



## **A Tribute to bell hooks**

### **Black feminist scholar, activist, writer, critic, teacher and radical cultural theorist**

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LIRIC Journal Editorial Board

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Born Gloria Jean Watkins in 1952, she took as a pen name her maternal great grandmother's name bell hooks and refused to capitalize it.

When she died in December 2021, we mourned her life and her writing. These are extracts from some of her forty books:

On asking for and being given a diary:

Confessional writing in diaries was acceptable in our family because it was writing that was never meant to be read by anyone. Keeping a daily diary did not mean that I was seriously called to write, that I would ever write for a reading public. This was 'safe' writing. It would—or so my parents thought—naturally be forsaken as one grew into womanhood. I shared with them this assumption... I could be angry there with no threat of punishment. I could talk back. Nothing had to be concealed. I could hold on to myself there. The realm of diary keeping has been a female experience that has often kept us closeted writers, away from the act of writing as authorship, it has most assuredly been writing that intimately connects the art of expressing one's feeling on the written page with the construction of self and identity, with the effort to be self actualised. (1999, pp. 4–5)

Only I see, feel and know how my mind and spirit are carried away. Only I know how the writing process alchemically alters me, leaving me transformed.

One of the advantages that writing has over speech—and why writing provides a rich site for resonant voice or presence—is that writing has always served as a crucial place for trying out parts of the self or unconscious that had been hidden or neglected or undeveloped—to experiment and try out new subject positions. (1999, p. xvi)

In 2015 I [Poonam ] taught the Cultures of Race and Racism module to final-year undergraduate sociology students at the University of Surrey. As we were nearing the end of the 12-week module, a student informed me that my teaching style reminded her of something bell hooks had once said:

*I entered the classroom with the conviction that it was crucial for me and every other student to be an active participant, not a passive consumer...education as the practice of freedom...education that connects the will to know with the will to become. Learning is a place where paradise can be created.*

Admittedly I knew nothing about this quote until the student shared it with me, for which I remain grateful. Equally, I felt humbled that my teaching methods had inspired my student to take a more active role in her learning, to have the courage to ask questions and never to be afraid to speak up—even if it meant having difficult conversations. And of course, it was a profound reminder to me how important the life and works of bell hooks has always been and to not forget her passion for seeing educational institutions as spaces capable of radical change—if we do it right. Since the student shared the quote with me, I always begin each new module with this very quote by bell hooks and ask the students to think very carefully whether they are active participants in their learning or passive consumers—a question that I believe we must continually ask ourselves, too. Thank you bell hooks for the many lessons and particularly for reminding me that I'll always be a learner.

## References

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- hooks, b. (1999). *Remembered rapture – the writer at work*. The Women's Press.
- APA citation: Wright, J., & Madar, P. (2022). A tribute to bell hooks. *LIRIC Journal*, 2(2), 1-2.