

Fearless Rage

Powerful feminist Audre Lorde remembered on her birthday.

Audre Lorde, self-described “black lesbian, mother, warrior, poet,” would have turned 70 on Feb. 18. Lorde’s work is an important contrast and complement to Eugene’s tradition of hard-edged activism. Lorde calls upon social activists and particularly women of color, gay women and “women-centered” women to be responsible to one’s self.

Lorde urges women to fight oppression with the fuel of emotional self-responsibility. “When we begin to live from within outward,” she writes in *Sister Outsider*, “in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense.”

How Lorde employs the “erotic” is the topic of her essay, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” from *Sister Outsider*. She defines the erotic as intuitive feeling that lies in a “deeply female and spiritual plane.” While the erotic has long been relegated to the bedroom, Lorde’s understanding includes any creative act, from writing a poem to building a fence. There is no difference, she writes, between composing a poem and making love.

Lorde contrasts the American economic system that “reduces work to a travesty of necessities” with a life that embraces the erotic in every act. Our work must be a form of power, she writes, but she does not mean the power of domination or control. She compares her work to a bed she enters willingly and rises from “empowered.” Empowerment means the continued ability to access joy and love.

At the same time, Lorde is not afraid to claim her anger about a lifetime of injustice for being poor, black and a woman. UO English professor Anne Chiasullo’s students are sometimes turned off by Lorde’s anger, the teacher said. But Chiasullo admires Lorde’s anger because it did not make her “embittered.” She is not afraid to



claim her anger, Chiasullo said. “She is fearless. That is something I aspire to. Audre Lorde is one of the most fearless feminists I can think of.”

The contrast between Lorde’s fearless rage and her deep belief in loving makes her poetry and prose incredible. Her anger is an act of self-love.

Lorde published more than a dozen poetry collections and six books of prose from 1968 until her death in 1992. She received many honors and awards, including the Walt Whitman Citation of Merit, which conferred the mantle of New York State Poet from 1991-1993.

Lorde’s work reflects a lifetime of perspectives, from the emerging twenty-some year-old of *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* to the more mature lover of her later poetry and the scholar of *Sister Outsider*. One of Lorde’s most intimate works, *A Burst of Light*, chronicles living with the cancer that eventually took her life.

Mother Kali’s Books is displaying all of Lorde’s books in commemoration of her birthday this week. In its many forms, Lorde’s work continues to teach readers about a new, strong and powerful way to live. **ew**

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