THE PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON PORNOGRAPHY

By

Amy E. Vorro

RECOMMENDED:

[Signatures]

Advisory Committee Chair

Chair, Department of English

APPROVED:

[Signatures]

Dean, College of Liberal Arts

Dean of the Graduate School

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THE PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON PORNOGRAPHY

A

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty
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MASTER OF FINE ARTS

By

Amy E. Vorro, B.A.

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Abstract

The poems in this collection reflect various forms of maturation and their parallels with historic cultural shifts, specifically those typified in pop culture by the perceived climate of the 1970's. The poems contained in the first section, *Deep Throat*, focus on moments, taking the variables of place and sexuality heavily into account so as to explore 'the unmentionable' and their resonances for both the specifically female and generally human conditions, while simultaneously examining the personal implications. *Debbie Does Dallas*, the second section, continues along this vein, yet branches out to contemplate more imagined encounters and more specific taboos, sometimes through the use of traditional poetic forms. The third and final section, *Behind the Green Door*, steps through a doorway into the past: applying the same topics of maturation, taboos and sexuality to family structure, childhood and memory. *The President's Commission on Pornography* relies heavily on eccentric juxtaposition so as to stretch and investigate the amorphous boundaries of taboos, language and sexuality.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signature Page</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Deep Throat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep Throat</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hackensack, 6:42 AM</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Morning, the Large White Mammal Rolls Off and Out of the Way</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That Time I was Pregnant</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corner Bistro, 3:30 PM</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonoma, Time Well Spent</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If This Were a Movie</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ClusterFuck</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would You Like to Come in for a Drink?</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Can't We Just Hate Everybody?</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Debbie Does Dallas</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie Did Dallas</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Not to Say, Apparently</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survival Kit</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villanelle, Doggystyle</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career-ing</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Syllabus DICK 111x</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagism over the Sink, Eating Key Food Brand Peaches off Beth's Tiny Chapped Hands</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industriousness</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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I. Deep Throat

“A woman seeing this film may think that it is perfectly healthy, perfectly normal if you have a clitoral orgasm; this is all the woman needs. She is wrong. She is wrong. And this film will strengthen her in her ignorance.”

- NYC Prosecution, *Deep Throat v. City of New York*
Deep Throat

It wasn’t because Linda could swallow cock like a sleeve’ll snatch your hand… you ain’t heard nothin’.
Call it explicit, call it dirt complain that your grandma was watching. Wasn’t none of that, neither

Honey.
Nameless it was a tickle in Linda’s kind throat.
Named, it’s your clit. Ask that Dick.
Nixon who stamped it obscene.

Sugar,
Congress spread every pussy on the Hill. Cross-examined and filed them $P$ for Pornography.
Dangerously, pink covert sneers.

It was too late, Baby way too late.
No firm legislative hand could unspill that milk, or Watergate cover-up our new lay’a the land.

Sweetness…
none the ivy pricked suits
none of the president’s men
can commission
them stiff marbled
Dicks, again.
Hackensack, 6:42 AM

That was when a nod
became a fluid suggestion.
There, sipping the thick
winters' sleep from your mouth
under the rustle of morning traffic –
air brakes, engines and tires.
My heavy hand scattering
your cries over the room's early light.
Elastic plunge
a finger
limited vision
the tongue
full and hairy clench.

Your sighs make me let
the work bus pass right by.
Early Morning, the Large White Mammal Rolls Off and Out of the Way

Firm.
Set between my teeth
fresh pink and elastic
taut with blood and meat
ginger flecked
cold, exposed.
The last thing I see before sleep—
your shoulder.
That Time I was Pregnant

It was something I expected to remember.
but all that comes to mind
is the food.
Fried shrimp, lobster tails, sushi
anything, everything.
There was a lot of vomit, too.
A series of waiting rooms,
one big mother nurse
made me sit, I was pale.
Nice selection of cookies
in recovery.
Pills you might feed to a horse.

He brought me a pizza
probably some donuts, too.
I watched HBO, some movie
about geese
flying home.

Somewhere it grew fuzzy,
my eggs seem undisturbed.
Seafood still tastes great.
Corner Bistro, 3:30 PM

Through the tilted lapse
of a winter Tuesday
Peter paces the bar
collecting the pints
rinsing the pints
condensing the unspent
ketchups.

Midmorning regulars line
the crook of the bar
warm and quilted
well-fed cocky old crows.
Franklin leans on his fist
humming jukebox jazz,
Sal drops in, Sal drops out.
The door yawns cold air in
(feet shuffle to smoke)
all toast a round from John Mo'.

Luiz sets the burgers
and hustle aside
lifts his camera
fresh belief in the snow.
Sonoma, Time Well Spent

Carving new rows
turning my damp
earth loose,
coiling past
heaven-bent trees.
Wire and bristle.
Languid, cows grazing
wine-country slopes
your tongue
foraging up my legs
down the margin of my hip,
tugging a root
to the surface.
If This Were a Movie

I'd leave this orange
subway seat and wait on
the opposite platform
to backtrack.
Mosaic station walls
would wrinkle by
slower than ever before.
I'd storm the parting doors
mount the damp stairs
into the air, onto your block –
past a meat store
that sold us some
memorable roasts –
to your door, punching
the erratic buzzer button, as if
I could alter the chimes.
If this were a movie
toupee Rob might swish by:
he loves your muscles,
can't remember your name.
Upstairs shag would meet stone
at the faux fireplace
an apartment that's every porn
set from the 70's and
no one would complain
about his'n her showerheads.
Upstairs the floor might vibrate
between 8 and 5 from
Bleach House dryers below,
but the fire escape would seem
sturdy and we'd spread Steve's
vintage Playboys in the sun
to the tune of Mr. Softee's
clarion ice cream call.
Upstairs, I'd snap
from my life
(cancel my checking account
and my lover)
returning to the sag
of your couch,
under your sloppy fine grin.
All the skinflint
fibers would settle
to complete a picture
that's been lacking.
Space revolves inside of me
could comfort fill it?
But I stay on this train,
two empty hours from Queens.
Your furniture is in good repair;
dirty dishes lay wait in my sink.
On every bolt that holds this car
together on the track
rests a thousand ways
I cannot say I'm sorry
I want to come home.
ClusterFuck

Back your children away from me,
hide the ones you love –
the girl, the lover, the tease, your friend is coming and she,
I, will make you wish he had never touched you.
Make you want to be just another woman in the park,
drunk from your own love, being the someone to anyone else
waiting for the perfect Joe to come along
and grovel at your bloody knees, letting you hit him back into his bed
over and over throwing her, me, his toy,
into his face as that man you shouldn’t know waits
in the closet for him, your husband, to leave.
Would You Like to Come in for a Drink?

I usually don’t ask men in when
my place is in such a state
but I like you.

Don’t mind the mess.
These? Oh,
some stuff
old toys, mostly
never could decide where to put them.
Hard to believe they were ever new –
All factory-fresh and shiny!
Once my most noteworthy
playmates, now – bygone superheroes.

This one? The Bearded Redneck.
Came fully-furnished: a 70’s porn-set apartment
a creaky motorcycle, eyes blue
and adoring, adoring.
I didn’t mean to step on him like that.

There was a bloated Ken-doll,
had a lushous pink nose.
The Functioning Alcoholic…
that one never belonged to me,
had to give him back.

I’ve lost a bunch of them for good,
the Sadist disappeared somewhere
between moves, but wouldn’t you know
Art Teacher Guy’s über-pheromones
still torture my nose?

I can clean all this up if it bothers you?
I've loads of closet space, could scrub
all the corners down good.
But I never throw anything away.
Don't mind the mess...
Why Can’t We Hate Everyone?

Before you lunge
at any testicles,
lay the bread knife down.
Don’t think I haven’t known
those men: cocksure, hairy –
fumbling toward our breasts.
But I snipped my hair
short for years, Sisters
keep you from yanking me down.
My body’s not some temple
it’s where I like to get fucked.
Can you call a pussy helpless
with those claws?
There’s no way to respect you
when you’re drinking lowfat milk.
Eat. Take advantage
of your curves.
Let’s try and get
over ourselves –
you really must know
as equals
we’re all just a
bag of
assholes?
II. Debbie Does Dallas

“Look at the forms of capitalist expression. Pornographies: pornographies of love, erotic love, Christian love, boy-and-his-dog-love, pornographies of sunsets, pornographies of killing, and pornographies of deduction – ahh, that sigh when we guess the murderer – all these novels, these films and songs they lull us with, they’re approaches, more comfortable and less so, to that Absolute Comfort. . . . The self-induced orgasm.”

- Thomas Pynchon, Gravity’s Rainbow
Debbie Did Dallas

"Is sex dirty? Only if it's done right."
- Woody Allen, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex*

In my living room
when I was twelve.
White go-go boots
balding "high school"
quarterbacks.
One well-placed candle.

If I'd had one
it would've been hard.

Four years later
far from my peers
baby-faced radar
I wondered how to position
myself into such
convenient scenarios:
car-washing the lonely
suburban husband,
stocking an eager
salesman after hours.
But I lived in the woods
no stores, no neighbors
no pom-poms to ruffle.
Debbie did Dallas —
who was I supposed to do?
I couldn't even inspire
those notorious teachers
who sampled
student body wares.
A merciless wet hunger
despite my handmade efforts
refused to move.
So I packed it up everyday
with my books, my pens
my paper and carried it
low on my back
until a back seat beckoned
me into position.
Debbie Did Dallas,
why go so far when there's
churches, garages and libraries?
I had local bridges to bum,
covered and uncovered
my shit-kicker boots stomping
past boys, square onto men.
I did it with tireless hips
and pheromones, a continuous burn
like one well-placed candle,
pink and pleasant.
What Not to Say, Apparently

Tastes like grandma
Sure, you can slap me

I won’t fuck pretty people
Bacon tastes better raw

Want to play with my mercury?
Of course that will fit in my ass

You’re only saying that because I’m adopted
There’s no such thing as a free abortion

I’m fantastic in bed
You don’t like me, do you?

I refuse to use my uterus
You call that dancing?

Don’t bother, I’ll use my hips
I don’t have a best friend
Survival Kit

“A mind filled with thought,
identified with its own perceptions
beholds the mere forms of this world”
- Lao-Tzu, Tao Te Ching

cheeses
other active ingredients
sneezes felt below the belt
subway graffiti
lilacs full of bloom
Harpo Marx
hot tea, cold hands
Debbie Does Dallas
hats
dog toes
Shaker furniture
One Hundred Years of Solitude
beer guts
onomatopoeia
Max Von Sydow
mockery
Flatiron Building
soft tongues
manure by horses
letters by mail
Keith Richards
sign: sharpen your knives for the holidays
$10 corn dogs
Villanelle, Doggystyle

I nose against windows, I listen through doors
my body is shaped strange and wrong –
it only feels right if I’m down on all fours.

I rise every morning to change from before;
by noon when my form’s long since strong
I nose against windows, I listen through doors

Don’t know what I’m lacking, just know I need more
can’t even pretend to belong
it only feels right if I’m down on all fours.

I watch you around me, can’t help keeping score
and adding no bark to your song,
I nose against windows, I listen through doors

My body is changing, voice built to a roar
the new people touch me all wrong
it only feels right if I’m down on all fours.

Words don’t land lightly, my eyesight grown poor,
night is a nod, days never long
I nose against windows, I listen through doors
it only feels right if I’m down on all fours.
Career-ing

Pearl-swallowing, bread-wearing, shoe-rolling, finger-napping work
day-ringing, glass-nodding, book-rubbing, pencil-jamming
days
chair-offing, mouse-ripping, mail-yawning, window-reading
to
cube-climbing, file-running, grunt-slamming, paper-checking
death
lunch-typing, page-dodging, I-quitting, pointless-jobbing
days.
Course Syllabus DICK 111x
Survey of Early Encounters
Summer Sessions 1993

Classroom Location
Varies from week-to-week dependent upon availability of usable space (at instructor’s discretion)

Meeting Time
Family gatherings (contingent on whereabouts of instructor’s spouse)

Required Texts
Whatever you can find in your parents’ room.

Recommended Texts
Or in your brother’s dresser

Course Description
Introductory-level practicum to explore the seemingly endless points of penetration on your body. Hands-on instruction; specialized focus on tongue. Course topics may include, but not limited to:

- Fellatic Odyssey: the strong hand on the back of your head, defined
- Blood-to-Semen Ratio: solving complicated laundry problems
- Permutations in Rhetoric: why it’s not worth discussing
- Domestic Politics: encroaching marital and familial boundaries

Requirements
There is no formal discussion of the material at hand. This is not an independent study. If you do not choose a partner, one will be chosen for you. Submit to the instructor’s experience. Emphasis on practical applications. Occasional group work. As this is a new way
of behaving, confusions will naturally arise – wait to see if experimentation sheds new light on subject in question.

Projects
Tackle some issues as the learning experience progresses. Search in vain for patterns between each encounter. Chart your progress. How fast do you learn? Do you truly gain from the pain? How much can you take? Can you hide that knowing smile? What’s a vasectomy?

Term Paper
Construct a persuasive argument as to why you return late. Be sure to take the opposing side’s evidence into account, such as two small miles between your house and his, or the Old Spice smell on your pants. Some outside sources necessary.

Examinations
Quizzes come in the form of sporadic, pop pregnancy tests measuring your ability to manage anxiety, anticipate potential dilemmas and piss on a tiny absorbent stick. In lieu of formal exams, engage peers in analytic conversations on related topics, careful not to reveal your firsthand knowledge for purpose of objectivity (emphasis on vagaries).

Attendance Policy
Remain available; expect to be present in body, not always in mind.

Grading
Only a thorough mastery of the basic skill set will prepare you for more advanced topics in your future studies across the curriculum.

Sufficient competence is surprisingly elusive; never underestimate the benefits of rigorous practice and extracurricular engagements. You will be judged continually for the effectiveness and originality of your individual contributions to the discipline.

There is no final score.
Imagism over the Sink, Eating Key Food Brand Peaches off Beth's Tiny Chapped Hands

Like upturned children
down warm aluminum slides:
    fibrous crimson meat crescents
(our acid-tipped, fingersuck glide).
Industriousness

So when you left me
I ate off my mother's spoons,
bobbed for beer bottle bottoms,
emptied my eyes with words and
crawled the crisp nights straight.

But when I miss you
I meet fistfuls of dogs on the street,
dance through my room in eddies,
swallow my pancakes with butter and
sweep the floor with my knees.

And when I wake
I will laugh through my nose about ponies,
will yawn from the bottom of my toes,
will swim through my blankets for treasures and
will never come up for air.
A Meal Alone

I speak for the underrepresented art of eating a meal alone. A misunderstood act, feared even. Void of distraction potential dialogue gleams from the plate: shadows wink wet messages across ketchup, answering the burger's moist sigh when you bite the kind conversation to comfort even an upset butter knife.

Become a regular, just dollars a day with good tips. Pie on your birthday! Your name on the bill, not a number. Stake your claim on that table by the window there's surf n' turf to protect and a napkin supply with no end.

Feel at home and belong, keep your elbows aimed low talk through a mouthful of food, go ahead. You'll never eat alone again.
Weeks Starting, Weeks Ending in Jersey

Sundays
Paramus days
wavering
at McToole’s
sliding
whiskey treats
down
dancing
with Harvey
E.
arguing
with Harvey
Q.

One Saturday
one good
motorcycle day
bouncing
off a
Porsche
bumper
spilling
across the
on-ramp
pinching sex
ads from
the ditch
to pass
the time
until the engine
ceased
to flood . . .

Saturday, late
in the daze
our mouths
rich
with bar
foods
leaving big
tips
falling asleep
before the news
our hands
deep in
each others’
hair.

There were others
like Mondays
pants wouldn’t wear
dry days.
Wednesdays
in bed avoiding
the knife set days.
Or Thursdays.

Or days I walked
sucking oxygen
and begged by
the river at lunch.
III. Behind the Green Door

“All I must do now was stay sound and good in my head until morning when I would start to work again.”

- Ernest Hemmingway, *A Moveable Feast*
Behind the Green Door

Was there a green door?
No. A red one.

What was behind the red door?
*A bath. Some songs. Fire to warm the floors.*

What as behind the red door?
Many closed, brown doors.

What was inside?
*Piles. Family. Collected stuff.*

What did you learn?
*Everything. Except what mattered. Table manners.*

Who taught you?
*The radio, that I was lonely.*
*The TV, something ain't right.*

In the closets?
*Dumb rituals. More dumb rituals.*

Tables and chairs?
*Old. In constant repair.*

The distance between point A and point B?
*Never seemed justified.*

What was behind the red door?
*Wood smoke. Restlessness.*
What was behind the green door?

_A dirty movie. I wasn’t supposed to know._

Explanations?

_Always reached me late._

What was behind the red door?

_My blue room. A broken arm. Masturbation._

Unswept corners?

_Made me nervous._
Monologue of Distaste, the Formative Years

Unwind your cricket legs, long and bent, from around my face - I cannot breathe beneath your new growth hairs.

The rub of your bones, your long, dry skin against my thigh, no longer runs smooth, but trips among the bruises and storm of fatted hands, those slip-skin hands, they wait for any opening, every opening breaking the waves of my stomach.

Over my hips, along my knees, beyond my moist pink toes, I reach straining, flexing fingers, swimming against the flow of my forearms just to catch a touch of some salty, pale, white hairs.
The Perfect Dead Mushroom

Few things in life are as noteworthy as the perfect dead mushroom. Half the toil involved is recognizing this exceptional specimen: a brown, fleshy, bulbous spore-bearer of the puffball variety fairly exploding with expectancy.

Be prepared to spend the better part of an afternoon your head tilted in the downright position, as if inspecting your toes for lint. Nothing holds such great, volatile potentiality as the perfect dead mushroom. One must approach it in a respectful manner circumventing the perimeter with a quiet, appreciative gaze. Take a few cleansing breaths and address said growth in a confident, polite tone, stating your intentions. Assume the tactical position. Elevate your leg, foot poised directly over the flawless entity commence stomping.

The green-grey cloud of perfect dead mushroom dust that erupts around your shoes will validate your choice. Repeat as necessary until it comes to resemble a torn, lifeless, used vacuum-cleaner bag. Bring your leg to rest, step back a pace and survey the wreckage with satisfaction.

You may feel this act of violence undermines the function of the impeccable fungal unit. I assure you. This is the perfect dead mushroom realized. It is worth waiting for. Repeat as necessary.
Last Independence

Saw him at the Fourth of July parade, handing out bottles of Bud – as much sweat running off the silver caps as his own silver head. I remember back to the last fourth, the sticky morning between his sheets, legs dangling over the mattress, if it were a raft, kicking our toes in the waves.

Backyard, bare backs, bare feet deep; ant parade around our screwing to the colander of grapes. Wiped cheap apricot and him from my lips.

I saw him at the parade, he and Kevin eyeing the girls (younger ones every year). I march on.
Stewing

½ cook, crowded nudging you away from the stove
1 coil, burning relentless
   heat rumbling up the pot
   until a boil breaks the surface
1 tense search through the drawer for
1 long-handled spoon? Something to hold
   for the stir
   a return to the pot
   (drawer tipped on its head, empty)
1 scorched inch of stew
   heaved out the door
   dog won't eat it
   not hunger, desperation
1 cook reworks the recipe
   thickens the stock
   considers salt
   drawing you back
   carefully (hand cupped under offering)
1 teaspoonful at a time

Serves one two
Billy Jett

Billy pulled Christina’s toy sheep
all over the blacktop, singing

woo-woo lamb-y, woo-woo lamb-y

His toes that never touched
the ground, carrying him like
a storybook’s merry colt.
He sounded like a girl when he sang,
when he was angry, when we laughed
at him for not knowing how
to spell in-cyclopedia, the teachers
laughed because they could
until he stiffened and slumped
eyes rolled bright white — a seizure
a bad one, in Civics class.
In high school, Jen and I fed him sleeves
of cookies with milk between typing tests.
He left to live with his mother — choosing ignored, over beaten.
Last year Billy hugged me hello at the video store
limbs a little dirty, hair platinum blonde, overall thin.
There will never be enough oreos in the world
to say I’m sorry.
Donut Season

One afternoon out of every fall, they’d be there.
I’d soar off the school bus and run,
crunching down our gravel driveway,
past my grandmother’s blue Chevy,
and I’d know. They’d both be home, that day.
My mother at the counter flattening, pulling,
cutting the dough into round mouths saying oh.
My grandmother standing over the sink
deftly turning the next batch of donuts
floating on the simmering grease,
with the handle of our old wooden spoon.
They feel Grandma Borders over their shoulders
to see the mixing and rolling through.

Every autumn now, states and miles away,
I walk home to my new, steel kitchen
and stare down at my pink fingertips
still soft with inexperience
thinking of all the donuts I’ve come home to,
but never made.
Howard, Diagnosed

This doesn't change anything.
If it could have explained past behavior
  slapping the wife around
  humiliating your daughters
it might be worth remembering you, your ugly dumb words.
This doesn’t change anything

And what was good
  a tin lunchpail rattle
  the potato field –
  handkerchief a rooster-tail
  in your back pocket:
couldn’t amount to
one full night
of quiet useful Grandpa.
Winter, Long Distance

“How are you?”
“Fine”
(I went to Home Depot and decided to kill myself. Also bought some insulation, just in case)

“We’re going on a cruise!”
“Great. Where to?”
(I make $9,000 a year and spend it on petroleum products. Peanut butter and kibble)

“Are you staying warm?”
“Yes. The cabin’s cozy.”
(My hands turned black yesterday. You wouldn’t believe how cold my bed gets. I’m still alone.)

“How’s work?”
“Great. Busy!”
(I fuck everything up. But no one seems to notice. There’s talk of a promotion. College was wasted on me)

“Do you want to speak to your brother?”
“Sure.”
(I’m adopted. What’s his excuse?)

“Coyotes ate your cat.”
“Poor kitty.”
(Shes vomits mice on the carpet and crapped in your slippers. You put her to sleep)

“Your Grandmother was asking about you”
“Give her my love”
(Shes thinks Roosevelt is president and can’t control her bowels. Is she still in that nursing home the state tried to shut down?)
"We're trading the car in."
“What are you buying next?”
(I'm pretty sure all my screwing in the backseat will hurt the resale value. Sorry about that)

“Do you remember that man your father worked for?”
“Eddy. Sure.”
(The one who groped me at the Christmas party when I was ten. My therapist says I’m making progress. Christmas makes me puke)

“He died.”
“Too bad.”
(Too bad. He had nice strong hands, soft . . . progress is subjective)

“Take care. Bye.”
“Bye.”
(I might walk into traffic. Haven’t decided yet. Hope someone thinks to feed the dog)
Theories, a Chronological History

This is not a doll's carriage. This is a motorcycle.

On M*A*S*H they call one man Father. They miss their own dads, back home.

I have my father's eyes.

Radio stations play the same song, over and over.

I'm blonde. Like those kids on TV.

Only Catholics eat kielbasa.

I'd have friends if I had the right earrings.

If I act angry someone will ask me about it.

If I don't wear pants during the fire drill, he'll notice me.

You're one fuck I'll never regret.

Grandpa raped Grandma to make Auntie.

Grandma was probably a dyke.
Nurture v. Nature, a Family Sonnet

I read like a casebook: what's mine, what's yours
My behavior, my allergies — ripe clues
Ears soft for music, head missing red hairs
Skin green and legs short, eyes brown among blues.
Our manners are perfect, stiff and unkind
We spoil our dogs and eat lots of meat
Notions of strangeness raise barns in my mind
Sensing my structure falls short from complete.
I looked past our town, in search to lose home
Dulled minds rubbing blankly, bored and deranged
I found it so warm, being lost and unknown
You, once my closest, became the most strange.
I'm best in small doses, sorry to say
Don't try to find me, stay out of the way.