

Tits of Clay: Genderphilia and Changing the World, One Lipstick at a Time

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I love the word femme. This is the real F-word, a word that makes people want, wonder, and worry. It's a cool word, a French word, a pretty word. It doesn't give away too much, but suggests a great deal. It hints at "female" and "feminine" and "femininity" and "femme fatale" without specifying any of those things or to what degree. It's indefinite but not ambiguous. It's sexy. Not just what it suggests or what it means, but the way it feels in your mouth: a single fleet syllable, light on the tongue, and it ends with "mmmm."

Femme is a genderphile's word.

A genderphile is someone who loves gender. Someone who is attracted to the what and the how and the when and the joy of how people create and remix and imagine.

I assume for the sake of argument that most of you are familiar with the difference between sex and gender, but in case this is new turf for anyone, the way I usually explain it is that sex is biology: your chromosomes, your hormones, and your anatomy. When you're born, what they look at before shouting "It's a girl!" or "It's a boy!": that's sex. Everything else—how you dress and talk and behave, how you interact with others, the social roles you perform, especially those that you perform by preference—is gender. As internationally famous gender theorist RuPaul put it, we're born naked, everything else is drag... or gender.

Genderphiles are people who love and are attracted to gender. We are passionate about it. We are attracted to the protean, changeable nature of the human animal as it expresses itself through countless flavors and mixtures of masculinity, androgyny, and femininity. We love the fine art of dancing gender against gender with other genderphiles, feeling for the moments of delicious friction, scintillating smoothness, and the heartstopping instants where the magnets line up, pulling one thing to another, *click*.

We genderphiles know that words like “femme” only tell us so much. It’s like the word “red.” Is it a tomato red? A blue-red? Is it translucent, opalescent, glossy, matte? Is it the red of a candy apple, the red of a fifty-year-old Burgundy, the red of the smear of lipstick you left on a lover’s collar, the red of the cop’s flashing lights as she pulls you over for taking it a little bit too fast? This is precisely why gender is so exciting, precisely why femme is so exciting: it tells you what to look for, but you never know precisely what form it will take.

Genderphiles understand that there are many more genders than there are sexes. We femmes understand this because we are attracted to gender, first of all, because we find it a fulfilling mode of self-expression as well as a font of revealing information about others, and we not only see but know from the inside that we can hang many different genders on ourselves without once changing our genitals. We also understand it because we so often have a long tough struggle to articulate to ourselves precisely what our gender is, to create ourselves in our own image so that we have a version of femininity that feels right to us, that feels like home. We know that femininity is right for us, but we also know that the femininity we prefer is not necessarily the same sort of femininity that was right for our mothers, our sisters, or

our friends. We've fought about it, too, but gender means too much to us to just give it up, or to give in to doing it exactly the way that someone else tells us we are supposed to. Compelled by genderphilia and our own femme stubbornness, we have mixed our very own shades of red.

This love of gender, this genderphilia, is one of the things that brings us together here at this conference and here in this room. We come here together in the face of a larger culture that is not genderphilic but actively genderphobic. The world we live in desperately wants there to be only two sexes and only two genders that go along with them in the strictest lockstep. In fact, sex and gender should, in their scheme of things, be virtually identical, so much so that they can print the word "gender" on a form when what they really mean is "sex" and expect everyone to blithely mark "F" or "M" in the box as if sex and gender really were exactly the same. Funny how they never realize that at least a few of us are putting down "F" because as far as we're concerned it stands for "femme."

Genderphiles color outside the lines. This is why our femme genderphilia—like all genderphilia—is dangerous, difficult, subversive. Let me say at the outset that yes, I do believe that the subversiveness of femme has a lot to do with homosexuality and bisexuality. But I do not think that this is the only source of the subversiveness of femme, and indeed not even the primary one. Femme is subversive because it breaks the gender rules and expectations of the larger culture in ways that are more elemental and wide-ranging than the fairly limited arena of what happens in anybody's love life or bedroom.

As femmes we do the gender dance all day, every day. Most of the time we end up doing it not with our co-conspirators in genderphilia, but with people who are—if

you will indulge me in continuing my metaphor—pretty much color blind. The people we deal with every day do not, in most cases, notice our genders at all beyond assessing whether or not we fit their preconceived notions about whatever appearance and behavior they think should coordinate with whatever sort of genitals they assume we have. Most people, as most of us well know, don't know from femme. Nor do they care.

We do. We have to. We have to care because we are femme on the bus, at work, at the grocery store, at family reunions, on the treadmill at the gym, and when we take our car in to the mechanic, not just when we're pillaging the local Sephora. Some people try to tell us that femme is easy. Okay, maybe they'll admit that femme is difficult if you were born without girl parts. But the rest of us have it easy. Why, living a gender that is congruent with your sex is a veritable spa vacation.

(Go ahead and laugh, I'll wait.)

The truth is that we femmes are femme when it makes everyone in the room sit up and take notice. We're femme when it gets us what we want. We're femme when it gets us condescended to. We're femme when it gets us dismissed. We're femme when it makes us invisible to our queer brothers and sisters. We're femme when it gets us yelled at and demeaned by people who think that the cure for gender-based oppression is no gender at all for anybody. Our femmeness, and the ways we do it and live it, shapes our lives for better as well as for worse. It is not simple. It is not easy. It is a subversive, complicated, tricky, potentially explosive variable in a calculus that goes on every day of our lives.

Our culture, Western culture, has very narrow ideas about what sorts of gendered behavior should be allowed. Femme allows much more breadth and depth of

femininity than is typically considered permissible — one of the reasons that femme is so often considered too much, too blatant, over the top, *oh my God, Donna, do you have to be so... femme?!* Femme is subversive. And what is most subversive about femme is that femme refuses to accept the looming insistence of our male-supremacist culture that femininity is inherently inferior.

We're not femmes because that's all we can manage, or because that's just what happened to us because we happened to be born with a particular set of genitals. We're not femme because being androgynous or butch is too much for our delicate little constitutions. We're femme because that's what feels honest and true and right to us, because it's worth doing, because femininity is good stuff.

It requires great resolve to be femme. It requires boldness and firmness of purpose. It requires a certain degree of ferocity, and a not insignificant amount of Zen. Femmes know that choosing not to act, at certain places and times or in certain ways, is not the same thing as being helpless or incapable of doing all those things if the need arises. We know that much of what we do will be taken for granted, because feminine work and feminine ways of doing things are usually disregarded as background noise, but we get the job done anyway. We also know that paying attention to surface and style does not in any way mean that we fail to see and comprehend what is beneath the surface. Woe betide the unsuspecting person who for some reason believes that searing intelligence can not coexist with a penchant for cute shoes. Femmes are forged in the hot fire of our culture's general everyday devaluation of all things female and feminine, and as a result we are made of very sturdy stuff indeed.

Femme is not easy. Neither are femmes easy. We're rarely what you expect. Not even our femininity is, because it's not just one femininity, it's hundreds and thousands of femininities, each carefully and lovingly customized over the weeks and months and years. There are femmes who wouldn't hammer a nail if they had a pink rhinestone-studded hammer to do it with. There are femmes who love their belt sanders. There are femmes who delight in all things domestic. There are femmes who regard Martha Stewart as a gender traitor. There are femmes who are devoutly and conventionally religious and femmes for whom the pursuit of the perfect lipstick is a spiritual path, and in some cases *these may be the very same people*. There are stompy boot femmes and Birkenstock femmes and femmes whose battle cry is "Give me Manolos or give me death!"...and there femmes like me who are still trying to come to grips with exactly what it means to their gender identity now that their orthopedist has forbidden them to wear heels. There are femmes for whom butches are the alpha and omega of their sexualities and femmes for whom other femmes are, femmes who top and bottom and switch. There are femmes who love men, or transmen, or androgynes, or who have pledged their hearts to the most outrageous gender pirates. There are femmes who are dykes and queers and queens and trannies. There are femmes who are lesbians. There are femmes who wouldn't say "lesbian" if they had a mouth full. Straight women can be femmes, too. There are feminist femmes. Womynist femmes. Apolitical femmes. There are radical genderphile femmes who revel in every microscopic bit of gendered variety. And there are femmes who think that all that variety is fine for other people but for themselves would rather that the word "femme" mean exactly what it meant in 1958 and that all those other people can find some other

word to use. Femme, as I've said before, only tells you to be alert for the color red. It does not tell you what precise shades of red you're going to see.

However it comes, though, femme is about femininity. Self-aware, freely-chosen, and most of all, *cherished* femininity is an enormous blow to the oppressive mainstream gender system. Because femininity is typically viewed as being an inherently passive state, and one that is worthless except insofar as it reflects well on masculinity, valuing femininity enough to elevate it to a central position in our identities and lives may well strike harder and deeper at the roots of gender and sex oppression than anything else we can do. The writer bell hooks has famously said that challenging the patriarchy means challenging men to change, and I believe this is true. But I also believe that changing the world means challenging people of all sexes and all genders to learn to cherish the feminine.

Let me unpack this for a few moments; it's a long history and an important one. Beginning in ancient Greece, and Rome, hundreds of years before the common era, women were believed scientifically to be imperfect men, their physical and mental development stunted or interrupted. Women were by nature soft where men were hard, passive where men were aggressive, smooth where men were hairy, less muscled where men were more muscled, dull where men were intelligent, incapable where men were capable. Even women's genitals were seen as being incompletely developed—the vagina and cervix were seen as an inside-out, tucked-in penis, which, had it only developed fully, would have descended to exist outside of the body as Nature clearly intended for genitals to do.

This was not something women were blamed for, no more than you would blame a horse for not being able to juggle. It was just the way things were.

Masculinity and maleness were the standard by which everything else was judged. All things female and feminine were categorically weaker, less finished, and less worthy.

This way of thinking about maleness and femaleness extended to other realms as well. Deformities and disabilities were also feminine, because they were evidence of imperfect development. Infancy and old age, as well as illness, were all frightfully emasculating because they meant dependency and fragility. Fatness was feminine: it softened and rounded the hard masculine body and betrayed a distinctively feminine lack of control over the body. But being too thin was troublesome too, because a lack of muscle or strength was, again, categorically feminine. To be male was to be hard, virile, strong, independent. Anything else, and everything else, was effeminate—that is to say *feminine*—and deserving of disdain.

For centuries, this essentialist paradigm established able-bodied, European males as the unquestioned standard for judging everything and everyone else. This basic mode of thinking ran throughout all of Western culture up to the very late nineteenth century, a little more than a hundred years ago. It still profoundly influences the way many people think and behave today, around the world and right here at home.

The notion that the feminine was inherently lesser than the masculine was used, for instance, to justify things like denying education to women on the grounds that their feminine brains “naturally” couldn’t handle it. Educated women were literally compared to dancing bears; an ancient misogynist rabbinical saying held that to teach a woman Torah (Bible) was to teach her *tiflut*, garbage, because she would not be capable of comprehending it, and the wrongness she would inevitably introduce would profane the holiness of the sacred text.

For all but the last very small sliver of Western history women have routinely been denied (among other things) the ability to

- Be legal persons
- Vote or hold public office (except hereditary office)
- Hold religious authority
- Own property or control their own money
- Divorce their spouses
- Control their fertility
- Have free choice in who they would marry
- Have free choice in whether or not to marry at all
- Make binding decisions about the rearing of their children
- Work for pay

In many places around the world, women are still denied some or all of these things. The rationale for preventing women from doing these things was that women were simply not competent; their inherent femininity made them weak and flawed and incapable.

But it has never been women only who have suffered because of the belief in feminine incompetence. The abuse and enslavement of non-Europeans by Europeans was justified by the very same arguments. Like women, people of color were labeled as having the feminine attributes of being “sensual,” “irrational,” “undeveloped,” and less intelligent. The reason they hadn’t risen to positions technologically and culturally similar to the Europeans was because Nature had not seen fit to give them the masculine gifts of intellect and reason with which the Europeans were blessed. Why, it was practically a kindness for white European men to bring their civilizing influences

to such poor effeminate throwbacks, whom they described quite literally as being as far from European men as European men themselves were from the angels.

And speaking of angels, the equation of “feminine” and “wrong” has long been played out in religious thinking, too. The angels were sexless. God was male. Eve, the first woman, was responsible for the downfall of mankind from Eden because she lacked Adam’s manly and obedient resolve... and the rest is history.

The doctrine of unworthy femininity is still with us in a million ways even today, even in things as seemingly minor as the common practice of refusing to allow male children to play with the “wrong” toys or wear the “wrong” colors. Little girls can be seen wearing blue and red while they play with dump trucks and toy trains in a lot of playrooms these days, but it is the rare parent indeed who buys a Barbie doll for a son or dresses him in pink.

Despite occasional, mostly intellectual, attacks, such as Christine de Pisan’s early fifteenth-century literary fantasy of a “City of Ladies,” disdain of the feminine has been firmly entrenched in Western culture since the beginning. It wasn’t until the late nineteenth century that women’s rights began to become a legitimate arena for progressive activists. And it has only been in the past century that most of the laws prohibiting women from equal access to public life have changed—and some of them still haven’t. But more to the point, legal change in regard to women only addresses one part of the problem. Changing laws does not necessarily change minds.

Femininity is still looked down upon, still denigrated, still cheapened and dismissed as silly and devoid of substance, superficial and worthless. People still suffer—and sometimes die—because they are “too girly” or “too femme.”

This oppression can be fairly subtle, for instance the fact that career advisors commonly tell women to avoid prints and florals for job interviews. Almost any woman in this society can tell you exactly how to dress if you want to be taken seriously—or if you *don't* want to be taken seriously. Or the oppression can be overt: a rape victim who had the temerity to wear a skirt or high heels or too much makeup is still often told “she was asking for it.”

And oppression on the grounds of femininity is not limited to female-bodied people or to femmes. Bashers don't exactly stop to verify that a man they think looks “swishy” really is gay before they beat the hell out of him. If they just so happen to have managed to brutalize an actual homosexual, so much the better from their point of view, but what gets their attention isn't usually any actual display of homosexual activity: it's some aspect of femininity of gender. Lispings and limp wrists (if you'll pardon my stereotyping here) are not artifacts either of biology or of sexual activity. They are artifacts of gender.

The abuse often directed at transmen and butches is also, at root, a fear of femininity. When someone whose biology is female is masculine, it offends the system where female is supposed to equal feminine and only males have the “right” to be masculine. There is a horror of what it would mean if the masculine were tainted by the feminine. No wonder it's an insult to call a man a “sissy.” Sissy is derived from the word “sister,” did you know that? Sister. Surely *nobody* would want to be one of *those*.

The same dynamic is in play every time a woman who loves and desires other women is abused because of her desires. It is not so much the *act* of having sex with another woman that matters. (As we know, many men rather enjoy seeing that.) It is

the intrusion of the feminine into a social territory that is firmly gendered masculine:
the desiring of women. *You lookin' at my girlfriend, bitch? I'll kick your dyke ass.*

These are turf wars. On masculine turf, the feminine is always the enemy.
Western culture is by definition masculine turf.

Femininity is the expected standard for all women. But even when women are successful at being feminine, we find that femininity and feminine women are routinely dismissed and punished. We see it and feel it every time the word “girly” is used as an insult, every time feminine-coded interests like fashion or décor or playing with dolls are used as a way to set someone up for ridicule, every time women writing about feminine-coded topics are dismissed, as George Eliot put it way back in 1856, as “a composite order of feminine fatuity.”

And since I've mentioned her, how about that George Eliot, huh? Her real name was Mary Anne Evans, and she lived at a time when women were increasingly being published under their own names. But Mary Anne was worried that her books wouldn't be taken seriously enough if people thought she was a woman: enter “George Eliot.” And isn't *that* a pretty fine bit of evidence of the damning taint of the feminine?

Even feminist women have often punished femininity. A lot of feminist anger about femininity is entirely understandable. There is every reason in the world to resist and fight back against gender-fascist attempts to enforce a uniform femininity on absolutely everyone who is born biologically female, and for that matter, the corollary practice of refusing femininity to anyone who is *not* born biologically female. But a lot of this anger has also been misdirected, used as a cudgel against feminine women, not in the cause of dismantling the whole demeaning apparatus that makes feminine equal silly and stupid and wrong.

Lesbians and queer women sometimes punish femininity too. The first time I had anybody use the word “femme” to describe me it was when I was about nineteen years old and had just left a gay women’s discussion group in tears. Why was I in tears? Because some of the other women in the discussion group were talking about how oppressive I was and how I was damaging their ability to feel like they were in a supportive environment by imposing patriarchal gender standards on them. How was I doing such a thing? Well, to tell you the truth, I was... wait for it... wearing a pretty poppy-red silk shell, a navy blue calf-length skirt, nylons, sensible low-heeled pumps, a string of pearls, and a bit of lipstick. (Clinique, “Think Bronze.” I wore it all of freshman year.)

I suspect I may not be the only person in this room to have dealt with a sense of hopeless betrayal when other queer women ganged up on her because she was more feminine than they could stomach. On the other hand, I also suspect that I may not be the only person in this room to have gained a great deal from finally having a queer woman give a name to my femininity. As I said, the first time someone used the word “femme” to describe me came after I *left* that meeting.

I went into the room across the hall from where the discussion group was and sat down on an unoccupied end of a couch to pull myself together. At the other end of the couch was a kind-looking woman about twice my age, with long honey colored hair, big blue eyes, a long cotton skirt, and unrepentantly red frosted lipstick. She looked up from her magazine and asked me if I was okay.

In that way that you do when you’re nineteen and confused and hurt and someone offers you an opening, I dumped everything smack into her lap. I was miserable, no one liked me. No matter how I *felt* or what I *thought* about other women,

I would never fit in and never be welcome among queer women. They didn't like me. I didn't look like them or talk like them. I desperately wanted to be included. But either they assumed I was a clueless straight girl who had wandered in by mistake — at a different meeting several weeks prior I had been taken aside and quietly asked whether I knew that it was a meeting for *gay* women — or else they told me that my very presence was offensive.

The woman, whose name was Madge, patted me on the arm. “Oh, honey,” she said, “don't you worry about *them*. They just don't know what to do with you 'cause you're a femme, that's all. Oh, they act like they hate it in the streets, but honey, let me tell you what, they love it in the sheets. If they're gonna get all pissed off at femme girls because they can't admit to themselves how much they want to take us to bed, to hell with 'em.”

I was so flabbergasted by this that I don't remember much after that. Eventually, I think, I decided that Madge had just been trying to be nice, because I was 19 and it was the mid-1980s and no one seemed very interested in taking *me* to bed, particularly not the short-haired studly intellectual dykes I got all moony about. But in some ways that part wasn't so important — the whole sleeping with the hot edgy dykes thing happened in its own time. What was really important was that Madge reached out to me in all my crumpled sniffly insecurity, saw me for what I was, accepted me, and gave me a word for my fledgling femme self... a star to steer by.

In passing on the word “femme” to me, Madge acknowledged how hard it can be to be a femme, how complicated the gender game can be, how easily the feminine can be, and often is, little more than a punching bag. But at the same time she made it clear that in femininity there was joy and delight and vibrant power. Not just the

power to be erotically attractive, although that was part of it. Madge made it perfectly clear just by being who she was that femmeness was its own excuse. I could be a femme and not owe a single syllable of apology or explanation to anybody. Other people could just find a way to deal with my femininity, and if they couldn't, well, to hell with them. It was, and remains, a radical assertion.

It took me a number of years and a lot of false steps before I truly came to recognize the magnitude of this gift. Like many femmes I have gotten to know, learning how to embrace my own femininity, rather than seeing it as a sign of weakness or as evidence that I didn't measure up, took time and effort. Learning that it was okay to take joy in femininity—my own and other people's too—was another hard-won lesson in femme.

I bring up my own personal history because I think it bears noting, especially since feminine competition can be so dead serious, that no matter how polished and accomplished a femme is, no matter how pretty she is or how many conferences she's spoken at or whatever it is, each and every one of us has tits of clay. We are vulnerable, we are fallible, we are embattled, we bear scars. We wrap our femmeness around us for comfort, but also as protection: being femme is in large part an exercise in making a virtue of necessity. We have made our femmeness strong to protect our vulnerable feminine selves and salve the sting of being scorned by people we love. And still it is sometimes all too easy to forget that we are so vulnerable, all of us, that we need to be seen and heard and known, to be acknowledged for what and who we are.

One of the reasons that a conference like this one is so valuable is because it lets us do that for one another in a way that we rarely get to do in everyday life. The act of

acknowledging our non-standard genders, of accepting and approving their existence, of giving them room to thrive and applauding their beauty, is a powerful genderphile gift. When we embrace one another's femininity, it helps begin to heal thousands of years of severely damaged past.

There is a Chinese saying that translates as "dragon knows dragon." On one level it means that magical creatures know and recognize the magic of other magical creatures, and on another more metaphorical level, it means, that greatness recognizes greatness. This conference is an opportunity for dragon to know dragon. It is a chance to rally the rogue bombshell of feminine power we have, our dragon-lady femme grandeur, and use it in the name of healing the genderphobic, misogynist, femme-fearing world we live in. When dragon knows dragon, which is to say, sometimes, when femme knows femme, the results can be nothing short of revolutionary. As my friend and colleague Carol Queen once said, "The seed of all insurrection lies in the femme."

This is our work. When we see one another as femmes, as genderphiles, as warriors who struggle and fight to live the gendered lives that are most meaningful to us, it changes the world – for individuals, and in the larger picture too. When we do our femme work, when we are visibly and defiantly feminine, when we make it plain that our desires are our own and that we will not be shamed for being who we are, we carve out space for ourselves and for everyone who sees us. This is not to say that every femme has the responsibility to be a role model, with a capital R and a capital M, twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. That's exhausting. It is, however, to say that when we live our femme lives, we never know to whom we might be giving a

glimmer of hope, or a glimpse of an answer to a question they didn't even know they had.

A poet friend of mine once told me that poets write only two kinds of poems, the ones that ask your unanswerable questions, and the ones that provide the answers to someone else's. I think that this is true in some ways of conferences like this, too. Everywhere you turn there are new and excellent questions, new and excellent answers. You listen eagerly, because you know some of them will be magic. Already, even though the conference has barely begun, I am seeing and hearing ways of being and doing and femme that are new to me, that are soothing and itchy and just plain different than my own sense of what femme is and how it works. I am witnessing femmenesses that make me thoughtful, that make me want to know more, that leave me open-mouthed with admiration and gender joy.

This too is the work of femme, to add to our genderphile vocabularies and enhance our vision with every shade of red we can imagine—to change the world one lipstick colour at a time.

Before I end this talk here today, I would like to offer you some words about femme that are not my own, but which I think are beautiful and deserve to be heard in a great many places, but particularly in a place like this. Written by my brilliant friend Elise Matthesen in 1993 (she asks me to say hello and wishes you all a joyous revolution), this is a poem entitled “Femme Thang.”

Femme Thang

It's a femme thang
to be demurely in-your-face
It's a femme thang

it's attitude
It's a femme thang
it's camp conceit
something about long cigarette holders
and spike heels;
we let the butches do
"strong, silent & competent"
that's their number in the butch/femme cabaret
It's a femme thang
to know the roadmap for romance
the seven warning signals
of incipient sexual ecstasy
every pulse point
that could possibly carry perfume
and where to buy silk ribbons
for half price
It's a femme thang
to be a steel lily with lacquered nails
a waif in a cloud of ringlets
carrying a copy of Baudelaire
or a sunset-crowned, big-shouldered woman
chanting the sutras of her linguistics class
as she draws the pan of challah from the oven
It's a femme thang
to know how to kiss
how to be kissable
like it says in the handbook
"butches, don't kiss her until you're ready.
She'll tell you when you're ready."
It's a femme thang
to regard Vogue magazine
as raw material
for the next piece of sartorial satire
It's a femme thang
to think of Victoria's Secret
and performance art
in the same breath
I remember the first time
somebody called me a femme as an insult
it was like the first time
somebody called me a queer
they meant to be derogatory
but I was so tickled
to find a word that referred to the way
that I do it
that I said, Yeah
so what's your point?

It's a femme thang
to know how to bat our eyelashes
it's a femme thang
to be a tough broad
It's a femme thang
to keep a shrine to Mae West
little rows of votive candles
burning among the quotations
"Come up and see me some night.
Come Wednesday night;
that's amateur night."
It's a femme thang
to know how to be a serious bitch
It's a femme thang
to know what every magic wand
and little box of jewel-colored powder
might be good for
It's a femme thang
to have preferences in lubricants
the way connoisseurs have preferences
in vintages of wine
It's a femme thang
to be comfortable acting butch
Real femmes aren't afraid to act butch
because we know it looks attractive on us
like all those women in Shakespeare
impersonating boys
It's a femme thang
some girls have it
some boys have it too
it's a gift
it's a talent
it's guerilla ontology
it's the way we strut our stuff
and the fascinating noises we make in bed
It's a femme thang
and sometimes it's just enough
to keep the music playing in the face of despair
Life seems to call
for a parade amid the rubble
and anywhere there is defiant celebration
you can bet that
up front
male or female
there's some bitch with a baton
inciting revolution
swinging her tasseled boots

and saying, "Yeah
so what's your point?"
It's a femme thang
to up the ante
It's a femme thang
to lob in the incendiary glance
to say
"Can you handle it?
Or are you just gonna wish
you had the chance?"

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