

**PINK STEAM**

**Dodie Bellamy**

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## Delinquent

It's not easy to love a delinquent girl.  
She's vulgar, she's coarse. She despises the world.  
— G.B. Jones *Retrospective*

Throughout most of the movie she is a victim of monstrous schoolmates and a monstrous mother, but when, at the end, she turns the tables, she herself becomes a kind of monstrous hero—hero insofar as she has risen against and defeated the forces of monstrosity, monster insofar as she has herself become excessive, demonic.  
— Carol Clover on *Carrie*

Paint was covering everything. That must mean that I destroy either myself or the world whenever I fuck.  
— Kathy Acker, *My Mother: Demonology*

Dear Kathy,

At Nayland's dinner you explained the dynamics to me: the bottom (you) is given permission by the top (whomever) to be bad. "Run down the street naked." "Okay." You can't be bad on your own because you were raised to behave, to curtsy to your mom's rich friends. I imagine a tiny homunculus of Kathy rotating on a pedestal as she recites Miss Manners' rules of etiquette like Bible verses. Here's a sick story from *my* childhood: when I was four and a barking dog frightened me, I climbed into my father's arms and cried, "Daddy, why don't you shoot that son of a bitch!" As my mother recalls this, tears of laughter come to her eyes. Beyond occasionally washing my mouth out with soap she didn't try to civilize me. I grew up with no internalized wall of Good to bounce my Bad against—maybe that's why I've never seriously gotten into S/M. "Run down the street naked." "Fuck no." All those instruments, those contraptions of containment—I'm more of a natural type of gal, morality flopping around me like a fish out of water.

In white gloves and ruffly slip little Kathy worshiped the girls who were bad:

*Bad means slimy or dripping with sexual juices thus messy and mean.* I knew that the rankest possible sperm was drooping out of the lips of these girls. While mouth sperm flowed in them, their hands moved under their skirts. They weren't awake without masturbating. They masturbated everywhere except when they were getting screwed.

I knew that the girls were dirtier than all these images.

I too was dirtier than these images. I used to crouch in the alley with the boys, rolling and mashing damp sand into lumpy cylinders we threw at one another, "Here, have a turd!" Giggle. "Fuck those mud pies!" Giggle. We talked dirty to establish dominance. My father was a construction worker—I could spout obscenities those boys had never heard. "Wow, Dodie you are so cool." Thus began I to use words to show off, to woo.

Later I would meet girls who actually were as wild as I thought boys were. Girls carrying cunts who breathed, like those monstrous clams I found on ocean wastes, slime each time they opened, the way I know a heart will if it's separated from the body: the vulnerability of openness.

I hadn't yet met a boy, except for a cousin who couldn't play basketball as well as I could, nor had I met one of these girls: I didn't need actual beings to know that they existed. And I knew something else. That I was akin to them because I was wild, but that my wildness consisted in my lack.

The wildness of lack: not an assertion of self but an emptying of self. Your badness rages around a void, the place of no-Kathy, the cunt. Things tumble into it. *The knife which was the extension of the murderer pierced her flesh. The flesh around the entry line became a cunt.* Like a command the knife penetrates the girl

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and the girl swallows back. *Your enormous lips are greedily parted and you secrete saliva like Pavlov's dog. Crying out for all of it, yes, and then wanting more, you wail.* In place of the self is an ever-renewable insatiable hunger, a chasm that devours the world: an obsessive buffet of indistinguishable lovers, the contents of a room, somebody else's story, a psyche, the master's blade. Writing is an eating disorder—you/it gulp(s) down the Brontës, Argento, Dickens, Leduc, Faulkner, Laure, von Sternberg, de Sade and spit(s) them back up. What comes out comes *from* the self but is *not* the self. *Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will not be at all.*

Gulp.

Feminism failed because women are thieves. Never having owned anything, not even their selves, they filch texts...souls...dreams...space. The text has no power over its own violation, thus its name is WOMAN.

When I was in junior high, bad girls rode the bus downtown to drink cherry cokes and to steal. They sat at the back smoking Kools and popping bubbles round as their teased heads. One girl purses her chalky pink lips, pulls out a tasteless wad of Bazooka, grinds her cigarette out in it and hurls it at me. In home ec Miss McMorrow says rats and roaches nest in her hair, in her never-washed AquaNet hair. Wrapped in candy-yellow angora her boyfriend's ring bulges from her finger; her stomach is flat as the Gene Pitney and Dion 45s stuffed down her stretch pants. When a bad girl flirted with another's boy, a skirmish would erupt in front of the school. Tits flopping back and forth like punching bags SLAP SLAP the girls kicked bit and scratched 'til they drew blood, pulled out crackly tufts of ratted hair. Eager for a glimpse of girdle or bra strap the boys rallied yelling, "Catfight! Catfight!" Afterward they patched their nylons with thick globs of nail polish that blotched their calves and thighs like a contagious disease. The hems of their wide cotton skirts were turned under half a foot or more and roughly stitched in place. Bad girls didn't trim away the excess material because they were lazy. I was lazy myself but bad girls didn't interest me, they were too much like my mother, coarse

and old. Whenever I raised my hand in class they hissed, "Shut up!" I was more like Carrie, the mousy weirdo who looks up "telekinesis" in the card catalog. An intellectual. Eventually the girls got pregnant—their cunts were made of bubble gum, sperm blew inside them swelling their bellies enormous. The boyfriends took back their rings.

In writing it's so easy for the worm to turn. Take the evil carnival crackpot...ZAP...he's a chicken man squawking in his own shit.

I'm sorry I used your affair with the Zen monk in my Mina letter. It's just that you exude a daring and panache that wallflowers like me only dream of. You and the monk, me and Kevin—we couldn't get into the Kafka movie because *Premiere* had given out twice as many passes as seats. Weaving through a mob of drips who kept bumping into one another desperate for their freebies I said, "Damn!" Whereas you, your shaved head swiveling across the overflowing auditorium, smiled and announced, "This is a very Kafka experience." See what I mean? Did the monk really have a picture of a Thai girl with a Coke bottle up her cunt? *All that is left is sex alone and its naked violence.*

Re: appropriation: my pastiches are the misdemeanors of a bicycle thief, while you Kathy Acker are grand auto all the way.

I realized that I no longer understood any customs or laws.

The realms of Death, where I've never been, have customs and laws which I don't know.

Who tells you to be bad in writing? Who commanded you to write "Clit City"? *Its walls were painted with manure. I was the only human here. Did Heathcliff, or better yet, Dario Argento appear to you in the night, "Write this down, slut!" The taxi driver pulls cunt hairs out of the surrounding flesh—part of the cunt's mind thought, I want to get out of here—"The school," she said, "was burning down." No. Our cunts.—she saw gigantic cat's*

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*eyes looking at her and touched the bottom of the cross, her cunt - blood streamed out of every part of her and made all of the apartment smell like bleeding cunt - maggots were coming out of my cunt because maggots come from meat - houses are cunts - maggots don't come out of cunts because maggots can be born only in dead flesh - I will come into the Sacred Heart of Blessed Jesus which is truly a cunt - cunts just want to be cunts - that's a cunt not a girl - in my dreams the cunt was triangular: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost - in the swampy regions of the cunt Charon rowed and plied his boat as if the skiff was a finger reaching up - Circe's cunt can summon up night, chaos and death.*

The text is Daddy and everything else is Mommy and you are the incredible voracious hole. Appropriation is another name for incest. Gulp.

I tried to end everything: to lose myself, to get rid of memory, to resemble whom I don't resemble, to end... Sometimes when I encountered myself, I was so strange that "I" had to be criminal - all the time I was totally polite and, simultaneously, my language was brutal, filthy,

I meet a star  
go and am there.

It's chic these days to toss around "transgression" as if it were an English word in a foreign language. Kinkiness as a cerebral exercise pisses me off - poseurs flaunting their tit clamps their "difference" - let's mutilate them let's destroy them let's suck their blood and spit it on the ground. As the Haitians told Maya Deren, "When the anthropologist arrives, the gods depart." Behind the transgression of obscenity, pleasure protrudes, "My cunt is a camera," the simple sensuous pleasure of rolling those words across my tongue and lips. You're right, Kathy, we could all use somebody to tell us to be bad. Mina Harker speaks through me, the voice of the vampire goddess - I sit down at the computer and pretend I'm in the alley with the boys again, "There's this really neat trick I do with sand."

*You run away from childhood like you flush a huge turd down the toilet – the taxi driver is a snob, the shit in my asshole – the dog shit right here becomes you – the headline said “BAN ABORTION” into the shit that was gurgling out of the black and brown gratings – when she came to she found herself lying in a shit pool that wasn’t going anywhere – two young girls are tranquilly shitting into the holy water basins – she spurts bits of shit forth so that the altar breaks into pieces beneath her – we’ll shit on you because you as politicians taught us what shit is – you fucking shitting skunk of a bumblebee – at last it is clear that the Church reels in its own shit and that every text is a text of desire.*

Shit is the oxygen of your literary atmosphere. The cunt is the mouth that breathes it in. Sex is a nightmare of effects: narrative discontinuity, abrupt changes in position and lighting, unexplained losses, confused durations – a writing with the primitivism of a stag film, that “seems to want to remind viewers of their position in the theater or at the smoker, on the edges of a frame that cannot be fully ‘penetrated,’ witnessing a spectacle that still has aspects of what could be called a (genital) *show* rather than identifying with actions of a temporally sequenced (genital) *event*.” (Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible”*) Our expectations fester, bleed, dissolve. You’re so good at being bad in your books that some fools assume you’re a dominatrix – straight men who need to be set even straighter. “I’m not a top, hon,” you drone matter-of-factly, “That’s not what I’m into.” As the Haitians told Maya Deren, “He who wears the shoe knows best where it pinches.”

*Life doesn’t exist inside language: too bad for me.*

My dynamic is more like this: I’m bopping along minding my own business and some people go *insane*. I could never understand why Miss McMorrow hated me. I eagerly cooked and sewed for her, and I always wanted to wear dresses, the frillier the better. I looked like a small tank in them but I loved them. Once I played Slaughter in a white blouse and wool sheath. The boys and I divided ourselves into two gangs, lined up facing one another, and when somebody yelled “Charge!”



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we raced and tackled. The side with someone left standing was the winner. My mother found me in the backyard writhing against some boy with my skirt hiked midhigh, kicking and biting like the mutant offspring of Audrey Hepburn and Godzilla. She freaked, "Dodie, you can't do that!" She grabbed my elbow and started pulling me back to the house. "But Mom, my team was *winning*." From behind her humongous glasses Miss McMorrow squints her squinty eyes, her frizzy red hair squints too, she shakes her finger and hisses, "Tomboy!"

*I don't belong in the normal world whose name is sanity.*

I threw down my flat-chested Betsy McCall and exclaimed to my best friend Pam, "Lets pretend we're boys today!" Skipping down the alley we hooted cusswords, climbed fences and dumpsters, knocked stuff over, pulled mildewed *Playboys* out of the garbage. I taught her how to make sand turds. When Pam went home filthy and disheveled, and confessed all to her mother, she wasn't allowed to play with me anymore. "Listen," I whispered to one of the female variety, "if you think that your vaginal smell is better than a rosebush's, you're kidding yourself." Kathy will at least go to the movies with me. Sometimes. You leave a message on my phone machine, "Sorry I didn't make it to *Army of Darkness*, but we just started fucking and I got majorly distracted." BAD. "It was fantastic."

*Let your cunt come outside your body and crawl, like a snail, along the flesh. Slither down your legs until there are trails of blood over the skin. Blood has an unmistakable smell. The cunt will travel, a sailor, to foreign lands. Will rub itself, like a dog, smell and be fucked.*

When Toronto artist and rock singer G.B. Jones visited my apartment one Thanksgiving she left behind an extra-large Fifth Column T-shirt and a fine orangy smudge of face powder on the phone receiver. Makeup is powerful. She lifted a pale hand and in her husky baritone whispered, "Call me Gloria." When I met the other band members I was surprised at what nice well-scrubbed girls they were, bouncy and jokey, writing quirky messages on anything I would push in front of their faces—it was like having an autograph session with the

Monkees, like having the Monkees in my very own living room—a far cry from Gloria's rendition on the T-shirt, tough girls in studded leather pouting up tons of attitude around a motorcycle, their poses aggressive and rough as G.B.'s technique, a drawing with the oomph of a prison tattoo. *I can only be concerned with the imaginary when I discuss reality or women.... Bad means slimy or dripping with sexual juices thus messy and mean.* G.B.'s glorification of the women-behind-bars mode echoes the philosophical confusion at the end of *Grease*, when Olivia Newton-John makes her glorious metamorphosis to black leather—if good becomes bad, could bad really be good? This bending of categories leads to what is for me the central question of postmodernism: what's the difference between a moral stance and fashion? Over my head I pull the stretchy white tube of the T-shirt. Gulp. I am swallowed by Art. I look down at the screened images—upside-down Caroline's face is as large as Gloria's torso. Directly beneath my chin a tiny skinhead guy floats behind the girls, his right leg growing out of the top of Caroline's head. I think of a line I stole from an artist on PBS: "Perspective gave us the artificial feeling we could get away from things." In G.B. Jones' drawings perspective is subverted—rather than allowing you to get away from "things," she fists them in your face. Good and bad battle across my chest until my breasts feel like two brothers on opposite sides of the Civil War. The coffee I spill on the T-shirt falls, appropriately, in the shape of an exclamation point beside Gloria's full spiky bangs. Wearing this T-shirt I dream killer mosquitoes have taken over the world, but there's an AIDS convention in town and it's discovered that AIDS blood will kill the mosquitoes and save humanity—this is a far cry from the popular monster antidote of '50s sci-fi: seawater, an ordinary substance, a simple liquid, innocuous. I sit up bare-assed on the edge of the bed scratching my forearm. Bad. Good.

I wish you had met her.

Love,  
Dodie