



The Summer of Her Baldness: A Cancer Improvisation (Constructs Series)

Catherine Lord

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"No eyebrows. No eyelashes. When it rains the water will run straight down into my eyes," Catherine Lord wrote before her hair fell out during chemotherapy. Propelled into an involuntary performance piece occasioned by the diagnosis of breast cancer, Lord adopted the online persona of Her Baldness—an irascible, witty, polemical presence who speaks candidly about shame and fear to her listserv audience. While Lord suffers from unwanted isolation and loss of control as her treatment progresses, Her Baldness talks back to the society that stigmatizes bald women, not to mention middle-aged lesbians with a life-threatening disease.

In this irreverent and moving memoir, Lord draws on the e-mail correspondence of Her Baldness to offer an unconventional look at life with breast cancer and the societal space occupied by the seriously ill. She photographs herself and the rooms in which she negotiates her disease. She details the clash of personalities in support groups, her ambivalence about Western medicine, her struggles to maintain her relationship with her partner, and her bemusement when she is mistaken for a "sir." She uses these experiences—common to the one-in-eight women who will be diagnosed at some point with breast cancer—to illuminate larger issues of gender signifiers, sexuality, and the construction of community.

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