

Pink Shadows: A Comparison of the Internal/External in *Cancer Vixen* and *The Cancer Journals*

by

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Abstract

This thesis reads the breast cancer memoir, *Cancer Vixen* by Marisa Marchetto, in the shadow of *The Cancer Journals* by Audre Lorde, working to situate the text within the context of its very complex relationships with trauma telling and self-help motives. While both of these cancer narratives have been taken up in academic discourse, few scholars have sought to challenge the relegation of trauma metaphors to the literal background of *Cancer Vixen*, a practice informed by Lorde's focus on the political (as opposed to the emotional) in her text. This thesis connects the political act of this placement of trauma in *Cancer Vixen* in order to call attention to the ways in which Marchetto devalues other women, an act that directly opposes Lorde's text. Ultimately, this project argues that *Cancer Vixen*'s position as a self-help text shapes the ways in which breast cancer politics are represented and that this text, therefore, aligns more closely with the hyper-positive rhetorics of pink ribbon philanthropy than it does with Lorde's call to concrete political actions.

Resumen

Esta tesis tiene como objetivo situar las narrativas autobiográficas de cáncer de mama, *The Cancer Journals* por Audre Lorde y *Cancer Vixen* por Marisa Marchetto, dentro del contexto de la relación bastante compleja con narrativas de trauma y motivos de autoayuda. Mientras ambas de estos textos han sido ocupadas en discursos académicos, pocos estudiosos han intentado desafiar la relegación de las metáforas de trauma hacia un trasfondo literal de *Cancer Vixen*, una práctica informada por el enfoque de Lorde en la política (a diferencia de lo emocional) en su texto. Esta tesis intenta conectar el acto político de esta colocación de trauma en *Cancer Vixen* con el propósito de llamar la atención sobre las formas que Marchetto devalúa otras mujeres; un acto que opone directamente el texto de Lorde. Finalmente, argumento que la posición de *Cancer Vixen* como un texto de autoayuda moldea la forma en que la política de cáncer de mama es representado, y que este texto como representación se alinea más estrechamente con la retórica híper-positiva de la filantropía del lazo rosado que con la llamada de acción de Lorde.

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Pink Shadows: A Comparison of the Internal/External in *Cancer Vixen* and *The Cancer Journals*

This thesis project investigates the complications of publishing a self-help memoir culled from one's traumatic experience. More than single-medium narratives, the comics-stylenarrative *Cancer Vixen*, by Marisa Marchetto (2009), allows for frequent shifting between trauma narrative and self-help narrative. These shifts between the genres of trauma and self-help, however, are still constrained or policed, visually and verbally, by the end goals of pink ribbon culture. Situating Audre Lorde's narrative, *The Cancer Journals* (1980), as the foundational text for future breast cancer narratives, this project explores the following research questions: How does *Cancer Vixen* respond to *The Cancer Journals* call for diverse voices of experience in published breast cancer narratives? What role does hyper-consumerism in the form of pink ribbon philanthropy play in this intertextual call and response? Within the boundaries of *Cancer Vixen*, how are metaphors of trauma given a lower priority in this text than in similar self-help metaphors?

Limits and Justification

While there is a vast array of breast cancer memoirs available for study, there are no two quite as comparative in popularity as *Cancer Vixen* and *The Cancer Journals*. Both are widely cited in the academic conversation on breast cancer literatures while also maintaining popularity outside academia. While Lorde did publish a second cancer memoir, "A Burst of Light," this collection of personal essays does not invoke Lejeune's "autobiographical pact" in the same way as *The Cancer Journals*; the autobiographical constructions are structured more similarly in *Cancer Vixen* and *The Cancer Journals* than with *Cancer Vixen* and "A Burst of Light."

Another reason *Cancer Vixen* is an appropriate choice for this project is because it is constructed as a graphic narrative. The handcrafting of cartooning makes this narrative a product

of the methods of third wave feminist practices without actually promoting its politics. Furthermore, Hillary Chute theorizes that the comics-style narrative form is “apt for expressing that difficult register” (Chute, *Graphic Women 2*) of unnamable trauma, allowing the author to revisit, or to re-view, the emotion of the experience in more than one way. It should follow, then, that this narrative builds upon the call for traumatic communications in *The Cancer Journals*; however, this thesis project finds that, due to pink ribbon philanthropy, *Cancer Vixen* takes a step back from the feminist movements made by Lorde. As a product of the third wave era and as a beneficiary of the successes of the second wave movement, one would expect Marchetto’s published narrative to contribute to the voices of experience. Instead, *Cancer Vixen* contributes to the voice of pink ribbon philanthropy; the emotional voice of experience that *The Cancer Journals* calls for is overshadowed in *Cancer Vixen*.

This project takes into consideration the multiple intersections at play within *Cancer Vixen*. The purpose of this thesis is to acknowledge the feminist foundations of breast cancer activism, while focusing specifically on contemporary visual and verbal narratives, and how this intersection is problematic from a generic perspective. Because this project focuses solely on the text and not on readers’ responses to witnessing or their reactions, it differs largely from the scholarship within autobiography studies on trauma narratives. Leigh Gilmore, Kate Douglas, Gillian Whitlock, Hilary Chute, and others focus largely on “secondary witnessing,” or the implications trauma texts have upon the reader. This thesis focuses not on these implications, but on the political transition/regression that can be pinpointed through a comparison of these two texts. I choose to focus upon the sociocultural machinery behind these narratives, as little work has been done to bring together the many different phenomena that bring about graphic breast cancer memoirs. Reading these deeply personal narratives outside of the scope of traumatic re-

viewing is to ignore the purported purpose of constructing such a text, just as separating the pink ribbon politics from the same narratives would be to cut out an essential context of these texts.

Definitions

In regards to form, I use Hillary Chute's definition of "comics." Comics are the form of composition, and "graphic narrative" indicates a "book-length work composed in the medium of comics" (*Graphic Women* 3). Comic-style autobiographies are "autographics," to use the term put forth by Gillian Whitlock in her essay, "Autographics: The Seeing 'I' of the Comics." In this essay, she coins the term as an aesthetics and technology of life narrative that occurs only in a form in which cultural differences blend through the visioverbal grammar (Whitlock, "Autographics"). However, while I make use of the term, "autographics," I do not use it in the same manner intended by Whitlock—I use the term very literally: self-drawn and self-referential.

I read these deeply personal narratives as cultural products, and as such use this space as a safeguard against making claims that would privilege one experience over another. Cultural products are distinct from the people who wrote and/or drew them, therefore allowing me to offer an analysis that considers the politics behind these products without criticizing the person who made them. Furthermore, the term, "trauma narrative" refers to a plotline which focuses on making external the traumatic experience in order to turn away from superficial "appearance" concerns. A trauma narrative is unconcerned with appearing "unchanged." In opposition, a "self-help narrative" is one focused on remaining "unchanged" to sell a sense of hope or treatment option via performative identity to the reader/consumer.

Breast cancer texts, as "self-help," are what Barbara Ehrenreich terms "pink kitsch," which cannot itself be understood apart from "the corporate-driven, consumer-oriented philanthropic culture that emerged with it" (King xii). The implications of these theories,

explicated by Samantha King, are that in associating themselves with pink ribbon culture, narratives of breast cancer encapsulate some aspect of the politics of breast cancer—that is, the evolved social politics that are focused now on raising money than encouraging women to speak up. These motives seep into the narratives as well and further devalue the breast cancer experience; the narratives have become so ubiquitous that they are now normalized in society in the same way that the symbol of the pink ribbon has become watered down. This project shows through a comparison of *The Cancer Journals* and *Cancer Vixen*, the demands of the breast cancer identity, shaped by pink ribbon philanthropy, generalize breast cancer narratives into a collective experience versus focusing on individuality.

Lorde and Marchetto

Breast cancer narratives are unique and uniformly political. Unlike other texts on disease and illness, breast cancer narratives “generally have a public mission, an agenda that is in some sense political” (Couser, *Signifying* 37). These texts are “routinely triumphal” (Segal 295), even if the author/protagonist dies in the end. According to these texts, she has behaved bravely in making her personal, private experience public and political. In martyr-like fashion, the author does what she can, which in these instances means publishing her memoir, in order to minimize the potency of the cancer; her escape from it may only be temporary (Couser, *Signifying* 37). She may not win for herself, but her textual contribution is in some way an advancement of breast cancer treatment. The external political environment that shapes the forms of a breast cancer narrative is particularly evident in *The Cancer Journals* and *Cancer Vixen*. These oft-studied texts, however, are rarely attributed to the political, capitalist mechanisms which inform their existence and popularity.

Growing out of the rise of ribbon activism in the 1980s and 1990s, pink ribbon culture is a widely-recognized brand symbol in Western culture and, in particular, within U.S. culture, where this project is situated. The breast cancer narrative grows out of a celebrated feminist provocation; the stories told by Shirley Temple Black, Betty Ford, and Happy Rockefeller all contributed to breast cancer politics without making any outright claims of a political agenda (King xiii). As this topic entered the public political arena, so did the role of politics in the breast cancer narrative. Knopf-Newman credits all of Lorde's cancer writing, including *The Cancer Journals*, with reshaping identity politics surrounding the voices of breast cancer by calling attention to the white heteronormative practices of breast cancer treatment at the time (109).

In looking at *Cancer Vixen*'s embracement of white heteronormativity in a self-help breast cancer text, it is possible to claim that not much has changed in terms of the "normal" breast cancer survivor portrayed in breast cancer narratives. While the issue of breast cancer identity is a robust area for research, this thesis project explores select issues related to breast cancer culture itself. Why is it that instead of reaching out to other voices of experience, *The Cancer Journals* and *Cancer Vixen* actually attempt to replace preexisting voices of experience?

In part, this contradiction within breast cancer culture can be attributed to a practice not unlike product branding. The emotional responses cultivated from consumers to the "brand" of pink ribbon merchandise perpetuate a "cultural identity," which I refer to as "breast cancer culture." This cultivation of consumer responses is similar to what one would expect in relation to a team or manufacturer. There are subcultures within the umbrella of breast cancer culture that I will discuss in depth within the next section of this project. How these subcultures distinguish themselves within the spaces of philanthropic consumerism, breast cancer philanthropy, and other opportunities for consumer spending is based upon social support for breast cancer which

labels it as a “good and important cause” (Sulik 147). It is not only housewares, yogurts, and team merchandise that become products for sale in pink ribbon philanthropy, but narratives become commodities, too. Because *Cancer Vixen* and *The Cancer Journals* identify as different “cultures of action” within breast cancer culture, they fight to replace the experience of one another and of other women; we see these attempts within each narrative.

It is within the political context of pink ribbon philanthropy that this thesis makes challenges to reading *Cancer Vixen* as either in opposition to or in response to *The Cancer Journals*. It is impossible to claim either because of the location of the politics within breast cancer culture. Both texts work as identifiers of one of the subcultures, the cultures of action, and of breast cancer culture in general, thereby making them rebellious of one another yet still related in goal and scope. Additionally, the preoccupations with the politics of breast cancer and self-help authorship override textual metaphors that would or could be read as emblematic of their trauma. It is important to note the location of trauma metaphors in each, as I argue that their placement in the visual and figurative backgrounds of Marchetto’s frames foregrounds her turn away from the call for diverse experiences. What Marchetto does with her trauma is actually an echo of Lorde, complicating reading the two texts as having a like/dislike relationship.

As I will demonstrate in the first chapter of this thesis project, autobiographical texts of the self-help ilk typically end with a depiction of a sense of comfort or security, maintaining that the narrator’s successes are accessible to all readers, making it clear that these successes come from the narrator’s personal efforts and this self-improvement work will continue after the end of the narrative. This topic occurs in *Cancer Vixen*, and further shifts the text away from Lorde’s politics. Therefore, the unstable political ideology of breast cancer narratives has given way to a narrative which is astonishingly un-feminist despite the genre’s heritage. Instead of mapping the

author's feelings the way that *The Cancer Journals* does, *Cancer Vixen* uses her voice to instruct and to prescribe a process to a very specific type of woman: white, heterosexual, middle-aged, and upper-middle-class. Not only is this a misinterpretation of the call for self-identification present in *The Cancer Journals*, but it also presents a problematic cancer protagonist. In this way, the women other-than Marchetto perform their illnesses incorrectly, as the narrative suggests by framing that the only way to properly have/live through breast cancer is to be a cancer vixen. Furthermore, Marchetto's identity becomes part of her prescription: she is an upper-middle class, middle-aged, heterosexual, white woman. To perform Marchetto's prescriptive cancer vixen is to deny the diversities called for by Lorde in *The Cancer Journals*.

While pink ribbon philanthropy may have brought a widespread voice to breast cancer, but the voice is not coming from the diverse crowd of women (and men) that *The Cancer Journals* envisions; instead this voice largely comes from pharmaceutical and other companies looking to associate their products with the warm feelings of altruism. I interpret this departure as a regression from the social consciousness that *The Cancer Journals* contributed to the body of breast cancer literature. King notes that the employees, attendees, and volunteers at pink ribbon events are "overwhelmingly white" (40). This observation translates into reading Marchetto's narrative through her performance of the self-titled "it" life. When read as a performative and prescriptive narrative, Marchetto becomes the cancer protagonist or "cancer vixen;" her readers, therefore, are to use *Cancer Vixen* as a self-help guide to becoming the upper-middle class, white, heterosexual woman who survives cancer *better* than others. This goal is in direct conflict with Lorde's call for diverse voices to be present in the fight against breast cancer and therefore in feminist communities.

Reading *Cancer Vixen*—not as a response to, but as a pinked extension of, flawed response to, or regression from *The Cancer Journals*—reveals a problem that parallels the failures that researchers Samantha King and Gayle Sulik articulate within pink ribbon philanthropy. They claim that the political and ethical act of sharing one’s experience for financial profit overlaps with what Sulik notes as the allure of pink ribbon philanthropy as a “good” and “important” cause. Even Lorde’s narrative is written for profit, an altruistic profit that has become the pink ribbon product: “I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. That speaking profits me, beyond any other effect” (Lorde 17). As I mention earlier, pink ribbon products (“pink kitsch”) have come to represent the brand of breast cancer. Therefore, the commoditization of breast cancer narratives contributes to a master narrative that is interconnected with pink ribbon politics.

Narratives of the self-help genre are educational in that they teach the reader how to behave. As a self-help narrative, *Cancer Vixen* shows the reader a breast cancer survivor who, at some point, deals with a degree of shallowness, based on her concern about outside or physical appearances, as Marchetto frequently illustrates herself applying make-up, receiving compliments on her attire, and empathizing with a pregnant woman about weight gain. Her public retelling of her experience does not deal with the very real disfigurement of lumpectomies and mastectomies; instead, her text departs from Lorde’s suggestions and argues in favor of cover-ups in the form of wigs, make-up, clothing, etc. Doing so teaches the reader that surviving breast cancer is about remaining physically unchanged and outwardly “successful,” an assertion that I problematize as “pinked” advice and as a regression from Lorde’s politic.

One seemingly apolitical difference between the two narratives is the form: verbal versus comics-style. However, by including a visual component, Marchetto can draw upon the graphic symbols used in pink ribbon campaigns. Her cartooned metaphors do not convey the same severity as the verbal metaphors used by Lorde, despite the two authors employing similar representational strategies. Contemporary graphic breast cancer narratives, such as *Cancer Vixen*, are, then, associated with cultural responses to Lorde's call-to-action, and spending as a means of curing, which aligns with pink ribbon philanthropy. Visual narratives are more susceptible to this shift than single-medium narratives because they make use of both verbal and visual mediums, thereby employing a larger space for communication, which I expand upon later in this introduction.

Methodology

James Berger's essay, "Trauma Without Disability, Disability Without Trauma: A Disciplinary Divide" outlines a series of concerns in trauma studies. For a reader to consider a text as a trauma narrative, he states that there must be an "epistemological shift" in the narrator, the text itself should focus on the symptomology of trauma, the author should describe a precursor event as well as make it clear that the traumatic event be "obliterating or sublimely and horrifically transformative" (Berger 563). Furthermore, the author presents all pretrauma depictions and descriptions as hyperbolic, and expresses frustration at the inarticulateness of these hyperbolic reconstructions, according to Berger. While readers can certainly locate pieces of these criteria within *Cancer Vixen*, this project complicates the reading of these narrative strategies as they have self-help counterparts. I argue that because Marchetto's metaphors are highly abstracted, allowing for them to be read as either/or/both trauma and self-help, the narrative does not focus on voicing her experience the way that Lorde's text does.

Cancer Vixen actually works to glorify its narrator as “cancer protagonist,” a term I define later in this introduction. Marchetto’s position as cancer protagonist relies upon her ability to defeat all aspects of cancer, including its emotional aftershocks.

Micki McGee, in her book *Self-Help, Inc.*, claims the self-help text is a type of American phenomenon. McGee first positions Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography in this genre then connects his text with the expansion of this genre at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution to include women’s aspirations and the spike in popularity of self-help literature beginning in the 1970s. To her, the sudden spike of American self-help texts stem from a “new insecurity in the wake of the end of the standard job and family,” and that these texts meet the demand by promoting “investment” (12) in oneself. The U.S. self-help genre has served as an answer to these sociocultural anxieties (McGee 12). By intertwining these roots with the shift from feminist to pink ribbon politics, critics can understand why Marchetto’s narrative reflects an obsession with shallow spirituality, make-up, fashion, and other “it” lifestyle choices. *Cancer Vixen* tells a story of how breast cancer “improved” her life, a testament to her ability to improve continuously upon herself. These self-help metaphors connect with the self-representational strategies to reify Marchetto’s triumphant ending. However, triumph over cancer is problematic.

In “decoding” the images in *Cancer Vixen*, I will rely upon associations to U.S. cultural conventions and materials through a visual reading process outlined by Sturken and Cartwright. As readers of images, we “decode images by interpreting clues to intended, unintended, and even merely suggested meanings. These clues may be formal elements such as color, shades of black and white, tone, contrast, composition, depth, perspective, and style of address to the viewer” (Sturken and Cartwright 26). In applying this reading of visual texts to *Cancer Vixen*, I focus on the presence, within the visual and verbal aspects of the narratives, of traumatic re-viewing and

of self-help. Marchetto silences cartooned antagonists in a cycle of internalization/externalization. The metaphors of internalization/externalization which occur in each narrative show how the author embraces, or internalizes, her new found pink identity; this process of controlling the voices around her is what empowers Marchetto, according to her text.

This form of close reading does not differ significantly from the cultural associations I make analyzing the verbal forms in *The Cancer Journals*. Cartooning in particular allows for a focus that simply cannot be achieved by another medium (McCloud); graphic texts such as *Cancer Vixen* permit a space for the author to contribute more of her or his perspective than with single-medium narratives. These visual contributions are accomplished through the “underlying symbolic posture,” a style of visual referencing that calls upon the reader to interpret the cultural content of an image (Eisner 19). This type of decoding relies upon other visuals, such as lighting or atmosphere represented in the visual text, in order to shift a symbol into its culturally-attributed meaning (Eisner 19). These symbolic postures are “amplified” through the use of other visuals and/or verbal content (Eisner 15). The author/artist’s choice of symbolic posture(s) makes up an “alphabet with which to make an encompassing statement that weaves an entire tapestry of emotional interaction”; it is the basic symbol, articulated through a “familiar attitude,” that is used to relate visuals to content both inside and outside of the text (Eisner 16).

For instance, I take up a visual decoding of circles in the second chapter. The use of circles with faces to personify cancer cells, gossip grapes, and the pain chart all suggest an opportunity for emotional interaction and representative transference between these “characters” in *Cancer Vixen*.

Marchetto as Cancer Protagonist

Judy Z. Segal notes that the “most salient survival narratives” frequently take the shape of “praise of the cancer protagonist” (295), and *Cancer Vixen* is no different. The “pinked” metaphors of *Cancer Vixen* work to position an example of the ideal breast cancer survivor. But while triumph over cancer is not an issue in and of itself, the methods of persuasion used in “survival narratives” have the side effect of persuading readers that “they themselves are somehow failing at being ill” (Segal 295). While the limits of this project do not allow me to expand fully upon the gendered complications that breast cancer brings with it, I do note how similar this social anxiety of having a role model for breast cancer survivor mimics society’s obsession with ideal male and female roles. While there is undoubtedly a connection here, this project maintains its focus on how pink ribbon philanthropy uses political movements to fortify an ideal identity. With this focus in mind, I note that Sulik makes a similar observation to Segal in terms of having this type of role model establishes an opportunity for others to “fail” where there had previously not been one; yet, Sulik chooses instead to use the term “she-ro” instead of “cancer protagonist”:

The quintessential example of she-ro is *Cancer Vixen*. . . . *Cancer Vixen* displays pink femininity while taking on masculine power and aggression. She is emotional, sexually attractive, and tough, and the combination of these characteristics confers social status: after all she is a vixen, not a victim. Drawing attention to her survivor status and sexual acumen, *Cancer Vixen* exemplifies Maren Klawiter’s observation that ‘unlike the victim of yesteryear, [the new breast cancer survivor] was a woman whose femininity, sexuality and desirability were intact.’ Regardless of reconstruction, prosthetics, and reproductive potential, pink femininity provides an aesthetic solution to the disruption of breast cancer. (102-03)

This connection between victim, anti-victim (She-ro or cancer protagonist), and the use of this binary in *Cancer Vixen* becomes complicated when considered alongside the presence of trauma metaphors in this text. Where I distinguish “cancer protagonist” as distinct from “she-ro” is the gendered implications of the latter; pink ribbon philanthropy is certainly a static gendered space. Within the focus of this thesis positioning *Cancer Vixen* as a regression from the feminist politics in *The Cancer Journals*, it is necessary that I limit the project to a discussion of these cisgendered women. Part of this limit comes from my use of cancer protagonist instead of she-ro. Another reason for my term preference comes from Sulik’s consideration of the “she-ro” as “power puff girl who grew up and got breast cancer,” that is, a sort of maturing into the illness (105). Because this would differ too much from Lorde’s narrative self-positioning, I make use of cancer protagonist.

As cancer protagonist, Marchetto “mixes” these metaphors in order to establish herself as not only surviving the illness and its trauma, but as a role model for breast cancer patients and survivors. *Cancer Vixen*, as self-help narrative, does not point towards an arguably more accurate depiction of her trauma as semi-permanent: “any setback can be readily recast as temporary and thus one never falls into that loathed category of ‘victim’” (McGee 53). This text turns its focus to a single battle against one’s feelings instead of the multifaceted battle that breast cancer actually is; this maneuver reflects pink ribbon philanthropy’s obsession with raising money on behalf of the illness at the expense of promoting useful treatments. Because so much money and publicity are paid to pink ribbon philanthropy (and *Cancer Vixen*), it is more business-savvy to maintain this battle rather than to resolve it. Because Marchetto is drawn out of anonymity by publishing this text, she profits financially and publically—she is no longer an obscure cartoonist, but the *Cancer Vixen*.

Chute indicates that *Cancer Vixen* may in fact be “flawed by what feels like an all-too-easy triumphalism, [but] it provides several examples of how comics can be especially adept at representing illness” (*Our Cancer Year* 416). I maintain that the “all-too-easy triumphalism” grows out of *Cancer Vixen*’s relationship with pink ribbon philanthropy, the text’s intersection with third wave feminist politics, and the relationship between the comics-style narrative and heroism. While this thesis does not claim to study the entire history of comics, I do provide a truncated synopsis of the style’s relationship with heroic characters in the first chapter.

Otherwise, I do agree with Chute that the comics-style of the narrative brings a more rich representation to the table than a single-medium style because of its ability to apply visual and verbal mediums; however, the representations of illness presented in *Cancer Vixen* are minimized by her metaphoric usage in order to promote Marchetto’s position as cancer protagonist. Drawing cancer cells as angry cartooned drivers of the cars on the New Jersey Turnpike does not connote severity within a Western context. While the images Chute calls attention to, the “actual size” of the biopsy needle, do in some way depict a side of the actuality of this illness (*Our Cancer Year* 416), Marchetto diverts attention from these types of depictions of herself and her cancer. This lessening or avoidance goes against Lorde’s strategies, choosing instead to employ symbolism related to pink ribbon philanthropy: “[p]ink symbolizes breast cancer without telling us much about it” (Gardner 335) and so does *Cancer Vixen*.

Furthermore, the blending of metaphors of trauma into metaphors of self-help means Marchetto manipulates her text’s deeply personal connections in order to promote herself as cancer protagonist. This observation leaves space for future projects questioning the ethics of such narrative methods. However, this chapter argues that the metaphors Marchetto uses to position herself as a self-help author also point towards her trauma. The reader gets to see that

Marchetto internalizes her feelings, but because these depictions come from the same cultural starting points as depictions of self-help, the text actually overshadows her trauma, thus keeping it private. This thesis does not challenge whether or not this selective privacy is a “win” for Marchetto, but it does challenge *Cancer Vixen*’s position to tell others to use this process as a means of survival.

War as Metaphor: Pink Ribbon Rhetoric or Narrative Strategy?

Within the rhetoric of pink ribbon culture there is a “war metaphor” that provokes social anxieties through its use of binary categories, such as “good/evil, brave/cowardice, strong/weak, and victor/victim” (Sulik 75). Metaphors of battle are also a hallmark of the self-help genre used to personify the author’s life timeline within the narrative (McGee 51). This is a literary device that Lorde makes use of in her text; Knopf-Newman notes that despite her use of war metaphors, Lorde’s intent and focus was actually upon sustaining a theme of silence as violence and not so much personifying her life (125). This difference in political ideology, between life as war and speaking up as fighting, can be seen in *Cancer Vixen* and *The Cancer Journals*. Marchetto uses the self-help iteration of this metaphor in order to solidify her position as cancer protagonist. The “pinked” metaphors of *Cancer Vixen* work to position an example of the ideal breast cancer survivor.

Something similar occurs in *The Cancer Journals* on several occasions, however. Lorde writes, in this vein in several places in her text, including “[m]y silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you” (18); “we fear the very visibility without which we also cannot truly live” (20); “Because the machine will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak...we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we still will be no less afraid” (20); and, “[W]here the words of women 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 our lives” (21), among others. What all of these quotes show is a demand for women breast cancer patients to speak up, and her implications of feeling satisfied or in some way better off for her own speaking up provides both a learning opportunity for the reader and an example of a cured person. It is the war against silence that Lorde’s narrative metaphorizes, versus what we see in Marchetto’s narrative, which is a war against cancer/other. It is the difference in self-representational strategies that indicates *Cancer Vixen*’s departure from Lorde’s political ideology.

As I explore the shifts between trauma and self-help, feminist and un-feminist, and verbal and visual in *Cancer Vixen*, I demonstrate the generalizations that pink ribbon philanthropy enacts upon these deeply personal narratives. I further suggest that this collective experience undermines the personal political action which Lorde’s foundational breast cancer narrative called for and that making an individual’s experience part of a collective one gives way to a system of privileging one experience over another. In other words, pink ribbon philanthropy shapes this system; the discourse these narratives contribute to is one which “works to blame the victim and thus to deflect attention from structural or external variables” (King 78). The blame system in *Cancer Vixen* works to blame the reader for all the ways in which she might not be like Marchetto, something that is a detriment to recent third wave feminist political actions. This project ultimately uncovers the crucial point that *Cancer Vixen* works to prescribe a breast cancer identity through its self-help attributes and connections to pink ribbon philanthropy.

Instead of constructing representations of her feelings the way Lorde does in *The Cancer Journals*, Marchetto uses her voice to instruct and to prescribe a process to a very specific type of woman: one who is white, heterosexual, middle-aged, upper-middle-class. Not

only is this a misinterpretation of the call for self-identification present in *The Cancer Journals*, but it also presents a problematic cancer protagonist; the other-than Marchetto performs her illness incorrectly—the only way to have “properly” breast cancer is to be a *Cancer Vixen*. Furthermore, Marchetto’s identity becomes part of her prescription: she is an upper-middleclass, middle-aged, heterosexual, white woman. To perform Marchetto’s cancer vixen is to deny another portion of the diversities called for by Lorde.

Part of the political regression between *The Cancer Journals* and *Cancer Vixen* comes out of another shift: medicalization. The 1980s saw a rise in the personal narrative and a shift towards the medicalization of these narratives. This shift springs from the rise of “therapeutic self-help groups” (Taylor and Van Willigen 124). Taylor and Van Willigen note that this “context” of social change—one which includes medicalization, conservatism, and transformations in U.S. feminism—brought about the rise of “self-help groups” (124) and normalized the seeking of deeply personal advice from a stranger. A side effect of the medicalization shift is medical consumerism: “*Medical consumerism* is a term that refers to the belief that the users of health services should and do play an active role in making informed choices about their health” (Sulik 31). This project considers medical consumerism as a flaw drawn out of Lorde’s insistence that women have the final say in their medical treatments. Instead of giving the diagnosed the final say in treatment plans, it shifts the responsibility of medical knowledge and treatment outcome away from the doctor and onto the patient wholly.

When classifying books by a given theme, there is no “trauma” label to apply. For example, the Library of Congress Catalog data labels these narratives “Self-help/Comics & Graphic Memoir” and “Health/ Comic Books, Strips, Etc./ Biography.” Labeling the narratives in this way, with a life writing term placed last, situates the text’s medicalized purpose literally

ahead of the author's traumatic re-viewing. The external concerns of pink ribbon philanthropy are given priority over the personal concerns of the author's experience.

In the same way that I trace the medical consumerism of *Cancer Vixen* back to Lorde, Sulik traces it back to another second wave text, the Boston Women's Health Book Collective's *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. This text "empowers" women to ask questions about health concerns specific to their gender. Sulik also makes note of the causal relationship between medical consumerism and the demand for treatment options (33-35); the demand for options shapes the pink ribbon movement by concealing questions about applicability. In transforming the capitalist adage "let the buyer beware," it is the patient-buyer who should now beware. It is his/her decision which products/treatments to consume as this burden has shifted away from doctors. With this sort of redrawing of brand lines in mind (from non-specific brand to philanthropic brand), the self-help memoir boom overlaps with this turn towards using the personal experiences of patients in medical treatments. Shirley Temple Black, Betty Ford, and Happy Rockefeller may not have intended to fight against "a political agenda" or "medical status quo," but their diagnoses—their making public these diagnoses—are shaped by the shifts in medical practices (King xiii). *Cancer Vixen* illustrates this point through depicting Marchetto's refusal to lose her hair due to treatment and her concerns about scheduling appointments around her wedding plans. This project argues that such depictions give a false sense of control and success over the cancer.

Performance in Breast Cancer Self-Help: Externalization to War Metaphor

What has evolved from Lorde's feminist political beginnings is a cultural philanthropic phenomenon which serves as a "mechanism of governance," valuing society over the individual, often causing undue harm to the individual (King xxix). Samantha King asks: "What exactly

does ‘awareness’ mean in the context of breast cancer, and what is it that consumers are being asked to gain ‘awareness’ of?” (95). This open-ended question leads to the spending of money as a means of performing altruism; philanthropy has been watered down and packaged for the middle class by means of consumerism. The beneficiary of these campaigns is the company affiliated with the organization in question, and the products sold are personal experiences, empowerment rhetoric, and social networks (Sulik 121). The product I focus on is personal experience in autobiographical narratives; however, I do gesture towards empowerment rhetoric and social networks in my analysis.

Pink ribbon philanthropy, and these texts via transference, plays on the psychoanalytic anxiety of knowing what we cannot see. While hidden under clothing, the shape and size of the breast are still viewed. Once the breast is removed, it cannot invoke either, unless under the use of a prosthetic. The presence of the breast, the gaze of the “other,” the viewer, mediates the image of the self (Homer 26). As a cultural indicator of “woman,” the breast is crucial to the symbolic order, the image of the woman “stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other” (Mulvey 838). De-emasculating the female body is less problematic than disabling it because “disabled women are not seen as women in this society” (Schriempf 53-54). This significant quotation explains why light pink is the color of choice for breast cancer; the color’s cultural ties to girlhood provide a re-gendering of the mastectomized female body or an opportunity to remature into a woman. This point is not to claim that the naked breast is always visible, but that it can be viewed from under clothing and is considered a visual identifier between girl/woman as well as man/woman. This observation, however, is not the same with the mastectomized body; the post-treatment breast cancer patient is at risk of losing control of her or his ability to be seen and recognized.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter of this thesis positions Lorde's self-described "scrutinizing" as a form of outrage. Because outrage is a useful political tool, her narrative becomes political in a very general way and does not focus on one specific issue within breast cancer culture. While this position may have been intentional, as Lorde fought to encourage diverse voices of experience, what grew out of this generality is a vague yet robust anger at the disease. Lorde cannot be credited with spearheading changes to the treatment of women, in the ways in which she might have hoped, as *Cancer Vixen* depicts the very issues of lack of diversity and maintained patriarchy that Lorde pointed to. Furthermore, *The Cancer Journals* works to prescribe a politically-active label to the breast cancer patient, which might not actually fit with what that patient wants her or his life to be.

Also, the first chapter of this thesis also contains a discussion of *Cancer Vixen*'s failure to illustrate medically-relevant images, choosing instead to cartoon the protagonist taking on gossip women, applying lipstick, and treating bald women in particular as "unfashionable." I argue that this label of "unfashionable" works to discredit, and therefore silence, the relevant experiences of women who differ from Marchetto in terms of social status and cultural capital. While both *The Cancer Journals* and *Cancer Vixen* make use of outrage as a metaphor, it is within Marchetto's narrative that this narrative tool is turned against other women.

The second chapter of this thesis focuses primarily on the visual transfer of meaning between metaphors in *Cancer Vixen*. Between the gossip grapes, animated cancer cells, pain charts, and green text boxes lies nonverbal content linking of all of these images together. I further argue in this chapter that this nonverbal content is an attempt on the part of Marchetto to control what is inside of her and externalize it. This change of position connects to Lorde's anti-

silence movement, which implies visibility through verbal modes. The shift from verbalization to illustration between the two texts is particularly important, as it connects to Marchetto's attempts to control to trauma. This attempt at removing her trauma, however, intermingles with the "new insecurities" of the text's self-help genre, thus ultimately complicating a reading of *Cancer Vixen* as a success-over-trauma narrative.

The conclusion of this thesis articulates that "pinked" breast cancer narratives prescribe a series of behaviors detailing how women should voice emotional pain through control of the visible body. These bodies are not limited to her own, as Marchetto's rejection of other women is shown in *Cancer Vixen*. The popularity of pink ribbon philanthropy contributes to her valuing of the "fashionable" over the "unfashionable," but this value system carries with it significant complications when considering that Marchetto privileges her experience over other women's experiences. While *The Cancer Journals* maintains a focus on the then-silenced negativity of breast cancer, *Cancer Vixen* tries to reclaim the possibility of a "happy ending" in this space, which is problematic. Furthermore, additional studies need to be done to delineate the different cultures of action behind public breast cancer narratives, as I suspect the warring between these factions contributes to the disarray and complicated nature of these memoirs.

Framing *Cancer Vixen* within the Multiple Contexts of Pink Ribbon Philanthropy, Contemporary Self-Help, and *The Cancer Journals*

Knopf-Newman credits Lorde with reshaping the “way that many African American women and lesbians think about their bodies during and after breast cancer,” citing her as having interrogated Western medical practices as well as the creation of a consciousness about the absence of class/race/sexuality in medical discourse (110). Lorde’s noted concern in publishing *The Cancer Journals* was to “break the silence” around the “compulsory” white, heteronormative, middle-class femininity surrounding breast cancer narratives (Knopf-Newman 109). While Lorde’s narrative was not the first to introduce the breast cancer experience to the public, the earlier texts were “not conscious” of the ways their bodies were “racially marked” and how that “factored into the normalizing gaze” of U.S. society (Knopf-Newman 109). While this thesis does not directly take on racial, sexual, gender, class, and other identity markers, it is important to call attention to the way Lorde returns to these categories in her text, especially in light of the fact that Marchetto identifies herself as the very stereotype from which Lorde sought to escape carefully. As Lorde explained:

For other women of all ages, colors, and sexual identities who recognize that imposed silence about any area of our lives is a tool for separation and powerlessness, and for myself, I have tried to voice some of my feelings and thoughts about the travesty of prosthesis, the pain of amputation, the function of cancer in a profit economy, my confrontation with mortality, the strength of women loving, and the power and rewards of self-conscious living. (7-8)

Lorde recognizes her individuality and its place in the breast cancer conversation, and attempts to use her position as under recognized to pose a challenge. By extending her act of voicing to all women, not just black, lesbian poets, Lorde wants to challenge the medicalized patriarchy.

Jennifer Driscoll writes that “outrage has the political efficacy to effect social change and to intervene in the construction of discourse, leading to the challenge that certain rhetorical contexts limit the expression of emotion” (199). Lorde articulates her outrage of the illness of breast cancer by writing into her narrative moments of scrutinizing and of questioning allegedly normative practices: “If we are to translate the silence surrounding breast cancer into language and action against this scourge, then the first step is that women with mastectomies must become visible to each other. For silence and invisibility go hand in hand with powerlessness” (Lorde 62). For Lorde, voicing her outrage at the lack of diverse representations of women (and arguably patients at large) means to make public, to voice, multiple experiences.

However, the ways in which Lorde calls to action women with breast cancer is problematic—she does so within the confines of a self-help text. Because the goals of a self-help text are to instruct, Lorde prescribes a way for those with breast cancer diagnoses to behave. Lorde’s prescription is then enforced by the narrative’s position within the literary canon, but *The Cancer Journals* has certainly shaped contemporary breast cancer narratives, such as *Cancer Vixen*. Lorde’s text is now the piece from which to rebel; it is no longer the rebel.

From the very start of the text, the title of *The Cancer Journals* alludes to the author’s struggle, setting herself up as the protagonist of the text. Lorde, however, like Marchetto, does not write about battling the disease itself. Instead, Lorde positions herself as fighting against social prescriptions and misconceptions about who has breast cancer. She writes, “Each of us struggles daily with the pressures of conformity and the loneliness of difference. . . . I

only know that those choices do not work for me, nor for other women who, not without fear, have survived cancer by scrutinizing its meaning within our lives” (Lorde 8). The act of “scrutinizing” is the manifestation of Lorde’s outrage in *The Cancer Journals*. Locating where and how Lorde voices her outrage is important when comparing *The Cancer Journals* to *Cancer Vixen*. Lorde’s text is the baseline for future breast cancer narratives, and because voicing outrage is one of its hallmarks of this genre, this scrutinizing would be a particular characteristic a rebellious breast cancer narrative would have to take position against if it wished to depart from *The Cancer Journals*.

Lorde’s use of “scrutinizing” is metaphorical and its use sets up a battle that her text can win; she might not win against the cancer itself, but she can name and personify the social structures that inform her public experience with the disease. *Cancer Vixen* builds upon this type of personification through its comics-form. Chute’s quote that *Cancer Vixen* is “particularly adept” at representing illness offers important commentary because both Lorde and Marchetto focus on their illness, not their disease (*Our Cancer Year* 416). My argument here lies in the distinction between the terms “disease” and “illness.” As Cecil Helman acknowledges, disease is about the “abnormalities of the structure and function of body organs and systems,” whereas illness is about how the patient feels or experiences a disease (548). Through the precedent set by Lorde and the breast cancer narratives that followed *The Cancer Journals*, *Cancer Vixen* does not attempt to raise awareness of the disease of breast cancer, but rather awareness of Marchetto’s illness. Not only does this distinction illustrate how both Lorde and Marchetto set themselves up to be Cancer Protagonists, but, as noted by Segal, this type of representation sets someone else up to “fail at being ill.”

Both *The Cancer Journals* and *Cancer Vixen* have this same flaw in that they essentialize the breast cancer experience, including that of the authors, to provide an instructional text on how to survive the social detriments of the disease. Nonetheless, it is important to call attention to the different environments in the texts. Despite being from two distinctly different time periods, both texts are flawed in the same way. They both fail to bring awareness to the disease, instead bringing awareness to the social side effects. King's discussion of pink ribbon philanthropy makes use of one sense of "awareness"; consumers are made aware that breast cancer exists as a problem to women. This is a very limited use of awareness as reflected in the two narratives. By focusing on the social awareness of breast cancer and choosing instead to limit awareness to the illness side of the diagnosis, each narrative fails in its own right to make its reader aware of the medical aspects of the disease.

New/Old Insecurities: Value/Devalue of External Forces in *Cancer Vixen*

Breast cancer narratives exemplify how to perform illness through the genre's predilection towards self-help. Self-help, as a genre, is particularly popular in U.S. culture; McGee attributes the recent spike in popularity of self-help and advice texts to a "new insecurity" in the U.S. (30). The "new insecurity," growing out of social shifts in the structures of the workplace, family, and personal relationships, has placed new demands that people "remain marriageable and employable" (30), rather than lapse in physical appearance or become too uncomfortable with one's job. Lorde's new insecurity takes the shape of her sexual appeal to other women: "What will it be like making love to me? Will she find my body delicious?" (43). This questioning positions Lorde as a self-identified "deviant" body; however, Lorde's criticisms of feeling unrepresented by the Reach for Recovery program, one which would be identified as a product of what would become pink ribbon philanthropy, ensure that her self-help instructional

power is used to claim that she is not *that*—Lorde is not a pre-pink ribbon woman. Again, this act of articulating one’s identity through resistance rather than creation sets the tone for similar acts of rebellion in *Cancer Vixen*. Additionally, this kind of “new insecurity” also applies to personal health, as we see in *Cancer Vixen*. Marchetto’s purpose of exemplifying breast cancer blends with these “new insecurities.”

Cancer Vixen is a pinked narrative; Marchetto is not only silencing other women but concealing them as well. Concealment of the very real dangers of breast cancer is a common criticism of pink ribbon philanthropy. The pink ribbon which Klawiter identifies as the representative symbol for pink ribbon philanthropy has the same design flaws as those that Hillary Chute attributes to *Cancer Vixen*; both text and pink ribbon are “flawed by what feels like an all-too-easy triumphalism” (*Our Cancer Year* 416). Though, while Chute points to this upbeat characteristic of the narrative, she maintains that the comics-style of *Cancer Vixen*, that is its verbal and visual composition, makes it “especially adept” at conveying Marchetto’s experience (*Our Cancer Year* 416). The same is not said about the pink ribbon, which is frequently criticized for being symbolic of breast cancer “without telling us much about it” (Gardner 335).

However, the flaw with the pink ribbon is not that it is without words—these visuals frequently accompany brief, personal testaments and statements on websites and elsewhere, connecting the two through visual transference. The problem is with the politics it represents. Ribbons in the U.S. and much of Western culture do carry with them connotations of hope, gratefulness, positivity, and celebration just like what King, Klawiter, and Suilk attribute to pink ribbon philanthropy. The implications this flaw has on *Cancer Vixen*, then, and what Chute identifies as triumphalism, surface from the text’s political affiliation with pink ribbon philanthropy. *Cancer Vixen*’s triumphalism occurs in a space that emphasizes the political over

the personal, which reflects in her characterizations of other women. Furthermore, this value system within the narrative speaks back to the political goals of pink ribbon philanthropy and medicalization.

In part, the medicalization of *The Cancer Journals* and *Cancer Vixen* is more about revealing what is/might be on the treatment side of the diagnosis. Chute notes that *Cancer Vixen* uses its visioverbal construction to cartoon the “actual size” of Marchetto’s biopsy needle (*Our Cancer Year* 416), among other medical equipment and hospital settings. This example of the medicalization points to the “new insecurities” in the text. By illustrating the “actual size” of the needle, Marchetto is performing her self-help authorship; she is instructing her readership of the experience. *The Cancer Journals* performs a related representation of “what might happen” when Lorde is visited by the representative for Reach for Recovery. Even though Lorde’s reaction to the visit is largely negative, she still reveals a situation that other women with breast cancer diagnoses could face. Both the actual size of the needle and the Reach for Recovery visit are examples of questions readers might have but might be uncomfortable approaching their doctor about. Because these answers are surrounded by the context of a personal memoir, and of a complex web of breast cancer politics, they work to shape the text at large towards a medicalized self-help genre. Lorde’s text and Marchetto’s text relegate the forms of metaphors we would expect to be front and center in a deeply personal retelling of their breast cancer experience to the background. Instead, these texts focus on the political battles that have very little to do with emotions and more about instructing people how to behave “properly.”

Related in part to the presence of the “new insecurities” of remaining appealing, the tendency of pink ribbon philanthropy to silence and to conceal reminders of the severity of cancer and its treatments mirrors this same inclination Marchetto uses in her narrative. Maren

Klawiter theorizes that feminist cancer organizations “[challenge] the upbeat discourse of survival and the normalizing of images of unmarred, unscarred, heterofeminine bodies that were featured prominently in the culture of screening activism and the mainstream media”(169).

Lorde’s narrative makes these challenges.

Marchetto’s narrative, however, rejects such challenges in order to position herself as the new, fresh breast cancer fashionista. Additionally, Marchetto’s narrative does not waver between the two-pronged “culture of emotion” Klawiter attributes to feminist breast cancer activism in the way that Lorde’s does. Marchetto does waver in-between “anger, accusation...contentious protests directed at cancer culprits” as well as “public compassion, support, and direct services for women” (Klawiter 169), however, these emotions are not directed at breast cancer but instead her fashionable lifestyle. The personified cancer cells, as I will make clear in chapter two, are connected to the gossip grapes, the women who are “toxic” to Marchetto. Therefore, Marchetto analogizes her anger over her diagnosis to her anger over these other women, thereby lessening the severity of her diagnosis and highlighting the severity of personal gossip.

Cancer Vixen positions its narrator as fighting a war against gossip, ugliness, and being poor; *The Cancer Journals* positions Lorde against patriarchal doctors and nurses, who might be ignorant of sociocultural difference, and a complacency that she analogizes to silence. This is a crucial, significant difference between the two, as Marchetto regresses from the feminist battles fought in Lorde’s narrative. Marchetto’s narrative ultimately makes statements about what it means for all women who have breast cancer from her self-titled position as cancer vixen, as the woman who achieved a perfect balance between having cancer and remaining fashionable. The text maintains, in other words, that women who have a breast cancer diagnosis are white, upper-middle class, and heteronormative who will gain a sense of charity through their experience. It is

this textual thread that overlaps with pink ribbon philanthropy and with the statement of pre-Lorde breast cancer narratives. *Cancer Vixen* goes through significant lengths to show how Marchetto silences the voices and experiences of other women instead of the encouragement displayed in *The Cancer Journals*. It is not only the terrifying voices of breast cancer experience that Marchetto silences, though; she silences all women except for herself. In part, *Cancer Vixen* does reflect Lorde's call for voice and build upon it by including a visual medium; however, the form of Marchetto's answer is inherently problematic.

Silencing in a comics-style narrative is constructed by using the narrator's eyes; that is, who Marchetto looks at, looks away from, and who looks at her are all part of communicating who she identifies with. Garland-Thomson indicates that the act of staring gives way to a nonverbal "social relationship" between the two, that this kind of "visual scrutiny" is both "impersonal and intimate" (33). In several scenes Marchetto stares at other women with breast cancer and looks away from other women with breast cancer. These textual moments make use of the social convention of staring to convey approval or disapproval of the other woman based on the physical side effects of her cancer. Because this disapproval takes place in a self-help memoir, which generically requires the narrator to display some sort of instruction, women who are not like Marchetto fail at being ill, the text holds. If they were not bald, if they wore the right shoes to chemo and radiation, and if they married a rich man who could afford to pay out of pocket for her medical services, then these women would be comparable cancer vixens. They would succeed only at being ill with breast cancer. Marchetto establishes herself as a privileged, upper-class, white woman as well as envied "fashionista," implying that women who do not identify themselves using her terms are not having cancer correctly. While this text represents Marchetto's experience, and thus emblematic of Lorde's call for diverse voices of experience,

this binary setup stands in opposition to Lorde's politics, as it devalues the experiences of other women. Furthermore, Marchetto interprets Lorde's call to "exemplify the process of integrating crisis into my life" (Lorde 8) as integrating pink ribbon values to her life. Through her capacity to integrate and to control her life is limited—she cannot will her cancer away—Marchetto maintains a focus and valuation of external/outward appearance. By maintaining her make-up regimens, focusing on not losing her hair, wearing designer shoes, and more "fashionable" performances of wellness throughout her text, Marchetto implies that controlling these external factors, her external appearance, is effective in eradicating her breast cancer.

Pink Credit: Glorifying Symbols of Pink Ribbon Philanthropy

Marchetto uses her narrative to position herself as a privileged kind of cancer protagonist. On page 107 of *Cancer Vixen*, for instance, Marchetto draws non-narrator figures using a "cancer card" to collect a social benefit. The page itself does not feature a page number, and there are no linear gutters on the page. Draped in a light pink background, the page features a zigzag of three images: at the top right of this page is a woman with short red hair making her excuses for not attending a party; on the middle left (and largest part of) this page, is a woman confronting a security desk with her card; and, at the bottom right of this page is a close up of the cancer card with the caption, "A Special Kind of Membership." This card draws upon a U.S. cultural artifact, the credit card. While access to a "universal survivor network" is listed as a benefit of this cancer credit card, the top and middle images, as well as the top text describing the card's uses, signify that Marchetto is silencing the people around her. The use of the cancer card in this instance is to get people to stop asking the card holder to attend parties that she or he does not want to attend, do tasks she or he does not want to do, and get into a building that she or he

does not want to enter. Importantly, the middle image shows the woman saying, “As if I look like a terrorist!” (107), rearticulating the narrative’s focus on external appearance.

The way that the page is framed proves Marchetto’s blending of what is kept private and what is made public—the page has no frames or gutters. Such a detail articulates the limitless of “The Cancer Card.” As Eisner explains, “[t]he non-frame speaks to unlimited space. It has the effect of encompassing unseen but acknowledged background” (45). What is unseen in this picture is the visual representation of Marchetto; she chooses not to draw herself anywhere on this unlimited page. Here Marchetto visually represents not only the pervasiveness of pink ribbon philanthropy but the permanence of the disease. Because she has breast cancer, and because breast cancer cannot be cured, Marchetto will always have access to her cancer card. This is a moment where *Cancer Vixen* seems to emulate a trauma narrative, but again, this personal metaphor is literally relegated to the background.

Marchetto’s concept of the cancer card is an iteration of the “new insecurity” that McGee notes in U.S. self-help texts; *Cancer Vixen* is not only focused on physical outward appearances, but also on social appearances—both of which are external. Having breast cancer means that one gains the “power to say no” (Marchetto 106) without sacrificing one’s desirability to others. There is “no preset spending limit” on the cancer card, which alludes to the platinum and black cards used by celebrities. Furthermore, the cancer card visually connects the pink ribbon to spending in a rather blunt way to King’s criticisms on the financial mechanisms behind pink ribbon philanthropy. This connection to spending power, via the symbol of the credit card, means that Marchetto’s cancer protagonist has a kind of super exclusive membership with the social and financial spending power associated with the upper echelons.

While the women in this cancer card spread are not comic renderings of the narrator/Marchetto, it is significant to point out that they are skinny, white women. In this way, Marchetto distinguishes her product/narrative/text from Lorde's politics by identifying with the heteronormative white women Lorde positioned herself against. In this way, Marchetto's text fails Lorde's politics as she does not take up the call for diverse representations. *Cancer Vixen*, instead, upholds the visage of predominately white women used in pink ribbon philanthropy and actually goes even further by depicting the security guards as white, too. In this way, Marchetto's advertisement for the cancer (credit) card is racially exclusive and has implications regarding racial and class relations. According to this visual text, not only are white people the only ones depicted with the card, but the statement "As if I look like a terrorist!" has its own racial markers as well.

Marchetto's rendering of the cancer card may not verbally articulate its exclusivity to breast cancer, as it is labelled only "The Cancer Card;" however, the prevalence of pink ribbons across the page visually limit this card to the kind of social movement that Lorde rejected. Marchetto's visual limitations place her narrative in opposition to the call of *The Cancer Journals* for diverse voices of experience. An explicit criticism of the few materials available to Lorde was that they only feature upper-middle class, straight, white women when breast cancer affects all kinds of women. By sarcastically comparing her new "excuse card" to a credit card, Marchetto's narrative becomes one of those materials that does not recognize the experiences of other women.

Another instance of a page in *Cancer Vixen* is page 133, though this page has gutters and frames whereas "The Cancer Card" page (page 107) does not, suggesting limits on this page that do not apply to the cancer card. The pink card featured on this page is of "Saint Evelyn, Patron Saint

of Breast Cancer.” The first frame, both the largest on the page and the one featuring the Saint Evelyn prayer card, shows miniature renditions of Marchetto and her mother looking up at the large card as if it were a billboard on the street. Though footnoted as “non-denominational,” this frame culls many of its signifiers from the culture of the Catholic Church, which is noted earlier as Marchetto’s mother’s religion. Furthermore, the text outside of the speech bubbles outlines a timeframe of “Saint” Evelyn Lauder’s financial contributions to diagnostic centers, her role in the establishment of the Breast Cancer Research Foundation, and the factually-inaccurate note that Lauder “introduced National Breast Cancer Month [in October 1992].”¹ This one frame blends a (perceived) icon of pink ribbon philanthropy with cultural signifiers of fashion and religion, playing off of the idea of “fashion worship.” Marchetto, positioned as a consumer in this frame and as a self-proclaimed “fashionista” at several points throughout the text, sets herself up to replicate the “fashion” presented by this “billboard.” The other frames on this page show Marchetto in discussion with her oncologist, noting that the hospital she is at, the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, is the “WINNER! of THE most GLAM GOWN HANDS DOWN!” (133). Her proclamation, as seen in her use of capital letters, positions her receiving a second opinion from an oncologist in similar ways to a search for a wedding gown. Also, this comparison links what Marchetto emphasizes as “fashionable” to the “light chemo” offered to her at this cancer center; not losing one’s hair is fashionable to Marchetto, who also sets up those who do lose their hair as “unfashionable,” and having cancer as “wrong.” Furthermore, this

¹Samantha King notes that the manufacturer of the most-prescribed drug for breast cancer patients, AstraZeneca, founded National Breast Cancer Awareness Month (NBCAM) in 1985 (xx-xi). Additionally, King credits the Susan J. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation as the first organization “to latch on to the idea [of involving ribbons] by distributing pink ribbons to every participant in its New York City Race for the Cure,” explaining that this foundation later attempted and failed to trademark the ribbon, resulting in Estee Lauder’s adaptation of the ribbon in the fall of 1992 (xxiv-xxv).

scene embodies the implied “failing at being ill,” as unfashionable women, who are not at this fashionable cancer center, are not having breast cancer correctly. Then, as a self-help text, these emphases suggest that women with breast cancer diagnoses should strive to remain/to become fashionable as they undergo treatment.

Ostracizing Cancer: Rejecting the Experiences of Other Women by (Not) Looking

What Marchetto looks at, and does not look at, as I note above, reflects who she chooses to identify with (or not); Marchetto is comfortable being the “fashionable” cancer patient, and, therefore, depicts herself staring at the billboard/saint card of Evelyn Lauder. The symbolic posturing of gazing at the billboard/saint card weaves this section of the narrative into the idolatry of the fashion industry; Marchetto draws herself not only as a fashionista, but as aspiring to be specifically a breast cancer fashionista. Evelyn Lauder’s location on the billboard, where a fashion advertisement would be, positions her as a breast cancer fashionista. Being fashionable is not the only appeal to Marchetto, however; being fashionable also means that Marchetto would have an appealing external appearance. Her concern of remaining appealing speaks back to the narrative’s stance as a self-help text with concerns of “new insecurities,” aligning it more closely with the genre of self-help through its concerns of concealing the appearance of trauma.

Marchetto’s refuses to look at and identify with other cancer patients, signifying an act of rejection and disapproval and marks them as unfashionable, unlike Lauder, and therefore unsaintly. On page 108, for example, Marchetto is confronted with the reality of cancer when she sees “Daphne” in the waiting room of a holistic doctor’s office. The three frames at the bottom of this page show Marchetto cartooning an image of a bald woman while she and her mother sit in a waiting room; the cartoon Marchetto makes in this setting is of a woman complaining of “a bad wig day.” This image is followed by the two women watching Daphne walk to the receptionist’s

desk, and then Marchetto's mother comforting a tearful Marchetto by saying, "It's different when you see it" (108). In this last frame, Marchetto's eyes are again covered, but this time with her own hands. It is her hands that also produce the cartooned image in the first part of this sequence, connecting Marchetto's cartooning to covering her eyes; both allow her not to see the different "it" of cancer, which is represented by Daphne. The bald, "one-breasted" women Lorde sought to "descend upon congress" with (Lorde 15) are thus positioned as not-Marchetto. This revelation positions *Cancer Vixen* as a self-help text on how not to be that woman.

This sequence as well visually resembles a fashion runway as Marchetto and her mother sit and watch Daphne walk by wearing the "fashion" of cancer treatment. Like Lauder's billboard/saint image, Daphne is symbolically postured as a fashion model; the three-frame sequence with Daphne shows first Marchetto with an open book, showing her mother an image of two women conversing, one bald and saying she's "having a bad wig day" (108). Upon showing her mother the book, Marchetto asks, "What do you think of this?" (108). The second frame shows Daphne walking past and the third shows Marchetto slumped over with her face in her hands. The symbolic posturing of Daphne as a fashion model here moves from book to runway. But Marchetto rejects this fashion when she covers her eyes in the third frame; she rejects this version of breast cancer, which is the realist portrayal Lorde argued for in *The Cancer Journals*.

It is a disfigurement similar to Daphne's baldness that Marchetto refuses to suffer from throughout the narrative. By covering her eyes and refusing to connect with Daphne, Marchetto shifts to the opposing position of Lorde's politics. Lorde, in her *The Cancer Journals*, fights to give voice to the multiplicity of breast cancer experience through acts of voicing and scrutinizing—this is not what Marchetto chooses to accomplish in her text. Marchetto refuses to

scrutinize her experience by deigning to acknowledge any other experience than her own. The fact that other women have died, lost their hair, lost their breasts, lost their fiancés or husbands becomes irrelevant to Marchetto because none of those traumas happened to her. This absence of loss, as strange as it sounds, works to promote Marchetto's actions of refusal and denial as the "correct" way to perform breast cancer. It is because her narrative is missing these common cancer traumas that she positions herself as *the* role model.

However, an additional instance in the text where Marchetto refuses to gaze is found on page 138. This page is similar to 108: the bottom three images feature Marchetto and her mother again sitting in a doctor's waiting room. In the second frame, a woman disfigured by her treatment walks by, and in the third frame Marchetto looks away from the woman. On this page, Marchetto does not cover her eyes but does refuse to look at the other woman, and she turns her face away. This third panel also contains two lines of dialogue in which Marchetto's mother dismisses the disfigured woman, saying that she "probably has brain cancer," to which Marchetto responds "that doesn't make me feel any better" (138). This sequence also resembles a fashion runway, as the unnamed woman walks past the on looking Marchetto and her mother. Again, Marchetto refuses this cancer "fashion" by looking away. Marchetto, by illustrating herself as refusing to look, encapsulates Garland-Thomson's idea that when suddenly confronted "with some momento mori or our most dreaded fate—we look away" (79). Thus, Marchetto's response that she does not find comfort or understanding in this woman having another form of cancer, is a sustained rejection of the potential physical deformities caused by cancer treatment: she rejects the experiences of others.

By refusing to participate in a gaze of "mutual recognition" between herself and these two other women, Marchetto places her experience in opposition to Daphne and the unnamed

woman on 138. Furthermore, the focus on fashion throughout *Cancer Vixen* is not only superficial in that it relates directly to concerns of the exterior visage, but this thread becomes a reflection of the influence of pink ribbon philanthropy in the text. King notes that images and stories circulated by pink organizations focus on survivors who appear “uniformly youthful (if not always young), ultrafeminine, slim, immaculately groomed, radiant with health, joyful, and seemingly at peace with the world” (102). Marchetto’s narrative positions herself as one of these pinked images through its portrayal of her as not-her. This lack of “negative,” physical side effects, when juxtaposed with Marchetto’s act of looking away from these other women’s experiences, suggests these women are doing breast cancer wrong. This binary relates back to the text’s position within the self-help genre. Within the context of the cancer protagonist—winner against cancer—these other women have failed, because in this pinked context, any practice as a woman with breast cancer that is not “personal strength and optimism” is framed as ineffective (King x).

Being a Good Person: Exemplifying Charity

The spread on pages 92 and 93 reify *Cancer Vixen*’s narrative distance from Lorde’s call for diverse experiences. These two pages show a sequence of Marchetto talking on the phone in a New York taxi to her friend, Annie, who is visually hinted to be Executive Vice President of DKNY in regards to getting a second opinion on her treatment. Once this phone call ends, she has a conversation with the taxi driver about his wife, who also has breast cancer and no health insurance. Verbally, the second conversation in this sequence, with the taxi driver regarding his wife, is situated as a second opinion. This woman is revealed to be “not doing too good” (Marchetto 93). This exchange with the taxi driver is further setup as a second opinion, when Marchetto, after her phone call with Annie, says, “Oh Lord, everyone has a million opinions and

I don't have one" (92). It is after this comment that she converses with the taxi driver, ending with her handing him "everything in [her] wallet" (93). She has paid him for his experience and opinion—the text makes no difference between the two.

Visual cues found in her text, however, reveal that Marchetto ignores his experience. On this page, she wears blue sunglasses that she only peeks over once to look at his wife's picture and asks her name. She is not directly seeing because she is not directly looking at the driver and his wife. Furthermore, she is in a position of privilege, as she pays to be driven, which is symbolic of class differentiations and further underscores Marchetto's positioning of herself as a celebrity or famous person. Though she has received her own breast cancer diagnosis, Marchetto's behavior in this taxi suggests that she has not. By handing over "everything in her wallet" to the driver, Marchetto not only goes temporarily broke, but partakes in the consumerist culture of pink ribbon philanthropy—the way to fight breast cancer is to throw money at it. Furthermore, Marchetto positions herself as a "good" person using the same transaction method put forth by pink ribbon philanthropy.

"Bad" People are "Possible Cancer Cells": Depictions of Infectious People

While it is important to note the similarity between the green gossip grapes and the "Possible Cancer Cells" on page 4 and throughout, I reserve my discussion to focus on how Marchetto looks at these other women/ grapes. These gossipy, envious women—the faces on the grapes are heavily made-up—repeat jealous phrases such as "It's good for her career," "It'll never last," "All those gorgeous women he could have had—," "—Like me," and "She must give good blow jobs" (50). While these women-grapes are superficially talking about Marchetto's new husband, because the grapes are so visually similar to the cancer cells, there is a conflation

occurring here that speaks back to women who are unfashionable. The grapes do not have breast cancer, so they cannot be Marchetto's brand of fashionable.

The grape vine stands for the way in which spreads gossip from one person to the next; Marchetto's use of the grape vine, then, suggests an infectious quality to these women-grapes. Viewing women in this manner opposes Lorde's stance: "The women who sustained me through that period were black and white, old and young, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual, and we all shared a war against the tyrannies of silence. They all gave me a strength and concern without which I could not have survived intact" (19). Despite fervently carving out her own identity, Lorde does acknowledge and thank the diverse women around her who helped her through her treatment. Marchetto does not and even goes so far as to work to separate herself from the other women in her social circle.

Even while her focus is on her and how she envisions herself as better than other women, there is no drawn Marchetto/narrator character on page 50. Marchetto's presence is only through the white words: "Almost immediately, word about Silvano and me got out through THE SOUR GRAPEVINE these grapes never ripen and they're always green"; "But it wasn't just behind my back..." (50). There is a special kind of conflation between the "news" about Marchetto's new husband and her breast cancer. Ethically, this form of conflation feels uneasy, but this is irrelevant to Marchetto. This conflation works to reify her message about what is fashionable, in particular what is fashionable within the breast cancer experience.

Aside from the blurred subject of these words spoken by the grapes, the act of gossiping by the grapes leads to the reason for illustrating the gossip grapes/women as green circular objects, like the cancer cells, as they are themselves cancerous. The absence of Marchetto's body on this page, though, is another act of looking away from them—she is "snuffing out" the mutual

understanding that being in the frame and looking at these women would provide. Her visual absence negates the opportunity for visual transference, a type of textual “mutual recognition,” between Marchetto and these other women. Instead, Marchetto’s absence erases every opportunity to have herself associated at all with these other women. Doing so establishes a relationship between the other women Marchetto previously refuses to look at/ associate herself with—the two women showing visible signs of suffering through cancer—and posits that both types of other women are infectious. Furthermore, this rendering reflects the body politic inherent to pink ribbon philanthropy. Marchetto does not challenge the practice of hiding and, therefore, rejects the “display of unmarred bodies” (Klawiter 182); in doing so, she embraces and incorporates it into her narrative, reifying *Cancer Vixen*’s status as both emblematic of and in opposition to *The Cancer Journals*.

Externalizing Cancer, Distancing Herself: Connections between the Anger of Others and the Anger of Trauma in *Cancer Vixen*

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, breast cancer narratives often adopt a rhetorical strategy that cultivates readers' "worship of the cancer protagonist" (Segal 295). Though I use Segal's term "cancer protagonist," I note neither the author of *The Cancer Journals* nor the author of *Cancer Vixen* is only fighting cancer in the texts' respective pages. Rather, both narratives use their authors' war against cancer/death as a metaphor for an additional battle simultaneously occurring in their lives. Thus, the term cancer protagonist is more of a label of to describe their bodies; they have cancer and are the protagonists. This distinction is particularly of use in this project. The term developed by scholars like Segal who are politically active in breast cancer activism can be easily misunderstood. The term cancer protagonist could very well represent the cancer as the hero/winner in these narratives. That said, I use this term to identify Lorde and Marchetto as particular representatives of the breast cancer experience and to gesture towards their textual opponents.

In the case of Lorde's narrative, her antagonist is the patriarchal system guiding her treatment. In Marchetto's case, and as I have argued in the preceding chapter, it is sometimes other women with breast cancer, sometimes her own body. This chapter focuses on Marchetto's body, and how her war against this antagonist is represented via an internal/external positioning of visually similar characters and metaphors. What Marchetto's "war" is against, or who her "antagonist" is, is always drawn as something that should be external to her body. Whether it is the gossip spread by hateful women, or the cancer growing inside of her breast, these are the evils that Marchetto fights to keep out of her flesh and out of her life. Furthermore, I critically read the presence of green text boxes in this chapter. The text provided in these spaces in

particular are “boxed” off and colored differently from the rest of the narrative, which distinguishes its content from the other instances of verbal text.

At the beginning of her graphic narrative, Marchetto includes one panel sharing with readers her intimate knowledge of 9/11 in New York City. Readers see Marchetto’s fight against invisibility in her depiction of 9/11. Here, she disappears into a grayscape on pages 28 and 29 for two frames. But this disappearance is deceptive: in the first frame of disappearance, she walks away from the reader into the gray dust. The act of walking away is a U.S. cultural action of rejection and disapproval, which complicates the next frame: an outline of a crying crowd covered in the gray dust. Here Marchetto walks away from the gray crowd. In the third frame, Marchetto reappears, and she stands in front of this gray crowd and the cameras in the hands of those crowd members, with the visual artist rendering herself in color and her own camera.

What the first frame of these three shows us is Marchetto’s disassociation from the reader; she walks away from the reader and her body is still in color. Marchetto is colored different from the gray dust in this frame and the crowd of peoples in the second frame, which places the reader among the gray crowd. Since Marchetto stands out of the gray cloud, she is not in the second gray crowd frame because she has walked away from the reader; in this frame, she again distinguishes herself as different from the reader. This visual layer positions her as a self-help textual narrator because she illustrates herself as distinct from the traumatized collective—the lesson her narrative gives is how not to be part of the sad masses. When Marchetto reappears in the third frame, however, she is has a camera of her own and is photographing the gray crowd while they photograph her, reiterating that her experience stands apart from the crying collective. She acknowledges the collective experience by taking its picture, but her experience—being in color

and individual—is more important and receives greater attention by being photographed by the crowd. In other words, Marchetto is outside, external to, the crowd.

The text also shows the reader Marchetto inhaling the dust from 9/11; this dust grays out the cartoon image of herself and several others (28-29). While the gray dust covers the gutters of these pages, Marchetto appears on the phone receiving the news about the planes and being told that her story “what ‘it’ costs is dead. It’s too superficial right now.” Marchetto then goes to Ground Zero and interviews the National Guard on “Search and Recover” efforts, photographs a crowd, and turns in her drawings that same day before *Talk* magazine went to press. Visually, the gray dust overlaps her recollection of the day it happened, allowing for the transference of the horrific experience to jump onto the character of gray dust. This same gray dust is later shown entering Marchetto and going into her chest (32), though this image does not indicate a difference between her lungs and her breasts.

This image of her breathing in, through her nose and her mouth, is overlapped by a chartreuse green text box reading, “There was asbestos, benzene and god knows what else was in the air back then... And even *she* doesn’t want to think about it” (32). The pronoun “she” references both the female lung specialist shown in the previous frame, but it also references Marchetto. Here the dust from 9/11 symbolizes the horrific experience of that day through narrative transference; this grayscape returns in color via the starscape images used. Though not chronologically before 9/11, the text references dust when Marchetto leaves the doctor’s office—the song, “Dust in the Wind,” plays and Marchetto’s small narrative self image produces a thought bubble, “Oh shut up,” in response to hearing this song.

Additionally, there is a similarly green text box that reads: “On my way out, I heard that stupid *Kansas* song in my head...” (3). The thought bubble puts to rest the shaping of this text as a trauma narrative by silencing the hopelessness of being “dust in the wind” that 9/11 brought (or

will bring in the text). As this occurs on the first few pages, the text prepares readers for silencing throughout the narrative. This silencing is where the trauma narrative comes into conflict with the pinked self-help narrative.

Marchetto visually intimates that she fears the 9/11 dust she has inhaled may be the cause of her breast cancer. This inhale/exhale binary opposition is mirrored throughout the text as an internal/external binary opposition. Marchetto seeks to externalize her cancer, as a means of aligning it with the non-medically threatening women who gossip about her life and her love affair. By aligning her cancer with gossipers, and externalizing it in this way, the author seeks to diminish the threat by visually intertwining malignant cells with sour grapes that she can conceivably move away from. This link or correlation suggests an unwillingness to admit that the cancer cells are inside of her and, therefore, a part of her. Significantly, this internal/external binary opposition relates to Marchetto's unwillingness to gaze upon other women with cancer, as these other women may provide mirrors that reflect and foreshadow the potential affects and ravages from the disease on her own body. In other words, if Marchetto acknowledges these other women, she may need to acknowledge herself as a cancer victim, rather than a cancer vixen. Marchetto, therefore, externalizes her cancer cells by visually intertwining them with gossip mongers and by refusing to see other cancer patients as reflections of her own illness.

Voices of Experience as External Antagonists

Readers of *Cancer Vixen* cannot necessarily claim that the text contributes anything wholly original by articulating a negotiation between external political forces and internal emotions. Lorde writes that:

[I]t is never without fear; of visibility, of the harsh light of scrutiny and perhaps judgment, of pain, of death. But [women] have lived through all of those already, in

silence, except death...[W]here the words of women 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 our lives. (21)

Here Lorde articulates her personal understanding of the risks of giving voice to the breast cancer experience. Lorde, too, conveys a sense of grappling between what other women tell her she will experience and the voice inside of herself that wants to articulate her outrage at the sociocultural problems at play throughout her experience of the disease. By bringing the “harsh light of scrutiny” to “visible” experiences, Lorde recognizes that she asks for scrutiny of the experiences of other women, too, something she recognizes might be “feared.”

Marchetto’s text takes up this sense of what is to be feared about breast cancer with a different tone. The scrutiny of other women that Marchetto enacts is not to “examine their pertinence” to her own life, but to distinguish her brand of survival narrative from that of others. In this way, Marchetto’s text represents a rather dramatic departure from Lorde and a re-envisioning of the original message in *The Cancer Journals*, as Marchetto’s text argues that other women’s experiences are irrelevant to her own. This point is in opposition to the take-what-is-useful mindset visible in Lorde’s *The Cancer Journals*. Because becoming or remaining a fashionista is what Marchetto aims for, she must exclude other women. Including other women makes Marchetto part of the crowd, and part of the collective trauma. These other women, either cancer women or fashionable women, offer challenges to Marchetto’s desire to rise above and be singular. She seeks to be unique and not part of the collective experience.

These texts offer flawed constructs of cancer protagonists by blending traumatic experiences with the flaws that McGee observes about contemporary, self-help literature. McGee notes that these texts, in particular, have the propensity to focus on “interior concerns” (50). In

Cancer Vixen, for example, Marchetto focuses on the interior concerns of how can she better herself, how can she make herself more perfect. The answer to the concerns that *Cancer Vixen* provides is to defeat breast cancer and to rise above the gossipers. In this way, Marchetto makes gossip an interior concern that is of equal concern to her as cancer cells, which the text displays through her visual articulations of cancer cells and gossipy women. By visually intertwining them as one through the visual transference of color mimicking, Marchetto provides a specific point in which her narrative complicates the line between the personal and the public, reflective of the space between a self-help text and a trauma narrative.

In an interview with Bethanne Patrick for “The Book Studio,” Marchetto says of her experience with breast cancer that “I would never use ‘my’ in front of ‘breast cancer,’ ‘my’ in front of ‘cancer’...I didn’t want to own it. I wanted to get it off me, I wanted to externalize the whole situation” (wetaTV). In this interview, Marchetto is describing her mindset towards her cancer—she just wanted it off of her. This mindset comes through in her book through the visual metaphors largely through the green circle characterizations. These similar objects, bright green circles, are used as a basis for the rendering of gossipers and of cancer cells. While there are other uses of green, of circles, of shades of green, within the text, this chapter focuses on the presence of the cancer cells and the gossip grapevine images and how Marchetto uses them as visual metaphors representing what is internal or external to her body. Furthermore, this analysis of personified green circles complicates the ways in which the author refuses to partake in a “mutual understanding” with other cancer patients, as I outlined in the previous chapter.

Gossip and The Non-Cancer Woman

The comics form of *Cancer Vixen*, as I noted in the introduction to this thesis, allows for this text to construct cultural meaning via symbolic posturing. Once presented, reiterations of the

same symbolic postures carry with them content from the first reference in the narrative throughout all other references. I refer to this process as visual transference. The meaning generated through the visual transference between the grapes and the cancer cells not only jumps between these two, but also jumps again to the text boxes containing post-experience commentary, as they are similarly colored. Ultimately, while the last chapter offers visual illustrations documenting how Marchetto's narrative refused "mutual understanding" via staring/looking at other women experiencing cancer, this chapter analyzes how Marchetto attempts to control the evils inside of her, the cancer cells, by presenting them as similar to the evils outside of her, the gossip grapes. Marchetto draws a gossip vine as a symbol of women saying hateful comments about her. These women-grapes are shaded in a similar shade of green as the cancer cells she draws, and both call to mind the cultural saying "green with envy." The faces on the grapes and the cancer cells reify this cultural connection to "envy" in that they both make use of the same color green. These characterizations, the cancer cells and the gossip grapes, are not merely personified objects of envy, they hold a certain duality of place that this chapter explores as well as being foundational symbols for visual transference.

Marchetto draws a green, gossip grapevine twice in *Cancer Vixen*, once on page 50 and again on page 61, both times to represent the comments being made about her and her fiancé by women who know him or both of them. The grapes are drawn to resemble women, as thick make-up appears on the the faces on the grapes. The first time they appear in the narrative, they repeat jealous phrases such as "It's good for her career," "It'll never last," "All those gorgeous women he could have had—Like me," and "She must give good blow jobs" (50). The second time they appear, they state: "He'll *never* marry her!," "He's been single for 21 years!," "They have no real date!," "They have NO REAL PLANS!," "They're not *REALLY*GETTING

MARRIED!,” “She’s not saying ANYTHING!,” “HE’S NOT SAYING ANYTHING!,”
 “WELL, YOU *KNOW* WHAT THAT MEANS...,” “IF WE’VE HEARD NOTHING...,”
 “THEN *NOTHING* IS HAPPENING!” (61). To comprehend the grapes and the shape of their
 anger, the reader needs a commonality of experience with Marchetto. As Wil Eisner states:
 “Comprehension of an image requires a commonality of experience....An interaction has to
 develop because the artist is evoking images stored in the minds of both parties” (13). The gossip
 grapes are part of this commonality. In order for readers to grasp fully the *grape vine*
 implications, they have to be familiar with the idiom, “I heard it through the grapevine,” as a
 metaphor for gossip and the way in which gossip spreads. This point means that, from a
 particularly Western perspective, Marchetto develops a connection with her readers by relying
 upon the visual significance of this adage to convey another layer to her message.

The utterances of these gossip grapes establish an opposition between Marchetto and the
 grapes that is transferred onto the cancer cells due to the similarity of their shape and coloration.
 The connection to these grapes and the “Possible Cancer Cells: An Artist’s Rendition” on Page 4
 is largely visual. This page holds the first visual reference to either cancer cells or gossip grapes
 in the text; the cancer cells are depicted as sticking out their tongues and holding up their middle
 fingers, a gesture which is purely visual and used to express further Marchetto’s conception of
 cancer as a personal affront. The anger portrayed through the hand and face gestures of the
 cancer cells connects their conveyed emotion to the anger of the women/grapes gossiping.
 Connecting the two distinct characters in this way analogizes their opposition to Marchetto,
 which results in a negotiation of their perceived severity outside of the narrative. In other words,
 Marchetto, in *Cancer Vixen*, proposes that having cancer is just as severe as having women
 gossip about you, which is obviously problematic. Gossip cannot kill people, but it can kill social

lives. The “death” of Marchetto’s social life would impact her stance as fashionista. This heightened importance of social networks aligned with constructing such a public image, can be read as resultant from pink ribbon philanthropy.

The frame of the image with the cancer cells on page 4 stands out from the rest of the page. This frame is not only larger than the others featured here, but is also circular. This visually separates the cancer cells from the rest of the narrative, as it is the only circular frame in the narrative, which characterizes the cancer cells as non-Marchetto or different/separate from Marchetto. Coupling the symbols of gossip grapes and cancer cells together provides instances of a foreign opinion—the angry gossip—invading Marchetto’s public and private lives. The anger expressed by the cancer cells, unlike the gossip grapes, is visually coded.

Interestingly, this point relates back to Lorde’s call for public voices of experience to take up her goals of scrutinizing breast cancer culture—what developed into pink ribbon philanthropy. As I establish in the previous chapter, Lorde articulates her outrage in order to make public the travesty of the breast cancer experience. Here, though, what Marchetto does with the gossip grapes is comparable but differently-aimed. The gossip grapes and the cancer cells become the symbolic posture for voiced outrage: the grapes do so verbally, the cells do so with hand gestures. But these characterizations are poised as different to or apart from Marchetto. They do not share her outrage. Instead, Marchetto’s existence is a catalyst for the outrage of the gossip grapes, making *Cancer Vixen* once again depart from *The Cancer Journals*. Marchetto fights the culture of voiced outrage that Lorde calls for. The green circles, therefore, symbolize a public opinion and have the capacity to travel inside Marchetto’s body, as cancer cells, and outside Marchetto’s body, as gossipers. While this project does not deal directly with issues of authorship, I wish to note here that as author/illustrator, Marchetto does have control

over what she draws as internal/external to her body. But narrated-Marchetto must overcome both of these antagonists. Her war is against the public still—just as she refuses to identify with other cancer patients, Marchetto refuses to identify as the gossip grapes, too, instead labelling them and their outrage as cancerous.

The significance of these symbols reflects the influence of public opinion on Marchetto's illness, further complicating *Cancer Vixen's* relationship with feminist politics. *The Cancer Journals* called for public action on behalf of all peoples with cancer, *Cancer Vixen*, instead, demonstrates awareness that the text is a public performance, but looks to find an individual space within the public sphere. This individual space is inside of Marchetto's body. By driving out the public/external voices, represented by the cancer cells, Marchetto shows her breast cancer as claiming her own space. Another important distinction here is that, while Lorde's stance was to voice verbally, Marchetto's stance is to voice visually; Marchetto gives voice to the hurt caused to her person on the matter of her cancer diagnosis and her romantic relationship through visuals. The most salient of these representations is the green circle cancer cells/gossip grapes. The shades of green used for the grapes and the cancer cells appear very near the shade used for the post-experience verbal text boxes throughout the narrative. Therefore, these personified circles, the grapes and the cells, have a related symbolic posturing to the text boxes. Below, I discuss these text boxes in more detail, as I note how they form a cycle of visual transference begun by the gossip grapes and cancer cells.

Medicalized Anger

The cancer cells within *Cancer Vixen* are never drawn as having any emotion other than anger. A rationale is given for their perpetual anger on page 123, which shows these cells as they are driving on the New Jersey Turnpike, flipping people off. Here, Marchetto brings these cancer

cells outside of her flesh and places them into the same space as the gossip grapes: external to her. The position of these cells as external to the body completes the visual significance of the gossipers and the cancer cells as synonymous. At this point in the narrative, the driving, green circular cancer cells have mobilized and have learned the capacity to use language. This scene, therefore, marks an important progression from the cancer cells illustrated previous to this point which were mute, but conveyed their anger through facial expressions and hand gestures. At this point, they are cognizant and able to verbalize through yelling. The cancer cells, now outside of Marchetto's flesh, behave more like the gossip grapes. Both characterizations, however, serve to illustrate forces in Marchetto's life that harbor anger towards her; the grapes are angry through their jealousy of Marchetto, and the cancer cells are pieces of anger inside of her body. Placing the cancer cells outside of Marchetto's body reduces their capacity to do harm to Marchetto's body. But, the harm that *Cancer Vixen* focuses on is a social one. Therefore, by analogizing the aggressiveness, represented textually via anger, to the jealous gossip of the women grapes, Marchetto blames them. What she is blaming them for is tricky.

Marchetto, as I argue, maintains that other women have breast cancer "wrong," that they somehow fail at being ill, and she chooses to draw these women with visual indicators of having cancer/illness (bald, frail posture, pale). The grapes are not, though the cancer cells are a slightly lighter shade of green than the grapes, suggesting this artistic decision might be a reference to nausea and chemo. However, Marchetto depicts the gossip grapes, as a salient representation of external forces, as being responsible for her illness. Furthermore, it is the jealousy of these women, symbolic of externalities beyond her control, which have entered her life and made her sick.

While I am not necessarily focusing on this aspect of blaming in this chapter, I do acknowledge that Marchetto extends her rejection of the experiences of other women past those with breast cancer and onto all women. There are many connections to be made to this essentializing, but I note here that one such connection underscores the limiting of the severity of her own cancer—a part of trauma. Constructing her cancer as part of the gossip surrounding her life allows her to undergo the “formation of symptoms” and to place order and value with those symptoms (Berger 566). Though her method of depicting her cancer reveals an attempt to convey her trauma, priority is still given to the text’s stance as a self-help text, since Marchetto establishes herself as the top of the new order. This order system controls the world of *Cancer Vixen*, as Marchetto is its author. The world she constructs centers on her.

Other women, then, are pitted as rivals because their experiences would challenge Marchetto’s position as the top figure in this order. Not only is she representing the cancer that was inside of her body as nothing more dangerous than gossip, but Marchetto is giving the cancer cells a voice here, too. Because they speak outside of her body, and these cells are visual cognates to the gossiping women, Marchetto slightly gestures to Lorde’s call for voices of breast cancer experience. However, this answer is less than positive. The voices of other women, still represented by cancer cells and gossip grapes, are deemed nothing more than hateful gossip or road rage, which is ethically sticky. Since this text is a self-help narrative, metaphorizing the voices of other women in this way returns to Marchetto’s devaluing the experiences of other women in order to promote herself. As I argue in the previous chapter, Marchetto once again conveys that she succeeds at being ill with breast cancer. This point is made through constructing an internal/external binary opposition which conveys a sense of jealousy by other women and by

aligning them with the cancer cells themselves. These other entities envy Marchetto because she is the “fashionista” of breast cancer.

The anger and jealousy are also connected to Marchetto’s “lessons” on outrage. It was Lorde who called for voices of outrage in order to enact change. Marchetto opposes this method as a way to distinguish her narrative from other breast cancer experiences and as a way to promote herself. By keeping voices of outrage external to her body—the cancer cells move outside of her and the gossip grapes are not women in her life—Marchetto performs a culturally valued “rising above the hate and negativity” that connects to Marchetto’s position as the cancer vixen.

This “rising above” works to reify Marchetto as the “fashionista” authority on how to have breast cancer, but also aligns the text’s cultural value with the self-help genre. As McGee notes, contemporary self-help texts promote “investment” in one’s self, and this type of investment surfaces in *Cancer Vixen*. The gossip grapes are jealous of Marchetto and her rich boyfriend, who not only can financially invest in her medical well-being, but he is depicted driving a Maserati and buying her expensive things and trips. He is clearly investing in her and in their relationship. I return to this concept of “rising above” in a later section, noting how on pages 206 and 207 Marchetto re-evokes the saint card (from earlier with Evelyn Lauder) and the wedding dress.

The anger measured by these cells and grapes is visually connected to the pain chart on page 118. While not green, these face circles connect to the cancer and gossip, circle faces through facial expression. Scott McCloud comments on the “universality” of cartooned faces, claiming that “the more cartoony a face is...the more people it could be said to *describe*” (31). Being asked to relate to the generic faces of the pain chart adds another layer to my argument

regarding Marchetto's rejection of other women who could act as mirrors and therefore allow her to acknowledge her disease. These simplified faces on the pain chart are, therefore, other faces that Marchetto refuses to identify with. After the pain chart, Marchetto draws another frame, split between the black and white "ten" face and her own in color face noting that "the pain was off the chart" and "It goes to '11'" (118). She does not identify with the faces of people on the chart, nor does she identify with the bald women discussed in my previous chapter. The pain is non-visual and, therefore, distinctly internal. Pain becomes a characteristic that Marchetto that is to illustrate in *Cancer Vixen*. She also rejects other people's attempts to reflect or shape her pain, via the pain chart and the experiences of other women.

Marchetto uses the medicalized artifact of the pain chart to enhance these internal/external forces. These circles provide additional meaning to the green gossip and cancer circles by connecting pain to these faces. I point to this example to show that, while the internal/external binary opposition is most clearly read through the characterizations of cancer cells and gossip grapes, there are several other examples of this relationship interwoven throughout the text and it is important to mention that Marchetto echoes this conflict in several other ways across the pages of her text. Throughout the text, Marchetto's illustrated faces are either heavily made-up or "cartoony" like the pain chart.

It is interesting to relate that in this example, Marchetto draws in one frame aside-by-side rendering of the "worst possible pain" expression from that chart and her own face—which mimics the expression from the pain chart (118). Instead of covering up her cancer, or refusing to look at its harbingers, Marchetto, for a single, half-frame, reveals part of the pain of her experience. Not only is this pain drawn in the comics-style of the entire narrative, it is a reflection of the pain chart that was given to her. Marchetto's expression of her pain, therefore, is

informed by the cartooned medical pain chart and its circular facial expressions. Thus, this pain expression becomes more about Marchetto publically performing pain than it is about attempting to convey a deeply-personal trauma. Additionally, when Marchetto does not abstract her face through cartooning, her trauma is concealed through her use of make-up. This visual element shows that she relegates her trauma and her pain to the background, similarly to her use of the light pink color on pages 107 and 133.

Analysis of the green text boxes also becomes significantly enriched by acknowledging the visual elaboration of the pain chart. The emotionally-instructive and medicalized pain chart encourages social performance and this type of performativity transfers onto the green text boxes. This textual choice creates a triangle of visual transference. The prescriptive pain chart informs the symbolic posturing of the grapes and cancer cells, which in turn inform the symbolic posturing of the green text boxes. This triangle of visually-transferred meanings reflects *Cancer Vixen*'s stance as a narrative informed by pink ribbon philanthropy.

This visually-transferred content, however, jumps to the text boxes through the use of the particular color green that Marchetto employs. The text boxes have few other visual similarities to the cancer cells and the gossip grapes and even less in common to the pain chart faces. While all of these images have the same thick black outlines, the text boxes have sharp corners that make them rectangles or squares. While I am not analyzing the content of these text boxes—that analysis is for another project entirely—I would be remiss if I did not point out the way in which the color of the green text boxes visually connects them to the grapes and the cancer cells. The faces are drawn as objects that Marchetto wishes not to identify with. Her own words, the text boxes, do not have faces, which places an internal contradiction inside this text. The first chapter outlines how Marchetto refuses to face the experiences of others, whereas here, Marchetto

refuses to face her own experience. By drawing this part of her own voice as green, Marchetto externalizes her own trauma telling, she denies the existence of her trauma.

The text in the green boxes offer a post-experience commentary. Marchetto makes it clear that the text in the green boxes is external to the experience. Although the construction of the entire narrative happens after the fact, the green text boxes point to a post-experience mindset making comments on what is going on. These boxes are connected to the grapes and the cancer cells through their shared color. Because this fragment of the narrative is external to the ill-Marchetto, it is green, like the grapes and the cells. The boxes also convey anger through the words included within them and through visual transference from the grapes and cancer cells. These green text boxes in particular are a piece of Marchetto's reckoning with her trauma; she has hidden it within the anger of others and the physical threat of the cancer itself. Placing her emotional anger in the green of her post-experience commentary illustrates how Marchetto prioritizes *Cancer Vixen's* stance as a self-help narrative over a work of scriptotherapy or trauma telling. Kept hidden or secondary throughout the text, *Cancer Vixen's* self-help exigencies take priority over conveying Marchetto's sense of personal trauma.

Furthermore, following the binary opposition of internal/external, the transference of the specific color green that she uses for both cancer cells and gossip grapes onto these text boxes symbolizes Marchetto's verbal narrative, her own voice, as being separate from the rest of the narrative. The color of Marchetto's retelling of her cancer odyssey in the green text boxes is, therefore, indicative that these words are to be considered not part of the experience of cancer, but external to it. This type of approximate-revisiting is where readers can locate trauma telling in *Cancer Vixen*. In recalling James Berger's understanding of Trauma Studies, I point to the color or visual aspect of the green text boxes as connected to his explanation. These visuals bring

to light several epistemological shifts between Marchetto's narrative structures, and the fact that she constructs these shifts through visuals relates to the inarticulateness of trauma. So, just like *The Cancer Journals*, *Cancer Vixen* provides readers with a more complicated understanding of the textual nature of trauma, especially in ones with an overtly political agenda.

Similar to James Berger, Chute theorizes that the comics narrative form is "apt for expressing that difficult register" of unnamable trauma, allowing the author to revisit, or to re-view, the emotion of the experience in more than one way (*Graphic Women* 2-3). It should follow, then, that this narrative extends beyond the traumatic communications of *The Cancer Journals* due Marchetto's use of graphics. Marchetto does not, however, prioritize the trauma of cancer in *Cancer Vixen*. Instead, this text constructs Marchetto as a cancer protagonist. Because of the privileging of this goal, which is not reliant upon a plot of fighting cancer, trauma takes a backseat in *Cancer Vixen* to the battle against other people, such as the gossip grapes, the other women undergoing cancer treatment, and even herself.

Unpinked Saint

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, page 206 features a Saint card of "Blessed Icaobus," who Marchetto notes is prayed to "for help to cure cancer" (206). Unlike Saint Evelyn Lauder, this page had no pink gutters. What it does have, however, is the Saint Card and a mention of "Father Peter Jacobs," who Marchetto clarifies is "a priest in the Vatican, and our BFF" as well as "Father Jake has witnessed 4 dramatic miracles" (206). The reference to this priest and his contributions to Marchetto reify her stance as privileged fashionista, receiving the best kind of prayer. Furthermore, the absence of the pink gutters in the background return to Marchetto's denial of her trauma. Breast cancer is, at this point in the text, something she had

and overcame with the help of her fabulous contacts. This point again makes Marchetto a “successful” woman when it comes to having breast cancer.

Another revisited image on this page is of the wedding dress following the Icaobusprayer card. Marchetto chooses not to include boxes on this page, but she does include a background of blue with green grass at the bottom, and three images of herself in a white gown with a pink ribbon belt skipping across that grass. The top of the page features a small green textbox stating, “And how am I today?,” the answer to which appears outside of the box, in white lettering, and written across the blue background/sky:

I only think positive thoughts! I forgive all my enemies! What enemies?! I loveeveryone!
 I go to each check-up with complete joy and abandon! Petty things don’t bother me! I
 don’t have a care in the world! I’m only going to create peace and love in my life andjust
 have a fear-free, blissful existence for the rest of my days! Tra La La la la laa... (207)

The pink belt on the dress indicates that Marchetto contributes to pink ribbon philanthropy, which is her way of understanding breast cancer culture as fashionable. She has turned the disease into a fashion accessory, and significantly, it is a fashion accessory to a white dress that resembles the wedding dress that she picked out earlier in the text on page 126. The white dress and fashionable pink ribbon also refer back to the dress/hospital gown at the Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center on page 133. Because this new dress, the one on page 207, is not shown being bought in a store or from a hospital, it must be from Marchetto’s own imaginings, her own fashioning. In her own fashion, she is free to skip carefree, suggesting a “happy ending” to the breast cancer experience found in *Cancer Vixen*.

Marchetto visually renders herself as having “won” against the cancer cells and the gossip grapes. She will not only “go to each checkup,” but she states that she will do with

“complete joy and abandon” (207), suggesting her triumph over the negativity and anger of the cancer cells; she will not let their anger influence her. Furthermore, Marchetto articulates here that she will “forgive” and “love” her enemies—the gossip grapes—and even states, “What enemies?!” (207). Ultimately, Marchetto proposes that she can externalize the anger and jealousy of the gossip grapevine, redolent of the cancer cells, with whom she struggles throughout the narrative, even going so far as to deny its existence. In this final section, the denial of the gossipers, not the cancer cells, reflects a textual uncertainty. Marchetto’s trauma sneaks past the self-help aspects of the book. Although she has visually represented the cancer cells and the gossip grapes as one in the same, or at the very least related through their anger and hatred of her, Marchetto ultimately denies the existence of the other women in the end of the text and not the life-threatening cancer itself. I argue that this choice underscores Marchetto’s stance against other women. She has turned her cancer into a tool to make herself fashionable and, therefore, her breast cancer is a weapon against women who do not have the illness, or do not perform it in the same ways as Marchetto. The green text boxes complete this cycle of visual transference, and help to reveal the trauma behind her experience.

Conclusion: What Exactly is Your Problem?

As I write this conclusion, the month of October approaches. To recall my discussion in the introduction to this project, October has been declared by various authorities and corporations in the U.S. to be National Breast Cancer Awareness Month (NBCAM). As if it were not difficult enough to avoid pink ribbon reminders outside of the fall season, October further saturates U.S. consumer culture with the symbol. From the National Football League's "A Crucial Catch" program to the Yoplait's "Friends in the Fight" fundraiser to workplace organized breast cancer walks and more, the U.S. comes together to participate in the national holiday that is NBCAM. For people wishing to avoid reminders of their traumatic experiences with breast cancer, however, October can be particularly difficult. Throughout this month, there are various events in workplaces, social organizations, and entertainment venues that make an effort to associate with the pervasive goodwill of pink ribbon philanthropy culminating with the celebration of Halloween, which may seem like a metaphor for personal horror to some. In pointing out the inability to escape the cartooned symbol of the pink ribbon throughout the month of October, I suggest that not every patient wishes to be a part of this public space.

The way in which *Cancer Vixen* depicts other women complicates its feminist capacities. While there is an inherent feminist agenda within pink ribbon philanthropy, *Cancer Vixen* perpetuates the problems with the movement. When read alongside *The Cancer Journals*, it is clear that the politics between the two narratives have shifted from encouraging all women to break their silences and demonizing patriarchal systems of medical care to discouraging diverse women from speaking out, as they might remind readers of the fatal capabilities of breast cancer and its treatments. Marchetto's text depicts her narrating and narrated "I" as refusing to identify with the sour grape vine gossip women or the bald cancer patients. If these sour grapes are

visually aligned with the malignant cancer cells, as I have argued, then the author's insistence that she rises above the gossipers can be read as Marchetto positioning herself above cancer and the other cancer women, too. In her text, she claims that she rises above all women to become a representative of how one engages with breast cancer as a fashionista. This fashioning is indirect opposition to Lorde's narrative in which she preached difference without devaluing: "Each of these women has a particular voice to be raised in what must become a female outcry against all preventable cancers, as well as against the silent fears that allow those cancers to flourish" (8). Like Marchetto, Lorde makes use of a similar internal/external metaphor, yet her employment of it works to equate the value of her experience with others in a way that the second text does not. Therefore, *Cancer Vixen* is as much in opposition to *The Cancer Journals* as it is emblematic of it.

I suggest that different cultural and political climates are to blame for *Cancer Vixen's* devaluation of women who are not Marchetto. To embrace those experiences would be to reveal the "memento mori" of breast cancer and would complicate the competitive nature of remaining marriageable. Hidden between personifications of dust and death, readers find incomplete trauma metaphors. While drawing significance from the cultural trauma of 9/11, *Cancer Vixen* does not suggest that breast cancer is itself a national trauma. Instead, Marchetto uses this comparison, as well as others, to illustrate ways in which she integrates cancer into her body and her life.

What the chapters of this thesis have shown is that *Cancer Vixen* works to portray a style of avoidance. As I have shown, Marchetto does not engage in an identifying act of gazing upon women who undergo the more severe side effects of breast cancer treatment. Instead, she chooses to identify with the "fashionable" women of pink ribbon culture, such as Evelyn Lauder. No doubt this fashionability is culled from the pervasiveness of pink ribbon philanthropy that

suggest that it is in vogue, or particularly stylish, to partake in the events of NBCAM. While I make no effort to claim that Marchetto's actions—comforting herself by not thinking and by not looking at negative side effects and reminders of death—is wrong in any sense, I do hope to point to certain implications that these actions have. By styling a self-help text that positions severe side effects of breast cancer treatment as “unfashionable,” I have argued that *Cancer Vixen* works to silence the voices of experience these women do/could contribute to breast cancer culture. The exclusionary nature of in fashion/out of fashion works more to alleviate concerns of “new insecurities” than to reconcile pre- and post-diagnosis identities. Remaining physically desirable, even after breast cancer, is one of the goals of *Cancer Vixen*.

Working Towards Silence

Lorde emphasizes the act of voicing in *The Cancer Journals*, *Cancer Vixen* provides a visual voicing. My argument in the first chapter demonstrates the ways in which these narratives attempt to give voice to the experience of receiving cancer treatment, including the mysteries of this process; they do so by taking on a medicalized voice and experiential authority. With this type of representation, Marchetto's use of medicalized symbolic posturing (like the “actual size” of the needle) and other external performativities give voice to a tiny facet of her experience with breast cancer. Therefore, even with all of its noted problems, *Cancer Vixen* does provide a type of response to the call issued by *The Cancer Journals*, one that ultimately challenges Lorde's powerful prose by asking: why can't a cancer survivor also be a cancer vixen? In a way, *Cancer Vixen* challenges the love for other women that *The Cancer Journals* distributes unscrupulously. However, Marchetto works to replace Lorde's narrative/ideals, rather than add to or challenge them, which is why *Cancer Vixen* can also be read as a text in opposition to *The Cancer Journals*.

Gossip, which is meaningful only when “embedded in a larger context of social relations and symbolic dynamics” (Besnier 2), challenges the fervent seriousness given to cancer by *The Cancer Journals*. Besnier notes that gossip is a form of “political practice in the everyday” (2). Equating hurtful gossip about her to the deadly cancer cells inside of her gives Marchetto the platform to challenge the sustained outrage in Lorde’s narrative. Lorde articulates her outrage over the illness of breast cancer by writing into her narrative moments of scrutinizing and of questioning allegedly normative practices. Lorde normalizes the use of outrage in breast cancer narratives, and Marchetto challenges what diagnosed women should be outraged about. In other words, *Cancer Vixen*, in order to be a *breast cancer* narrative, must perform some form of outrage, which is done through the transitory green circle symbolic posturing. It is through this system of visual transference that Marchetto connects gossip, cancer cells, the pain chart, and her post-experience commentary all to one shade of green.

While sustaining a call to all voices of experience in *The Cancer Journals*, Lorde’s narrative neglects the possibility that a cancer patient may wish to keep her experience private or even silent in this context. Her argument of silence as violence leaves out persons wishing to remain silent on their own accord; Lorde would draft this action/non-action as a self-inflicted violence. Some patients do not wish to become beacons of breast cancer for the remainder of their days. And while there is no doubt that Lorde’s narrative is particularly adept at making use of outrage, via scrutinizing, as a political tool, this project has questioned the unfocused nature of this outrage. If it were focused on any one aspect of breast cancer culture, would scrutiny prove a more effective tool in dismantling the system Lorde speaks out against? I have not deliberately addressed this question in this project, but the politically-violent nature of outrage and scrutiny do have negative implications for those persons wishing to remain silent. Lorde’s demonization

of acts of silence extend beyond patriarchal forces working to exclude certain experiences and takes as collateral damage the cancer patients who willingly keep silent on their own terms.

Additionally, the focus on encouraging women to voice their experiences of breast cancer has additional implications on women who do not have breast cancer, as evidenced in *Cancer Vixen*. As Marchetto faces off with the gossip grapes, and visually links them to her cancer cells, she positions these other women as dangerous and ultimately “unfashionable.” Because these grapes either do not themselves have breast cancer or do not perform breast cancer as fabulously as Marchetto does, they work as antagonists. Likewise, Lorde’s call for voices of experience does not include voices of women who have not had breast cancer, which works to exclude deeply affected family members and second generation witnesses.

As I address in the introduction, pink ribbon culture, having grown out of the rise of ribbon activism in the 1980s and 1990s, is a widely-recognized brand symbol in Western culture, in particular U.S. culture. The breast cancer narrative grows out of a celebrated feminist provocation: the stories told by Shirley Temple Black, Betty Ford, and Happy Rockefeller all contributed to breast cancer politics without making any outright claims of a political agenda (King xiii). As this topic entered the public, political arena, so did the role of politics in the breast cancer narrative. Knopf-Newman credits all of Lorde’s cancer writing, including *The Cancer Journals*, with reshaping identity politics surrounding the voices of breast cancer by calling attention to the white heteronormative practices of breast cancer treatment at the time (109). In studying *Cancer Vixen*’s embracement of her white heteronormativity in a self-help breast cancer text, it is possible to claim that not much has changed in terms of the representation of the “normal” breast cancer survivor. But, why is it that, instead of reaching out to other voices

of experience, *The Cancer Journals* and *Cancer Vixen* actually attempt to replace preexisting voices of experience?

It is within this political context that this thesis challenges reading *Cancer Vixen* as either in opposition to or in response to *The Cancer Journals*. It is impossible to claim either because of the location of the politics within breast cancer culture; each text takes up a distinctly different identity and therefore different politics. Because of the corporatization of pink ribbon philanthropy (the battle of the brands), *The Cancer Journals* and *Cancer Vixen* stand in opposition with one another, yet the texts still relate in goal and scope. While I have argued the impossibility to claim an either/or styled relationship between these texts, I believe that this project proves that there is a significant need for scholarship investigating the valuing of the political over the ethical in the reading of breast cancer narratives.

Future Projects

This concern of ethics does not negate a further need for a detangling of the politics at play in breast cancer narratives. For instance, future, critical projects on breast cancer narrative need to expand further this dialectic by making use of Maren Klawiter's "culture of action" (COA) distinctions. She notes that, in the San Francisco Bay area, breast cancer culture could be parted into three different "cultures of action," noting that these categories are both "dynamic" and are easily influenced as each interacts with another and the world around them (44). Klawiter numbers these COAs, but this numbering should not suggest a timeline or a priority structure to these pieces of breast cancer culture. I will bring these COAs into my discussion of future analyses of *The Cancer Journals* and *Cancer Vixen* in order to point towards the imperfectness of delineating breast cancer politics at large; as these books shift between COAs, so too do other cultural artifacts of breast cancer culture.

It would be important to consider such a complex dynamic especially if a future project were to examine a photographic collection such as *The SCAR Project*. This collection of photographs, initiated by a male, who did not experience having breast cancer, includes multiple photographs of topless women displaying their mastectomy and/or lumpectomy scars. At the time of defending this thesis, there were two men photographed in the project, one with a breast cancer scar and one without. Breaking down the politics of projects such as *The SCAR Project* would be useful in considering the ways in which the male gaze has entered the space of breast cancer culture. Also, this photographic project could prove useful as a foundation into a discussion of trauma texts, particularly in taking up the questions of collective trauma posed by Jeffery Alexander: Who is in charge of identifying “suffering collectives”? Who is in charge of identifying “who did this” to that suffering collective? Who can command the most effective platform to tell the trauma story? (4).

Additionally, future projects focusing on the ethics of breast cancer narratives and breast cancer culture could take up other research questions posed by trauma studies scholars. Suzette Henke, in focusing on women’s trauma texts, questions if authoring a trauma text could mimic a “talking cure” comparable to Freudian psychoanalysis (7). Relatedly, Geoffrey Hartman questions if “secondary traumatization” is possible through trauma texts, and if so, he encourages scholars to investigate the implications of publishing one’s trauma narrative and its effect on the public. This approach is particularly sticky in considering the contributions that pink ribbon narratives have made in promoting consumer activity in that space.

When considering my future as a scholar, I intend to take up a line of investigation which would interrupt the concept of a “breast cancer culture” by interrupting the dominant, mainstream images of pink ribbon philanthropy with images from other breast cancer activist

groups, such as Breast Cancer Action and The SCAR Project. Building off of Susan Wendell's argument that there are multiple "political and philosophical issues" that come into play when establishing a cultural "other" (Wendell), I argue that these alternative activist groups, despite having differing political and philosophical agendas than more popular organizations such as Susan G. Komen and The American Cancer Society, actually use the same forms of visual rhetoric in their public paraphernalia. In particular, my future research would call attention to the bodies shown and how these bodies fit into what Karla Holloway terms "regulatory frames" (xix). Breast cancer culture can be and has been broken down into three "sub" cultures of action: early detection, patient empowerment, and cancer prevention. Each of these politically and philosophically distinct "Cultures of Action" (Klawiter) makes use of images of bodies in efforts to publicize their group's existence. These bodies of breast cancer become devices of normalcy, delineating who has breast cancer and who does not based on public images of bodies produced by these activist groups.

My hope is that this future research would confirm the interdependence of existence of these three breast cancer "sub" cultures; without acts of rebellion against the other COAs, one of any of the three would not have a means to identify itself. Additionally, I hope to complicate the use of bodies in this activist context, as I intend to argue that the bodies used not only act as "poster images," but are understood via a culture-specific framework, which extends across the three COAs, or breast cancer culture at-large. I intend to complicate this framework by taking up Holloway's observation that the way bodies "matter" is not so much related to "personhood," but that the "*presumption of a body's culturally constructed personhood*" (xix) relates to the calls for ethical inquiry by these activist groups.

I would also like to take up research related to the inclusion/exclusion of brief personal narratives in pink ribbon philanthropy's advertisements, particularly the Susan G. Komen foundation's website. G. T. Couser notes in his introduction to the special issue of *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, "Illness, Disability, and Lifewriting," that "illness and disability may stimulate the autobiographical impulse in a number of ways" (1). While illness memoirs continue to saturate the market, forms of illness life writing have escaped the realm of the literary marketplace and have been adapted into forms of advertisement. Specifically, this project would analyze pink ribbon marketing campaigns and the personal "blurbs" that accompany images.

Arthur W. Frank writes that "the body is not mute, but it is inarticulate" (27), and this project would study how these advertising images place narratives onto bodies. Those bodies, then, work to promote the message of the charity, which may or may not align with the body from which the personal narrative emerged. I hope to use this line of inquiry to seek the ways in which the "impulse" of illness narratives has crossed into advertisements, in particular those featured alongside the efforts of the Susan G. Komen foundation. By displaying several instances of brief personal statements and accompanying images, all found on the Susan G. Komen foundation webpage, I would argue that the body, the signifier of the illness, is kept visually separate from the message. Continuing to structure my research based on Susan Wendell's argument that there are multiple "political and philosophical issues" (*Toward* 116) that come into play when establishing a cultural "other," this project would look to challenge ethically further the representation of personal experience in these advertisements. In large, I hope to convey the embodiedness of these advertisements through my future research by examining how the juxtaposition of personal narrative "blurbs" work to establish "poster images" which may or may not accurately represent those with breast cancer.

As the public continues to work towards an understanding of the causes of cancer and the best ways to treat the disease, there is a neglected dimension both inside and outside of scholarship concerning the personal ethics of breast cancer and its narratives; as the pervasive dangers of breast cancer are publicized, what are the implications for the diagnosed? Must they now live a public battle because they contracted a specific disease? In pointing to the ways that *The Cancer Journals* and *Cancer Vixen* detail personal trauma and public calls to action, I hope this thesis will help open the door to answering these ethical questions.

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