

# Queer & Young & So Much Else

by Anna-Louise Crago

*L'auteure parle de son expérience bisexuelle à l'âge de 17 ans et elle relate également l'incompréhension face à cette réalité.*

*I am bisexual/bisexuelle for lack of a better word. Bi as in what? Two choices? I'd rather play with gender. Mold it, shape it, twist it, fuck it altogether than choose between two constructed genders.*

My politics turn around the fact that my life so far as a queer has been as a young person. I deeply sense the rifts and the *méfiance* that separate me from adults. I have often found paternalism, condescension, pathologizing, and ageism when searching for solidarity.

I am also bisexual/bisexuelle for lack of a better word. Bi as in what? Two choices? I'd rather play with gender. Mold it, shape it, twist it, fuck it altogether than choose between two constructed genders. So maybe I am a Teen Ambisextress (as in ambidextrous yet more fun) Activist Queen if partial labelling is necessary. I am bisexual as in "you're not lesbian enuf" as in "you're young, chuckle chuckle, you'll fall off the fence eventually" as in "bi and/or trans not allowed—cause you're the real perverts." I'm bi as in "bi the way, I'm TRANSGRESSING some conservative gay and lesbian values that want me to shut up/ walk at the end of the pride parade (Ottawa 95)/ turn against transgendered people/ pretend bi and/ or trans people don't get AIDS." I'm bi as in "young person spewing *bile* with great elegance. I'm bi as in "I don't want to wait five years for a special issue on bi women, I'm mustering up some audacity and sending this in to the lesbian issue anyway."

When I began coming out, somewhere between 14 and 15, I started playing around with the word bi. No one believed me. They swore I'd change when I matured. (I'm 17 and still here.) I worked tirelessly on gay and lesbian issues hoping I might gain credibility. I didn't, nor did I gain shelter from the queer-bashing in highschool as the only one out. Biphobia fed into ageism and vice versa. Established lesbian and gay groups were there for people in their thirties. They did/do not have the resources or necessarily the understanding of the gamble of being out in and *dependent on* one's home.

Nor did they understand some of the powerful taboos

that young queers face. First, proclaiming that youth/ children have a sexuality and desires of their own independently from adult intervention, exploitation, and abuse is somewhat radical in a world dominated by adults' perceptions of reality. Secondly, claiming a "deviant" identity means that a narrow-minded adult world must consider the frightening fact that we are *their* "deviant" children. Both of these debunk the myth of children's purity, naïveté, and innocence—often used to take advantage of us. As well, we "bare" the burden of proof (yes, I am constantly carded)—which most often lies on the assumption that you have to have "sex" (defined as intercourse) to have an identity.

Add to this trans and biphobia and linguistic gems like "gender identity disorder in youths" (American Psychiatric Association). Of course, part of this mix is the juxtaposition of racist and anti-semitic stereotypes of sexual eroticism. There are also the rigid social codes about who can be sexual and who can't that dictate that differently abled and fat people must abandon their desire. Combined, these forces envelope our lives.

I summed it up this way in a letter to my (het) vice-principal:

Bi/Transgender/Two-spirited/Lesbian/Gay. These are words that got caught between your teeth. Irrelevant thistles that bare only nervous potential. Pregnant with accusations of a new era. You are here to reconstruct my years of convoluted yearnings into parentally-acceptable socially-responsible educationally-advisable white-washed invisibility. You intend to "protect" the young from desire and defiance, all of which is fiercely equated with the revelation of our own controlled existences.

You trivialize my coming out and the signatures of 18 queers in your school on a queer manifesto. We are young and all too acquainted with being made to feel small. Our lives are not small.

People forget too easily where many of us are. We're in homo/bi/transphobic homes & out of those homes and on the street (many people say 40 to 50 per cent of all street kids are queer). We're in schools taunted by teachers, administrators, and students who take out all their "isms" on us & out of school when it became too much. Some of us are drinking, sniffing, starving, and cutting ourselves & some of us aren't. Some of us are living and loving and comfy & some of us are not: some are dead by hate crimes (killed by homo/bi/transphobic parents and other people), some by AIDS, and some have killed themselves among other things. (Remember the report on teen sui-

cide the U.S. government wouldn't release because it showed queers were six times more likely to kill themselves?)

Theory is nice but theory is not life and it's not all that pretty. I think the next texts might teach you more because they are pieces of my life. I wrote this letter last year in grade eleven (at 16). It embodies some of the simple elements of my existence as a young bi queer and parts of my love for AJ.

Dear AJ,

*Some of us are drinking, sniffing, and starving & some of us aren't. Some of us are living and comfy: some are dead by hate crimes, some by AIDS, and some have killed themselves among other things.*

Don't try and convince me about forty some odd lovers or that I will be next. Sweetpea. You cover your truths in sticky sex with sticky strangers. Void where there are no "out" girls our age, no 14, no 15, no 16, so you swing open. They coil their bodies neatly or ardently or awkwardly around yours. Until you're only the head. Maybe giving head. Giving it all away.

Now. Drop them. They roll. Sordid pebbles escaping your existence. Coil tighter and resolutely. Cover your body in coils that constantly renew themselves.

If they're gone, spread panic wide like the gentle cause in your hips. And hope they will write their way into you telling new stories. Your subtle revenge is the fear you instill, the horny fear in these bony boys with hard nipples. You touch them in the hallway playing sex. They don't want it. Sex has nothing to do with it.

Some of us ran out of artillery and shelter ourselves beneath bridges of women. Hoping against the force of things, that no arc will collapse and no woman will come falling on our back. And none of us will drown each other when the scaffolding wears into the colour of our bones. Trampled, we feel betrayal above and beneath water. Yet we'd rather be rocked into the ground by our mothers' rhythms and quiet consent than perhaps guiltier hands.

No, you've seen the worst and it stared you blank in the face. Fuck it. And you did. It's grade nine, you suckle your bisexuality and caress this potential revenge. In nine positions over ninety newly screwing boys.

Nothing intersects. I can't share with you this and not that. Risk becoming a boy. I can't settle for arousal and tussled hair. Or your acid-induced kisses.

Don't believe I'm not enticed. You are my familiar. Baby queer among the rough. You are hand on your hips staring down those who are scared by the thought of you, a brave Black African-Canadian bi girl with braids. So the

letter you so gently passed me in the bustling cafeteria line complete with curly queues and honesty was neatly tucked in my bra (for lack of a) pocket. In return, I should write. Address your love from bleached paper and separate ink.

Yeah, I'm writing for you. The relentless waves of your smooth dark colour contain more than rancid experiences and emotions. Understand though, when I say I've gotten deathly drunk off the trough of other girl/boy/trans (friend)'s rapes.

Loving is loving the gashes.

I assume sex is to numb. I assume your body aches. I assume that in a racist white-washing world letting your colour be pride and strength is confronting a world and its past in every second. I assume your story into my own hands. Don't let me paint denial where there is fright, a child where a young woman strives.

I gathered profiles of friends/ that you were a survivor, the first time I saw you talk and high school-grey lockers cut off my circulation. So, I was right. So, I was right. So I've been wrong. I think.

My face is blunt. If it were sharp, I could be your head rush. I could coax your veins open temporarily. To be the confirmation that you exist beyond/withoutside flesh.

Sweet, sweet AJ. I would roll myself deep in your tremendous brown body.

If only I could show you scars that are skin deep.

For when you understand that open is more than my legs:

I will be your mother/sister/daughter/lover/  
revolutionary  
here.

Anna-Louise

Here is a last poem for you:

Beneath this layer I can  
drowned and pit  
myself against myself  
against the queer against  
the queer

A nd I reach for nets and masses  
I ntended to  
D ivide myself  
S ectioning off who will live

and colour lines determine much  
and leave my mouth dry  
and my lips cracked

Shifting and sifting for resilience  
insides ache—everything is  
guttural

This is the young one pulling upon the  
young one  
To build on the cornerstone of her teeth

Those that smile  
Those that bite  
Those that nourish  
    the coral reef in the well  
Those that love the innards  
    and the mess they make  
Those that cut freedom 'till it fits.

See this well,

I WILL NOT PASS

*Anna-Louise Crago is in the long process of relearning the history of the lands called "canada" and busy being inspired by the writing and words of Patricia Monture-Angus, Dionne Brand, and the publishing of SisterVision Press among others. She has an appetite for activism and is presently in a longue et douloureuse lutte contre l'université d'ottawa for the bigotry she suffered at their hands. She is 17.*

## ERICA DESJARDINS

### tongue in cheek

my coffee break out back beyond  
the music and i am blowing  
    smoke—all by myself in the dark  
a chain of perfect 000's.

he walks over and places  
his arm over my head and his  
hips are level with my mine  
and he says heh i hear you are bi  
    lingual and he moves in closer to my belly  
    button and his chin grazes my  
    space and he says god i'd like  
to have all those bodies  
of knowledge  
    howditya get that way?

+ because he signs my paychecks  
i say i found out about my persuasion & proclivity  
    for languages in school but i don't get  
    much  
    chance to use my dexterity in tongues  
round here and my eyes meet his flat blue ones.

and he tells me i musta been born  
    into that kinda family or  
with some kinda brain gene  
    that makes people quicken in that way.

+ i say i did learn some from granny

and he asks me if i get around much  
    to using it

+ i say well one is for trade you know  
just to pass & survive you've got to  
    speak what everyone else does but the

    other well  
it is the grains, the fabric, the skies &  
my poetry and the dirt.

and he says yeh i really want to learn  
    another language and he asks for a  
    cigarette and  
snakes a grin and tells me he has been to Mexico  
twice.

+ i say now i go away for those intense  
    courses because i don't want to forget  
how to use it and right now—here  
i can't afford the time & space  
    to practice.

and his arm slips down  
my shoulders and he says  
heh can you teach me to be bi  
    lingual and i wanted to say i did have  
another language when i was younger  
    but this will complicate things for him.

*erica desjardins is a graduate student, living and working in British Columbia, who has found reading fiction and poetry (especially Dorothy Allison and Cherrie Moraga) to be more effective and affective than "theory" to make meaning out of her complexities.*