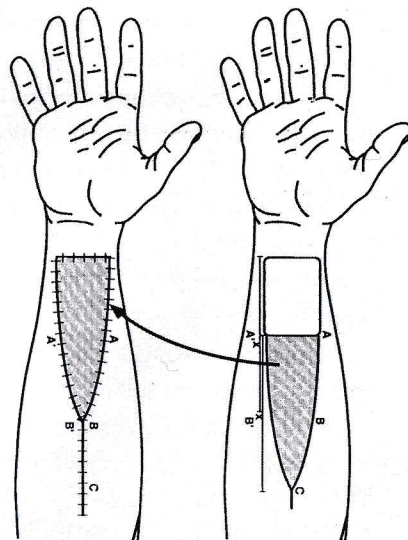


his superiority above all else, had now deigned to play the humiliating role of an old-fashioned good soul shocked by the modern generation of young women in order to lure me to the schoolgirl. By using his fuddy-duddy, avuncular indignation he was uniting us against himself, and, by means of old age and antiquated ways, he wanted to make me fall in love with youth and modernity. But Pimko had yet another, no less important, goal in mind. To make me fall in love was not enough — he wanted me to bond with her in the most immature way, it would not have served his designs for me to simply fall in love with her, no, he wanted me to become infatuated with that particularly trashy and disgusting young-old, modern-antiquated poetry born of the union of the prewar fuddy-duddy and the postwar schoolgirl. Obviously, the prof wished to participate, however indirectly, in my enchantment. Although utterly stupid, it was all ingeniously conceived, and therefore, imagining that I was totally free of Pimko, I listened to his inept old-uncle flatteries. Stupid me! I didn't know that only stupid poetry can really entangle you!

And out of nothing evolved a monstrous configuration, a horribly poetic cast of characters: there under the window the could-not-care-less, modern schoolgirl, here on the sofa the fuddy-duddy professor bemoaning postwar barbarism, and I, between the two of them, hemmed in by the young-old poetry. God help me! What about my thirty-yearold?! I must leave, leave as fast as I can! But the world seemed to have collapsed and reorganized itself on new principles, the thirty-year-old grew pale again and out-of-date, while the modern one, there by the window, grew ever more alluring. And the accursed Pimko would not let up.



DON QUIXOTE, WHICH WAS A DREAM (1986)

by Kathy Acker

THE FIRST PART OF DON QUIXOTE THE BEGINNING OF THE NIGHT: DON QUIXOTE'S ABORTION

When she was finally crazy because she was about to have an abortion, she conceived of the most insane idea that any woman can think of. Which is love. How can a woman love? By loving someone other than herself. She would love another person, she would right every manner of political, social, and individual wrong: she would put herself in those situations so perilous the glory of her name would resound. The abortion was about to take place:

From her neck to her knees she wore pale or puke green paper. This was her armour. She had chosen it specifically, for she knew that this world's conditions are so rough for any single person, even a rich person, that a person has to make do with what she can find: this's no world for idealism. Example: the green paper would tear as soon as the abortion began.

They told her they were going to take her from the operating chair to her own bed in a wheeling chair. The wheeling chair would be her transportation. She went out to look at it. It was dying. It had once been a hack, the same as all the hacks on grub street; now, as all the hacks, it was a full time drunk, mumbled all the time about sex and how no longer not even never did it but didn't have the wherewithal or equipment to do it, and hung around with the other bums. That is, women who're having abortions.

She decided that since she was setting out on the greatest adventure any person can take, that of the Holy Grail, she ought to have a name (identity). She had to name herself. When a doctor sticks a steel catheter into you while you're lying on your back and you do exactly what he and the nurses tell you to do; finally, blessedly, you let go of your mind. Letting go of your mind is dying. She needed a new life. She had to be named.

As we've said, her wheeling bed's name was 'Hack-kneed' or 'Hack-

neyed', meaning 'once a hack' or 'always a hack' or 'a writer' or 'an attempt to have an identity that always fails.' Just as 'Hackneyed' is the glorification or change from non-existence into existence of 'Hack-kneed', so, she decided, 'catheter' is the glorification of 'Kathy'. By taking on such a name which, being long, is male, she would be able to become a female-male or a night-knight.

Catharsis is the way to deal with evil. She polished up her green paper. In order to love, she had to find someone to love. "Why," she reasoned to herself, "do I have to love someone in order to love? Hasn't loving a man brought me to this abortion or state of death?"

"Why can't I just love?"

"Because every verb to be realised needs its object. Otherwise, having nothing to see, it can't see itself or be. Since love is sympathy or communication, I need an object which is both subject and object: to love, I must love a soul. Can a soul exist without a body? Is physical separate from mental? Just as love's object is the appearance of love; so the physical realm is the appearance of the godly: the mind is the body. This's why I'm having an abortion. So I can love." This's how Don Quixote decided to save the world.

What did this knight-to-be look like? All of the women except for two were middle-aged and dumpy. One of the young women was an English rose. The other young woman, wearing a long virginal dress, was about 19 years old and Irish. She had packed her best clothes and jewels and told her family she was going to a wedding. She was innocent: during her first internal, she had learned she was pregnant. When she reached London airport, the taxi-drivers, according to their duty, by giving her the run-around, made a lot of money. Confused, she either left her bag in a taxi or someone stole it. Her main problem, according to her, wasn't the abortion or the lost luggage, but how to ensure neither her family nor any of her friends ever found out she had had an abortion, for in Ireland an abortion is a major crime.

Why didn't Don Quixote resemble these women? Because to Don Quixote, having an abortion is a method of becoming a knight and saving the world. This is a vision. In English and most European societies, when

a woman becomes a knight, being no longer anonymous she receives a name. She's able to have adventures and save the world.

"Which of you was here first?" the receptionist asked. Nobody answered. The women were shy. The receptionist turned to the night-to-be. "Well, you're nearest to me. Give me your papers."

"I can't give you any papers because I don't have an identity yet. I didn't go to Oxford or Cambridge and I'm not English. This's why your law says I have to stay in the inn overnight. As soon as you dub me a knight—by tomorrow morning—and I have a name, I'll be able to give you my papers.

The receptionist, knowing that all women who're about to have abortions're crazy, assured the woman her abortion'd be over by nighttime. "I, myself," the receptionist confided, "used to be mad. I refuse to be a woman the way I was supposed to be. I travelled all over the world, looking for trouble. I prostituted myself, ran a few drugs—nothing hard—, exposed my genitalia to strange men while picking their pockets, broke-and-entered, lied to the only men I loved, told the men I didn't love the truth that I could never love them, fucked one man after another while telling each man I was being faithful to him alone, fucked men over, for, by fucking me over, they had taught me how to fuck them over. Generally, I was a bitch.

"Then I learned the error of my ways. I retired... from myself. Here... this little job ... I'm living off the income and property of others. Rather dead income and property. Like any good bourgeois," ending her introduction. "This place," throwing open her hands, "our sanctus sanitarium, is all of your place of safety. Here, we will save you. All of you who want to share your money with us." The receptionist extended her arms. "All night our nurses'll watch over you, and in the morning," to Don Quixote, "you'll be a knight," The receptionist asked the knight-to-be for her cash.

"I'm broke,"

"Why?"

"Why should I pay for an abortion? An abortion is nothing."

"You must know that nothing's free."

Since her whole heart was wanting to be a knight, she handed over the

money and prayed to the Moon, "Suck her, Oh Lady mine, this vassal heart in this first encounter; let not Your favour and protection fail me in the peril in which for the first time I now find myself."

Then she lay down on the hospital bed in the puke green paper they had given her. Having done this, she gathered up her armour, the puke green paper, again started pacing nervously up and down in the same calm manner as before.

She paced for three hours until they told her to piss again. This was the manner in which she pissed: "For women, Oh Woman who is all women who is my beauty, give me strength and vigour. Turn the eyes of the strength and wonderfulness of all women upon this one female, the female who's trying, at least you can say that for her this female who's locked up in the hospital and thus must pass through so formidable an adventure."

One hour later they told her to climb up pale and green-carpeted stairs. But she spoke so vigorously and was so undaunted in her being that she struck terror into those who were assailing her. For this reason they ceased attacking the knight-to-be: they told her to lie down on a narrow black-leather padded slab. A clean white sheet covered the slab. Her ass, especially, should lie in a crack.

"What's going to happen now?" Don Quixote asked.

The doctor, being none too pleased with the mad pranks on the part of his guest, (being determined to confer that accursed order of knight-hood or night-hood upon her before something else happened), showed her a curved needle. It was the wrong needle. They took away the needle. Before she turned her face away to the left side because she was scared of needles, she glimpsed a straight needle. According to what she had read about the ceremonial of the order, there was nothing to this business except a pinprick, and that can be performed anywhere. To become a knight, one must be completely hole-ly.

As she had read—which proves the truth of all writing—the needle when it went into her arm hardly hurt her. As the cold liquid seeped into an arm that didn't want it, she said that her name was Tolosa and she was the daughter of a shoemaker. When she woke up, she thanked them

for her pain and for what they had done for her. They thought her totally mad; they had never aborted a woman like this one. But now that she had achieved knighthood, and acted as she wanted and decided, for one has to act in this way in order to save the world, she neither noticed nor cared that all the people around her thought she was insane.

