

20

Menopause and Desire, or 452 Positions on Love

MERCILEE M. JENKINS

INTRODUCTION

I began writing this piece with a poem about cleaning my refrigerator as a metaphor for dealing with the decay of past relationships. Gradually I realized that my theme was menopause and desire. I have never seen these two topics connected before and I felt it was high time they were. *Menopause and Desire* evolved in New York, during my sabbatical where I worked with Suzanne Bennett as director and Rae C. Wright as an actor interested in performing the monolog. Out of the work came the poems entitled “Bureau of Appropriate Self-Disclosure,” “Civil Service, NYC,” and “452 Positions on Love” which ended up in the final draft. A trip to Bourbon Street in New Orleans sparked my remembrances of all I went through after I had a mastectomy, so I started working on “Show Us Your Tits”

when I got back to San Francisco. I had written one other poem about having breast cancer (“What to Do When You Find Out You Have Breast Cancer”) when I was asked to speak at a local gay church during Breast Cancer Awareness month a few years ago.

I was invited to perform at the San Francisco Fringe Festival in 2002, thanks to Stephanie Weisman, Artistic Director of The Marsh, a venue where I have presented several of my plays and performance pieces. I decided *Menopause and Desire* would be composed of interconnected prose poems and scenes dealing with such topics as sexuality in middle age, how to admire the post-mastectomy body, and whether or not it is possible to learn anything about love, even if you live to be a hundred. “You Made Me Love You” was edited and revised from an earlier prose monolog into poetic form. I use the poetic form because it

SOURCE: This chapter was originally published as a part of “Menopause and Desire or 452 Positions on Love” in *Text & Performance Quarterly* (July 2005). Copyright © 2005 National Communications Association. Reprinted by permission.

offers an economy, rhythm, and imagery I don't evoke when I write in prose. I've written poetry since I first started keeping a journal at age eighteen, and my poems always seem to be the place where my truest feelings take shape.

The rest of the pieces were written during the summer of 2002, as I began to prepare for my upcoming performances. I was not only writing for performance but, through the act of performing, my writing was being tested and refined. Poems I loved were cut, as a cohesive script began to emerge from the juxtaposition of the parts. During this process, I recruited a male director because I wanted to include men in the audience, even though the M-word might scare them away. Ron Pelias served as dramaturg and director, and, as a fellow poet, encouraged me to bring out the sensuality of the writing in my performance, along with the sadness and humor.

When it comes to poetic traditions, I am inspired by the poets of the everyday conversations we have in our heads, such as Frank O'Hara (*Lunch Poems*) and the feminist poets I grew up on—Diane Wakoski (*Motorcycle Betrayal Poems*), Jessica Hagedorn (*Dangerous Music*) and Susan Griffin (*Like the Iris of an Eye*). They know how to look at a life, slice it up, and serve it on the best china. Here I offer up a slice of my own life for you to taste.

Menopause and Desire was first performed in its entirety for the 2002 San Francisco Fringe Festival and shortly thereafter at the Lake

Superior Festival in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan thanks to Gary Balfantz. In 2003, I presented the show for International Women's Day at Skyline College in San Bruno, California and most recently as a Distinguished Visiting Artist at California State University at Northridge and at the National Communication Association annual meeting in Miami. My ambition was to write a text that could be appreciated in performance and in print. I hesitated to add many stage directions or performance notes that might interrupt the lyric flow and interconnection of the pieces, which do reference each other at times. I will, however, sketch in some of the staging to help the reader visualize my performance. I do hope that there will be other performers of *Menopause and Desire* and that they will feel free to make it their own.

There are three major segments or scenes, which contain separate prose poems that are variations around the themes indicated by the scene titles. Each scene is introduced by a musical interlude during which I move matter-of-factly around the stage setting up the next scene, changing costume pieces, picking up props, etc. I think of the whole piece as being like a musical composition with the theme of menopause and desire and sub-themes concerning destiny, body image and secrecy reflecting and resonating with each other as they recur. (Note that only selected segments appear in this chapter.)

Scene 1: Destiny & Desire

"Civil Service, NYC"

"You Made Me Love You"

"Dialogue with Menopause & Desire"

Scene 2: Geography of Desire

"452 Positions"

"What to Do When You Find Out You Have Breast Cancer"

"Show Us Your Tits"

"Bureau of Appropriate Self-disclosure"

Scene 3: Secrets of Desire

"A Sign"

“Dyke March 2002-2003”

“Cleaning the Refrigerator”

SCENE 1: DESTINY & DESIRE

[The stage is set with a small square table and a chair mid-stage left and a bench arranged diagonally mid-stage right. There are strands of Mardi Gras beads hanging along the back wall of the stage and a bright colored paper parasol, which is covering a bucket of props. A bright colored feather boa hangs on the back wall stage right]

[omitted: “Civil Service, NYC”]

[I leave the post office area and walk to the table and chair as if I have come back to my office. I begin speaking standing behind the chair, which is facing the audience. I sit at the desk when talking with David in my office. I use stage right for our rehearsals and center stage for the lobby of the hotel. Intermittently I sing phrases from the song “You Made Me Love You”]

You Made Me Love You

If I were being honest with myself,
I'd have to say that before I met David,
I didn't like my students to get too close to me.

(sings) “*You made me love you.
I didn't want to do it.*”

He was very good looking—
tall, dark hair, coal button eyes
and cheekbones for days.
Native American—Osage tribe.
He claimed that's why he had “attitude.”
I didn't mind. Everybody's got something
you have to contend with.
He was smart, laughed at my jokes,
but we argued about who was funnier.
He could always get me
with some stupid joke.
Like his Xerox® allocation was bigger than mine,
and I, a professor, and he
a mere graduate teaching assistant.
He'd change the numbers on his memo,
casually leave it on my desk.
“How did you get 400 copies
and I only got 200?”
Midwestern gullibility
after all these years in California.

*"I didn't want to do it.
You made me love you."*

He was just a student in one of my classes
who kept coming to my office.
He said he wanted to be like me—
do theater and academics,
study gender and communication,
sexual identity—he was gay.
Then one day he announced that he had a crush on me.
I found that very endearing.
Here I'd been trying to write plays,
do research and teach all these years
and I just thought I was crazy.
Now I had a protégé.

*"And all the time you knew it.
I guess you always knew it."*

I woke up sick one morning
and called him to take over class for the first time.
He said, no problem. He'd love to do it.
He was never shy about speaking in public.
I fell right back to sleep which isn't like me
Usually I'd worry. I woke up and realized
I loved him. I trusted him.
At that time, I shared an office
with two other colleagues,
so David sat at my desk with me for a year.
Being a workaholic, I don't think I ever spent so much time
with anyone in such close quarters while awake.
We used to joke about getting married,
except we didn't think my girlfriend, Kay,
would approve, but we were noticeably a couple
parading up and down the hallways
always doing something, going somewhere together.
I knew he had AIDS, but then
he walked so fast.
I used to have trouble keeping up with him

"You made me happy sometimes. You made me glad."

That fall, we were rehearsing a few scenes
to perform at the conference in Atlanta
from my play, *Dangerous Beauty*.
It's a love story about a gay man

and a bisexual woman
that starts in the 70's and resumes after the earthquake in 1989. That second part was
mostly fiction,
until we started doing the play together.
Life and art intermingled
and I never could separate them after that.
We worked on every scene, but the love scene.
We joked that our director
wasn't ready for that.

"But there were times, dear, you made me feel so bad."

He arrived late the morning of our performance
in Atlanta, and we missed connections.
I was pacing the lobby and phoning him every 15 minutes.
Finally, we found each other, but I was furious.
So we go to my hotel room to have it out and rehearse,
but by the time we got into the elevator
I was over it and he was upset.
He started to cry and said,
"I'm only doing this for you."
I thought of the hours of rehearsal,
the long plane flight,
he had chosen to spend the time he had left
working with me.
I didn't know how sick he was.
He didn't want me to know.
It was my job to make sure he always had a future.

*"You made me sigh 'cause.
I didn't wanna tell you. I didn't wanna tell you.
I think you're grand. That's true. Yes, I do, 'deed I do, you know I do."*

During the rest of that conference,
people would stop us and compliment us
on our performance.
We were always going up and down escalators
in our dress-up clothes, getting lost in the hotel.
I chided him for being Native American
and having no sense of direction.
He said it was because we were so enamored
with ourselves and each other.
We even found time to get
the right blouse for my outfit.
A tunnel went from the hotel to Macy's.
We emerged amidst all this merchandise.

I stood there stunned but he swooped
 down on the racks of clothing and found me
 exactly the right shade blouse.
 And we were off again
 to hear another panel of speakers
 taking notes on the same pad of paper,
 an intertwining dialogue on all that we saw and heard.
 I hate these conferences, and here I was
 having the time of my life.
 When we got back
 sitting in the courtyard at school
 I told him I'd never be the same without him.
 I knew they would invent a drug to save him.
 It just came too late.
 By next fall he was gone.

*"I can't tell you what I'm feeling.
 The very mention of your name sends my heart reeling."*

And he did make me love him.
 It was really all his fault.
 It all started when he said
 he had a scholarship to pursue an M.A. at Arizona State,
 but he was thinking of staying in San Francisco because of me.
 Normally, I would have recommended
 that he go to a new school,
 tap into new resources and teachers.
 But as it happened we were walking down the street
 after a class dinner, and I just took his arm and said,
 "I think you'd better stay here with me."

"You know you made me love you."

[Song "You Made Me Love You" sung by Judy Garland comes up as I shift from the table and chair to the bench. I pick up the feather boa and hold it in my hands as the music fades out.]

David always said he didn't want to be around when I went through menopause. Now I know why.

Dialogue with Menopause & Desire

[Throughout this piece I sit, lie down, and move around on the bench striking various poses. The feather boa is draped seductively around Desire but hangs limply around Menopause]

Menopause: Desire, you're back?

Desire: Yeah, Menopause, I'm here. How you doin'?

- Menopause: OK, I guess. I've got my symptoms—hot flashes, headaches, my head feels like it's full of cotton batten, I think my hair is falling out, and I've got a vagina like the Sahara.
- Desire: Please, don't bore me with your medical history. That's not why I'm here.
- Menopause: OK, OK, sorry. Why are you here?
- Desire: You know. Don't you feel anything yet?
- Menopause: Well, let's see. I am feeling a little restless, unsatisfied, I haven't been sleeping that well.
- Desire: Yes, yes, anything else?
- Menopause: I don't know. I always seem to want something, but lately. . . .
- Desire: Yes?
- Menopause: I want sex.
- Desire: It's about time.
- Menopause: Why now, when most women my age have sworn off sex, relieved to be done with it all, not so dependent on having a mate.
- Desire: Everybody's different. Some people go through periods when they are too busy for passion. Know what I mean?
- Menopause: So I was busy still, why now?
- Desire: Let's see, your horoscope says, and I quote: "You know you're not happy when you get what you want. You need something to long for."
- Menopause: That's not true. I do so like getting what I want. I've just been a little moody lately. Do you think I've gained weight?
- Desire: You can't blame your whole personality on hormones.
- Menopause: Shut up. I have drive, that's all. OK, I'm driven.
- Desire: Face it, you're an incurable romantic. You are all about desire.
- Menopause: Maybe, but that doesn't mean I want desire now. Not for that.
- Desire: Why not? You're bisexual. You've got the whole world to choose from.
- Menopause: Not that that ever did me any good. I still managed to fall in love with the wrong person, at the wrong time, in the wrong place. And even when I do really love someone who loves me, it never lasts very long. Something bad always happens—we break up, they die, etc.
- Desire: You are so tragic. So you want me to go away, is that what you want?
- Menopause: Well, I didn't say that.
- Desire: Because I'm inconvenient?
- Menopause: It's not just that. Who's gonna want me, male or female, at this point in my life? Men like younger women. Women like younger women. It's not fair. Society is still sexist.
- Desire: Remember the little old lady in the post office. She got what she wanted.
- Menopause: Oh, please. That's not what I want. (*pause*) I'm into S & L relationships: sincere and lasting.
- Desire: Good. See, that wasn't so hard.
- Menopause: But it's too late for that now.
- Desire: I don't see why.
- Menopause: If I haven't been successful by now, what are my chances?
- Desire: You know better than to believe in percentages. (*pause*) But I could leave right now and you'll be stuck in your head intellectualizing like always.
- Menopause: No, no, don't leave, even though you are in my head. I like feeling desire, wanting someone, longing for him (*pause*) or her, imagining what it could be like.
- Desire: Then what are you going to do about it?
- Menopause: I don't know. Got any ideas?
- Desire: Yes, start with yourself. Get in touch with me and all I have to offer.
- Menopause: You mean masturbate?
- Desire: Not just that. Use your imagination. That's what you're really good at.
- Menopause: Yeah, I am good at that.

Desire: Go ahead, let yourself go. Dare to love whomever you want in whatever way you want. What have you got to lose? We'll get back to reality—

Menopause: —later.

[The song "Drift Away" by Dobie Grey fades up as I get ready for Scene 2. I hang the feather boa back up on the wall and go to the table and pick up a set of Xeroxed pages stapled together. When I am ready I move downstage center and the lights come up as the music fades and I begin.]

SCENE 2: GEOGRAPHY OF DESIRE

[omitted: "452 Positions on Love"]

[I deliver this piece as if I am making an impassioned speech to the audience, looking at individual audience members in different locations around the theatre every time I offer instructions on what you should do.]

What to Do When You Find Out You Have Breast Cancer

Call all your friends and ask them to help you.
Get mad as hell and rage at the medical industrial establishment
for not taking better care of you.
Blame the government for not taking better care of all women
and this planet.

If someone says,
What did you do to get this?
Say, I was born after World War II
during the time of above-ground nuclear testing.
All my life, I drank the water and breathed the air
that has been polluted by industry.
I worked too hard for the money I needed to live
and my heart has been broken because too many of my friends
have died of AIDS.
And no, breast cancer doesn't run in my family
but it's running like crazy through the family of woman.
Thirty years ago it was 1 in 20.
now it's 1 in 8.
But we're told there's no cause for concern.

Maybe it's our diet
we should eat less fat
until we disappear
no breasts to speak of
no flesh to nourish this disease.

If someone gives you the book
Love, Medicine and Miracles
(And they will)

Chapter 20: Menopause and Desire

287

first throw it across the room
because you don't want to hear about
how you are responsible for your own healing.
Then pick it up and read it
and find out the author thinks it's good to be a troublesome patient
and realize you are well on your way.

Do whatever you need to do
to make yourself feel whole again:
walk on the beach,
go dancing,
prune the garden with a fury,
have secret ceremonies by moonlight with witchy friends,
or rent a lot of old movies and cry as much as you can.

Go to the doctor.
When he pulls the drain out of your side
get a good look at your mastectomy scar,
then go out and get drunk.
When your doctor surprises you with the news
that now you are going to have chemotherapy,
go home
and ask your partner to cut off all your hair
because you're going to lose it anyway.
If the diagnosis doesn't kill you,
the cure sure feels like it will.

Tell the newspapers to ban all lingerie ads
since they only make you jealous
of women with two breasts of any size.
Tell your doctors and your well-meaning friends
you are not cheered up by the idea
that now you can get perfect fake breasts
to replace your middle aged natural ones
which you like just fine, thank-you-very-much
because they respond to sexual stimulation
and fake ones don't.
Funny we never seem to talk about that.

And you will find out things you don't want to know
like who your real friends are,
the ones who offer to help and mean it.
Or what your love relationship is all about.
Fifty percent of relationships break up
and not because you are abandoned
but because you can no longer afford to love people
who don't nurture you.

Find out how spiritual you really are.
 Don't be afraid to pray
 and ask whoever is "in"
 as you see it—that great being in the sky—
 to lift you up to where you belong
 and carry you on a dove's breath
 away from all this
 'cause you certainly don't belong here.

And tell yourself you love yourself
 even if you don't mean it.
 Tell yourself that every day
 until you do.
 That won't make up for the loss
 but it will take you to
 the next person you're going to be:
 wiser, more beautiful,
 capable of kicking ass and taking prisoners.
 And when they call you a
 "Cancer Survivor"
 tell them no
 you're much more than that.
 You're a whole woman inside out.
 You're a self-made woman
 and you celebrate life
 every time you think of it
 and you feel lucky
 and you bless your body and honor those who have died
 because that's what eventually happens to one out of three of us.
 So you tell that person
 that it's about so much more than surviving.
 It's about defining yourself by new rules
 even if you don't know
 how it's all going to end.

Show Us Your Tits

[New Orleans style music comes up during the segments on Bourbon Street, along with a change in lighting, which includes a disco ball rotating. I use the entire stage, picking up Mardi Gras beads and putting them on along the way as I move under the imaginary balconies and walk along the street. These segments alternate with my self-reflections on my decisions about what to do after I had a mastectomy.]

They are chanting from the balconies
 "Show us your tits."
 People who might otherwise
 run offices, invest your money or fix your car

are asking for such a display
in exchange for Mardi Gras beads.

[Put on strand of beads]

This is Bourbon Street in New Orleans
as it rises to its full height
of cocktail induced merriment
so they feel entitled.

I am shocked.

I thought this sort of thing only happened
during Mardi Gras.

This is an ordinary Tuesday night.

My companion looks up and
beckons for beads

so they wave and point to me,

"Show us your tits."

"Don't laugh and encourage them."

Thank you so much.

What are you going to show?"

We walk on

but I start to think of all the times

I have been asked to do just that

to demonstrate my womanhood.

First as a kid, "I'll show you mine, if
you show me yours" grows into the desire
for a bra, despite the lack of physical need.

I simply could not go on wearing
an undershirt in seventh grade.

I had to have the outline of a bra
underneath my blouse

So boys could say, "Are you a turtle?"

"No." "Then why do you snap?"

The same scene is taking place
under another balcony.

Here two young women egg each other on.

"Come on, go on. I will, if you will."

I see myself as a teenager on the swimming team
wearing an old-fashioned black nylon tank suit
made of filmy layers that cling
like transparent kelp when I emerge from the pool.
My teammate, Jenny, ascends the ladder with
her big beautiful breasts streaming with water
and threatening to escape their nylon second skin
but I notice I am sleek as a seal.

The young women cruising the strip seem prepared
 for this venture, wearing nothing underneath
 their tight stretchy tops.
 Am I the last woman on Bourbon Street wearing a bra?
 That's so ironic because I hate wearing one.

Through my teens I struggle with
 various models, shapes, sizes, padding or not.
 but the bra I remember most
 is the Merry Widow,
 a strapless white one like a corset,
 padded on top to give you cleavage.
 My breasts ignore this idea.
 The bra and I seem to move independently
 one trying to catch up with the other.
 Meanwhile, the boys grin and exchange glances
 and are more interested
 in talking to me.
 Is even the appearance of boobs
 so appealing?
 Fake or real doesn't matter.

I stopped wearing one in the 1970's.
 Thank heavens for the feminist movement.
 Bras are so uncomfortable
 and the straps always fall off your shoulders
 which makes you do this
[mimes pulling up straps]
 so you look unkempt and pathetic
 like you can't keep your clothes on.
 It's hard to make a serious point
 when you're doing that.
 I kept one dull white one
 for modesty's sake.
 Otherwise I wore nothing
 under my tight stretchy tops
 until I had a mastectomy.
[Pick up strand of beads]

"Show us your tits."
 another balcony full of revelers
 draws a crowd on the street
 waiting for someone to heed the call.
 Most flashers are young women
 but a few middle-aged women bare their
 well-preserved wares.
 The ritual is the same.

Their male companions merely hold their coats
and drinks and pick up the beads that hit the sidewalk
placing them carefully over their heads in tribute.

[Put on beads]

"Show us your tits."

I consider the possibilities.

During my political phase,
I firmly believe that no breast cancer survivor
should have reconstructive surgery.

[Hang beads over left breast]

We should proudly display
our lopsided chests so the world won't forget
how many of us there are.

My then girlfriend, Kay, says, "It doesn't matter to me."

But we weren't having sex anyway.

"Who can tell?" Another dear friend says,

"Your breasts weren't that big to begin with."

My straight friend, Richard, whose opinion

I solicit, says, "Well, it's not for everybody,
but on you it looks good."

I show my friend Sara,

in a restroom at a local dive after a few drinks.

She says it doesn't look so bad

but something flashes across her face

and what she says is not what she sees.

Bourbon Street is becoming almost impassable
for all the people walking along
with a drink in their hands. You feel naked without one.
Everyone seems to be genuinely having a good time
in this manufactured world
but it's too noisy to talk to each other.
So, we take refuge in a sex shop.

All along the wall hang translucent sex toys
dildos and vibrators in amazing shapes, sizes, colors
and compositions with variable speeds, battery or plug in.
Inflatable dolls with vaginas and plenty
of leather whips, collars, and handcuffs.
French ticklers and other condoms that
promise more than just safer sex.
Lubricants of all flavors. Nipple clamps.
Later we regret not buying the orgy kit.
What were we thinking? We'd just pick one up
at the local drug store?

Suddenly I am reminded of the aquarium
 we visited earlier that day. The fish swimming over us
 in the archway, the leafy gold dragon seahorses,
 the shark with dual torpedoes protruding underneath
 his smooth belly, the sensuous jellies
 delicately engulfing their prey with lacy transparency.
 The way it feels to pet a starfish
 sometimes firm, sometimes soft.
 "Look at that!" you say in your demented way
 in both places. "Look there's a pussy in the window"
 and I am surprised to see it is just a cat.
 This is what you and New Orleans have done to me.
 As we head for the door
 we overhear a woman at the counter ask:
 "Do you have some thing for the ass?"

Outside the street scene escalates.
"Show us your tits."
 Two young women above us kiss
 and one rubs the other's nipples
 simulating lesbian sex in a way that says
 we are not really lesbians. This is a man's fantasy
 of having two women. The crowd cheers and beads
 are thrown up to them. But still there's something sad
 about that gesture. I wonder why
 no woman shows her tits and then kisses her man.

I also consider getting a tattoo
 along my scar
[Arrange beads around scar]
 something feminist and faintly Native American
 and symbolic of the Solstice or something.
 Just like Deena Metzger did.
 She looked magnificent naked
 arms and legs spread wide
 on the cover of her cassette:
 "This Body, My Life."
 But that still leaves me flat chested
 since my other breast seems to disappear
 without its mate
 and who was going to see it anyway?
[Pick up beads]

A conservatively dressed matron
 who must have just removed her convention badge
 is dangling beads over her balcony

to entice young female flashers.
 Why do women participate in this as much as men?
 Is it objectification or desire?
 This street offers every sort of enticement
 for the body—food, drink, dancing, the erotic.
 Everywhere the drums beat
 the voodooienne's shop is on the corner
 young Christians pray for us around a large cross
 as we peek through a doorway at a naked woman
 then admire a shapely silhouette in shadow play before a window.

I want my boobs back.
 So I go to Nordstrom's
 to be fitted for a bra and prosthesis
 or fake boob, as I like to call it.
 Wearing my bra with the silicone mound inside
 you can't tell I'm missing one.
 It warms to skin temperature, the helpful clerk says.
 But not to the touch, I think.
 What will happen if I ever
 have a date again? What will I say?
 When should I broach the subject?
 Oh by the way, one of these is fake.
[Point to chest]
 No, darling, the whole thing.
 I'll let you guess which one.

"Show us your _____" what?
 Some of the women on the balconies
 beckon the men to reciprocate
 and showing their chests won't do
 they have to drop "trow" or moon the crowd
 but only the very drunk will comply.

I'm not satisfied with this bra stuffer for long.
 There are so many clothes I can't wear
 and I worry it will fall out and some dog
 will run away with it. It's happened, I'm telling you.
 So, next I try a stick-on boob.
 attachable to the skin on the chest.
[Demonstrate]
 First, mark the right spot with a white pencil
 then apply surgical glue
 and press a V shape form onto this spot.
 Wait a few minutes and then apply the boob
 which attaches via Velcro strips.

Thus in place, you can proceed without a bra
 to wear a spaghetti strap top or even a bathing suit.
 I'm delighted with this new extension of my body
 until one day when I'm seated on a bar stool
 wearing a tank top
 with one arm leaning on the bar
 like so
 having a drink with an attractive woman
 when I realize that my boob is no longer attached
 to my chest
 and instead is gently resting on my arm.
 I quickly put on my shirt and say:
 "Gee it's getting colder, guess the fog came
 in I've got to run, see you later."
 'Cause I'm a big phony with only one tit.
[Pick up beads]

We retrace our steps and see the same women
 flashing for new onlookers. To me the spontaneity is lost
[Put on beads]
 but you never seem to grow tired of this scene.
 Later you explain, it's not the breasts
 but the interaction of the crowd
 that holds your attention.

I decide to have reconstructive surgery.
 So I go to see a famous male plastic surgeon
 who gives me three options:
[Said as doctor]
 "Silicone implant, saline implant or
 trans-flap procedure
 where we take flesh from your stomach
 giving you a free tummy tuck
 then tunnel it up to your chest
 and make a breast of your own tissue,
 a more extensive operation—seven or eight hours.
 We have to cut the stomach muscles
 so the recovery is longer
 but the results are very promising.
 I've got someone here now I'd like to show you.
 She had large breasts but now she has
 lovely small ones, very natural looking."
 So I'm ushered into an examining room
 and she "*shows us her tits!*"
 very nice and even smaller than mine
 but she is over 6 feet and I'm 5'2"

They don't match the rest of her body.
 He doesn't see the whole picture
 only his creation, Dr. Frankenstein.
[Dr. Frankenstein accent]
 "I will make you the most glorious tits."
 I leave almost as quickly as I left that bar.

There has to be another way,
 so I find a female plastic surgeon.
 She understands my need
 to leave the other breast intact.
 Male physicians are always offering to
 give you two perfect C's while they're at it,
 by jacking up the other one with an implant.
 I also want my hair left in place.
 The one growing in the spot where
 my left nipple was.
 She agrees this is a nice "natural" touch.

After three operations, I now have
 a new left breast which I like very much
 although it's not quite the same as the old one.
 At first I thought it was just decorative
 but gradually the feeling is coming back
 because after all those connections
 are mostly in our heads.

"Show us your tits."
 We are getting tired and this might be my last chance.
 But one breast is sort of old and the other one is new.
 I wonder if the revelers would notice the difference
 between nature and plastic surgery.
 Has any woman with a mastectomy been so brave
 as to show her scar, her tattoo, a rebuilt boob
 on Bourbon Street?
 Would jewelry or despair rain down on me? Or would everyone
 pretend not to see, turn away and have another drink.
 Maybe tomorrow, I think as we saunter down the street
 arm in arm. Maybe tomorrow this sinner won't be saved
 and I'll do it.

[Music gets softer as I turn the chair around and sit backwards in it]

Back at the hotel
 I unhook my bra.
 You say they are just right
 a champagne glass full.

I do like to drink champagne
and so do you, we celebrate.
You know how to excite me
finding that magical current running
between my breasts and the rest of my body
sending shock waves through me
and afterward the tingling of every nerve
my skin glowing.

REFERENCES

- Griffin, Susan. *Like the Iris of an Eye*. New York: Harper & Row, 1976.
- Hagedorn, Jessica Tarahata. *Dangerous Music*. San Francisco: Mono Press, 1977.
- O'Hara, Frank. *Lunch Poems*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1964.
- Wakoski, Diane. *Motorcycle Betrayal Poems*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971.

Discussion Questions

1. The first excerpt explores a close relationship between a teacher and student. This topic is rarely openly discussed. How do you feel about student-faculty friendships, and how do sexual identities play a part in them?
2. The dialogue between Menopause and Desire illustrates how we are sometimes of two minds about our bodies and sexual desires. Have you ever felt that way?
3. The last excerpt deals with society's obsession with breasts from the perspective of a breast cancer survivor. Can you relate to any aspects of this? How does this piece relate to sexual identities and communication?