

(unpublished manuscript, dated 1959)
LONG NOOK

There she took her lover to sea
and laid herself in the sand.
Go up and undress in the dark.

He is fast, was down the dune
with silk around his waist.
Her scarf was small.

She opened her clothes to the moon.
Her underarms were shaved.
The wind was a wall between them.

Waves break over the tide,
hands tied to her side with silk,
their mind was lost in the night.

The green light at Provincetown
became an emerald on the beach,
and like stars fell on Alabama.

*(Ace of Pentacles, 1964)*
THE SUCK

This morning
last evening, yes
terday afternoon

in the hall
your voice, full
of complement

turns to strike
someone you do not

know as a wife or brother,

shaking trembling
in your arms
sweating like seventeen

again under young middle-aged

bellies in the summer

(Nerves, 1970)
ACCEPTANCE

Should I wear a shadowed eye,
   grow mustaches
   delineate my chin

accept spit as offering,
   attach a silver earring
   grease my hair

give orders to legions
   of lovers to maintain manhood
scimitars away as souvenirs?

Sooush, beloved! here is my tongue.

(Nerves, 1970)
TO H.

I like Sunday evenings after you're here.  
I use your perfume to pretend you're near  
in the night. My eyes are bright, why  
can't I have a man of my own?

Your wife's necklace's around my neck  
and even though I do shave I pretend  
I'm a woman for you  
you make love to me like a man.

Even though I hear you say why man  
he doesn't even have any teeth  
when I take out my plate  
I make it up to you in other ways.

I will write this poem.

(Selected Poems, 1972)
WHAT HAPPENED?

Better than a closet martinet.
  Better than a locket
  in a lozenge.
  at the market, try and top it
  in the Ritz.

Better than a marmoset
  at the Grossets,
better than a mussel
  in your pockets.
  Better than a faucet
  for your locker,
  better not
clock it.
Better than a sachet
  in your cloche,
  better than a hatchet
  in Massachusetts,
  Ponkapog
  Pudget
  Sound
lost and found.

Better than an aspirin—
  aperitif does it.
Better not ask
  how you caught it
  what has happened to me?

Better not lack it—
  or packet in at the Rickenbackers.
  Better tack it back
  in a basket
  for Davy Crockett

Better not stack it.
  Better stash it
  on the moon.

  Oh Pomagranate
  ah Pawtucket.
Oh Winsocki or Narragansett.

Better not claue it. Better cash it in at Hackensack. Better not lock it up again.

*Cultural Affairs in Boston: Poetry & Prose 1956-1985, 1988*
DOLL

How many loves had I
in young boy's bed,
at Humarock, or Provincetown's
Cape Cod, under sweating summer sun,

after Land's End, before their interruption.
How many loves had I?

in discourse by firelight, after highballs
to records of Marlene Dietrich and Cole Porter,
how many loves had I?

in Swampscott flat, or Beacon Hill house,
Beacon Street garage or Fiedler overpass,
how many loves had I?

How many loves, in Annandale
before pavement or threat, in the Public Gardens
or Fifth Avenue park, how many loves—

None, none, none at all.

(Cultural Affairs in Boston: Poetry &
Prose 1956-1985, 1988)