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Book Review:

The Cancer Journals

By Audre Lorde

(New York: Penguin Books, 2020)

Reviewed by Jennifer Rose

Audre Lorde's The Cancer Journals was first published over forty years ago, yet felt like having an intimate and personal conversation with a close girlfriend or my own sister. The back cover reads:

"Moving between journal entry, memoir, and exposition, Audre Lorde fuses the personal and political as she reflects on her experience coping with breast cancer and a radical mastectomy."

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The Cancer Journals, published 40 years ago long before Black Women's narratives of systemic racism in the healthcare industry and today's body positivity movement, Audre Lorde writes from a Black Lesbian feminist perspective.

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Sharing her most intimate thoughts on self-love, self-care, and self-determination as an Amazon sister-warrior, she lives as an example of women's autonomy, strength, resistance, resilience, and insurrectionary feminist, gender revolt, against the complicity of white silence in the historic injustices of White Supremacy in U.S. society.

I have always read excerpts or quotes from Audre Lorde in other writers' work, and was aware of her as an iconic Black Lesbian Feminist poet/theorist. However, The Cancer Journals was sent to me by a friend, and was the first book of Lorde's I was introduced to and read from cover-to-cover. I felt like a warmly welcomed feminist friend, girlfriend, daughter, sister or lover of Amazonian hero and Goddess/Queen Mama Audre Lorde! I felt like I had been let in

On the secrets and ancient wisdom of womanhood or like a newly initiated Amazon tribal member, I've pledged myself to Sisterhood of Women and girls with whom I'm blessed to have a shared experience, of gender oppression under the U.S. hetero sexist patriarchy and silent complicity of American "white settler" society in the virtual massacre, marriage slavery and misogynist murder violence against women.

In the "Foreword" Tracey K. Smith states:

"Lorde moves deftly between an emphasis on private survival and collective self-determination... even at its most intimate and vulnerable, Lorde's work is a literature of conscience and revolution."

Lorde's "Introduction" reflects on the intent and significance of her work:

"... my work is part of a continuum of women's work

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of reclaiming this earth and our power...within this continuum, my life and my love and my work has particular power and meaning relative to others.

(29 August 1980).

She views women as having a shared history, cultural identity, and community autonomy (or tribe membership) — i.e. woman as Amazons, or tribal warriors; woman as a collective Consciousness, or divine feminine spiritual force — i.e. Life/Nature as Goddess, or Mother Earth.

Chapter one "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" acknowledges the power and strength the woman as warriors, woman as building community, woman as collective struggle — sisters-in-solidarity. Chapter one concludes with Audre Lorde words of wisdom for women:

"And where the words of a woman are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to ourselves,

That we not hide behind the
Mockeries of separations that
have been imposed upon us
and which so often we accept
as our own."

In Chapter 3 - Breast Cancer: Power vs.
Prosthetic " Audie explains her intimate
self-care and self-care:

" It was very important for me,
after my mastectomy to develop
and encourage my own internal
sense of power. I needed to
rally my energies in such a way as
to image myself as a fighter
resisting rather than a passive
victim suffering. At 511
times, it felt crucial to me
that I make a conscious
~~Commitment~~ to survival. "



In her notes, Lorde references the
ancestors of women's history:

" It is said that the Amazon
warriors of Dahomey have
their right breasts cut off
to make themselves more
effective archers. "

In 1991, Lorde died of cancer at the age of fifty-eight.