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The Importance of “Walking Our Boundaries” by Audre Lorde

“Walking Our Boundaries” is a beautiful and symbolic poem that reflects on Audre Lorde’s battle with breast cancer and how it affected her sense of mortality and love. It was written after a rough patch that is described as “war” but feels like a rainbow after a thunderstorm. The imagery in the poem describes it as going from Winter to Spring and the regrowth period that follows. The narrative of the poem is healing, and she uses a garden to symbolize resilience and love. This poem deserves a spot on our syllabus because it is a beautiful and deeply powerful exploration of survival that shows Lorde’s confrontation with illness and death, but also how love and growth can still emerge victorious during a long and difficult battle.

“Walking Our Boundaries” almost feels like an extension to *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* because it continues Audre Lorde’s idea that identity is never fixed and is always developing over time. In *Zami*, you watch Lorde slowly come into herself through childhood experiences, relationships, and through her experiences with race and sexuality. Her identity is something she builds gradually throughout the book. “Walking Our Boundaries” feels almost like a “bonus track” if *Zami* was an album. The poem revisits the same process of self-definition, but under new circumstances. Particularly her experience with illness and her awareness of mortality. This shows that identity is not something that solidifies once we reach adulthood. Instead, it continues to evolve as we face new challenges. It shows that *Zami* is not a

finished story, but a part of an ongoing journey, and that Lorde is still “walking” and redefining herself long after *Zami* ends.

“Walking Our Boundaries” opens with a new beginning, after what is a rough winter described as war, “The first bright day has broken / the back of winter. We rise from war / to walk across the earth / around our house / both stunned that sun can shine so brightly / after all our pain”. These lines immediately set the tone for what is the rebuilding period after a long struggle, free from the harsh winter. Lorde and her partner take a walk around their garden to inspect their “joint holding”. “I take your hand...glad to be alive and still / with you / we talk of ordinary articles with relief”. These lines show the severity of the winter’s storm, as they are relieved to still be together and have the ability to talk about regular things.

A powerful symbol used in the poem that I really like is the apple tree, which symbolizes vulnerability as well as regrowth. As Audre and her lover walk around their garden, they are afraid their apple tree will have no buds because of how damaging the winter was. This moment shows the connection of the natural imagery and the themes of survival and healing. But the section makes a shift and shows the power of love and how it countered their fear. “Your hand / falls off the apple bark / like casual fire / along my back”. I love this section because it calls back to the opening of the poem, her partner is the sun that is ending her emotional winter. Even though the poem has heavy tones like mortality, this section is very peaceful. It shows how in the aftermath of a long struggle, love can help you heal and regrow. Although we have not *The Cancer Journals* yet for class, I can imagine the imagery and themes of this poem will connect to what Lorde explores there. The physical and emotional impact of cancer and the resilience to survive.

The third and final stanza of the poem ends very hopefully and beautifully while still showing the delicateness they feel. “Our voices / seem too loud for this small yard / too tentative for women / so in love”. Even though they have gone through so much together and there is evidence of decay and the damage of the past does not fully go away, “the siding has come loose in spots”, their love and strength still shine through in the end, “our footsteps hold this place / together / as our place”. The damage does not show weakness, it only highlights the strength of Lorde and their relationship. The poem ends in a very hopeful place, even though Lorde doesn’t know when they will laugh again, they are preparing the garden for Spring which means they are looking towards and forward for the future. They are planting again and renewing their garden, demonstrating their love and how it persisted in the darkness of Lorde’s breast cancer.

I chose “Walking Our Boundaries” because it resonated deeply with my own experiences of loss and resilience. Two years ago, I had lost my mother to cancer, and I have seen firsthand how evil cancer is and how it affects the person who is sick but also everyone around them. The constant amount of fear and emotions that come with watching someone you love struggle. Lorde shows these challenges in a symbolic and powerful way, showing both vulnerability and strength. The poem reflects on the emotional and physical realities of illness, showing how love, healing, and survival are intertwined and each needs the other.

“Walking Our Boundaries” is a powerful and necessary addition to any class studying Audre Lorde and her work. With its beautiful and rich symbolism, like the apple tree or just the garden, and its portrayal of love, the poem shows vulnerability and strength do not cancel the other out. Even after life’s “harshest winters”, whether it's emotional or physical, healing and love are still possible after. It is just a touching and beautiful poem that speaks to anyone who

has faced illness, loss, or just a really hard time in their life. Including it in our syllabus will only enrich our understanding of Audre Lorde and the struggles of her life.

Works Cited

Lorde, Audre. "Walking Our Boundaries"

(Below is the link that I used for the poem, only place that didn't have a million ads or make me pay to read it)

<https://ardenleejames.substack.com/p/walking-our-boundaries-by-audre-lorde>