

Teach Me, Fuck Me: The Educational Possibilities of Intergenerational Lesbian Sex

There's this dyke (isn't there always?). She's a regular at the coffee shop for which I work. When she makes eye contact with me, I feel it in my lower belly (lower). She must be twice my age. I like her lesbian hands and short, dark hair, and the way she treats me with a direct, meaningful, albeit casual, friendliness. Her appearances at the shop are both the highlight and the pitfall of my week because she is gorgeous. Slight wrinkles by her eyes and freckles across her nose, and so my ability to behave normally escapes me. I stutter, I look away, I repeat simple questions, and I can't make sense of her answers. It is humiliating. All the while, she speaks calmly; she is a considerate selector of her words. When I walk over to her table and place the coffee cup before her, I resist the urge to lean against her (do you like how I made this for you?). She thanks me for the coffee (I would make you anything. Let me thank you for something, let me beg you for something and then thank you for it). When she rubs her chin and speaks to me, I look at her fingers (show me how you use them).

I am butch. Capital B Butch. Like it doesn't matter what I wear, or how I wear it, there is no costume gendered feminine enough in the world to cover all the butch in me. That is to say, this is a small town, and I stick out here like a sore thumb. My browbone, my hair, even my posture, you get the picture. Here, dykes are hard to come by. Between the few of us that live here is a lot of loneliness. The locals distrust us despite our locality, and it is difficult to not find myself shrinking against their stares and occasionally open hostility. Like many, if not all transsexual dykes, or perhaps all queers, or perhaps all people living in this plastic, anti-natural, imperial world, a series of deeply painful events have pushed me into young adulthood at whiplash speed. I have somehow reached an age that I did not think I would ever achieve. I find myself in this town, kicking stones at the bottom of a lonely well, reflecting self-pityingly on all

the pain that shimmers back at me within the water at my feet. So, when she, the dyke, comes into my view, the subject of survival is often swirling in the basin of my nervous system. That is the head space I am in when I contemplate her sweet curls, and hard jaw, and low voice. My desire marks the gap between me and her. Me, wandering when all this finally gets better, and her, who lived and lived until finally, it got better. Whenever she speaks or looks in my direction, a tug of desire pulls at me. I feel it in my gut and in my throat. Alongside that desire is my bemused questioning: How did you do this for so long? How did you survive this?

A certain educational responsibility shadows any and all older dykes both in the simple practice of dykehood but equally in the actual form that dyke artists use to educate. Through understanding Audre Lorde's biomythography, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982) in reference to her previously published text, *The Cancer Journals* (1980), readers can appreciate a time honoured tradition of extracting life lessons from older dykes. Lorde absorbs wisdom from an older lesbian, specifically through sex, and this wisdom is further spread through Lorde's own text, further spreading dyke wisdom from Eudora and Lorde, and into the future dyke reader.

Zami ruminates on lessons from women and lesbians around her, constantly projecting into a future where Lorde can use these lessons and pass them on. Though *Zami* was published two years after *The Cancer Journals*, it doesn't contain Lorde's experience of cancer and mastectomy. Instead, the text accounts Lorde's sexual and romantic relationship with another breast cancer and mastectomy survivor, Eudora. Lorde was writing from the perspective of her own breast cancer and mastectomy, yet refuses to raise this in the context of Eudora. Lorde is learning from Eudora in moments of sexual intimacy, specifically referencing her 'wisdom'; learning about sexual relationships and lesbian community, learning about Eudora's intersectional survival of illness as a gay woman, learning about Eudora's mental health

intersecting with physical health.¹ However, Lorde does not take this moment to teach the reader about her own breast cancer, despite having knowledge of it in the present moment. Instead, Lorde lets Eudora speak her own experience uninterrupted; 'I had an operation, and it was pretty rough... radical surgery, for cancer. I lost a breast'.² In allowing Eudora this space, Lorde projects the curiosity of her past self temporally into the current moment of her writing, allowing her innocence prior to breast cancer to intersect with her present knowledge. Lorde states that she had 'wondered so often how it', Eudora's mastectomy scar, 'would feel under [her] hands'.³ Despite Lorde knowing how her own mastectomy scar feels, having lived the experience, she still relives this moment of intimate discovery with Eudora. This serves both Lorde and the reader, allowing a collective teaching from Eudora, rather than from Lorde. The Lorde within *Zami* is more naive and less cancerous than the Lorde who narrates the text. Yet, the perspective of that innocent Lorde is prioritised over the narrating Lorde, allowing her to survive time and remain as she once was, despite Lorde's contemporary position as the writer. Lorde specifies the sexual intimacy between herself and Eudora as being 'in the light', and in doing so, Lorde explicates the lessons of lesbian, woman illness as a secret and intimate moment that is illuminated for the purpose of teaching queer survival.⁴ *Zami*, then, is a meditation on futurity; learning from community members like Eudora in *Zami*, works as a teaching for Lorde's cancer in *The Cancer Journals*, as well as a teaching for any Black/Woman/Working Class/Sick/Disabled/Queer dyke reader.

Lorde suggests that fucking elder lesbians, then, is an invaluable rite of dyke survival (no? just me?). Sex becomes a vessel through which generations of lesbian knowledge is passed

¹ Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, (Penguin) 1982, p.166

² Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, (Penguin) 1982, p.163

³ Ibid p.167

⁴ Ibid p.168

on, a non-linguistic method of teaching the lessons of the body, that being survival and desire conjoined in a hot and bloody way of living. In Lorde's essay, 'The Uses of the Erotic', Lorde defines eroticism as a non-rational intuition which has been systemically separated from the body by racist, capitalist, misogynist powers. Lorde asserts that eroticism is spiritual - that which is 'psychic and emotional' - and that spirituality must be reconnected with the body in order to restore health.⁵ Sex, desire and sexuality functions within Lorde's work as a proxy for language. This is evident in Eudora's presence in *Zami*, where Lorde describes her own body against Eudora's as 'speaking a tenderness [her] mouth had no words yet for'.⁶ For a moment, Lorde rejects language; Lorde as a baby dyke is too young, perhaps, to articulate the meaning of her heart. Too young is the dyke not yet weathered by time, she does not yet know the words that can articulate her pain and her desire, only hardened by life experience and not yet embedded with the knowledge that age brings. Instead, Lorde shows us the corporal language of the baby dyke, her pawing hands and searching mouth, her trembling body and wet heat. Lorde utilises explicit sexual intimacy to teach on the redemptive nature of intergenerational fucking, showing the reader a tenderness passed between dykes that soothes the wounds of oppression and sickness.

The older dyke is the daddy complex made flesh; all the churning eroticism of the protective figure that will fuck you and fuck you well, but none of the fear towards her masculinity. Her protective nature, that tenderness directed towards younger dykes, softens the fear that we have been trained to feel in the presence of other masculinities, such as men. The dyke body does not provoke fear; in the place of fear is the purest fuck me/protect me union. Maybe that's why I stutter and look away from the butch that comes to me to order coffee.

⁵ Audre Lorde, 'The Uses of The Erotic', *The Masters Tools Will Never Dismantle The Masters House* (Penguin) 2018, pp.6-15

⁶ Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, (Penguin) 1982, p.168

(Or maybe it's just because she's hot.)