



## Wounds of Passion: A Writing Life

*bell hooks*

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## Wounds of Passion: A Writing Life bell hooks

"Wounds of Passion" is a memoir about writing, love, and sexuality. With her customary boldness and insight, bell hooks critically reflects on the impact of birth control and the women's movement on our lives. She explores the way her sexuality is influenced by her radical political consciousness. Resisting the notion that love and writing don't mix, she begins a fifteen-year relationship with a gifted poet and scholar, who inspires and encourages her. Writing the acclaimed book "Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism" at the age of nineteen, she begins to emerge as a brilliant social critic and public intellectual. "Wounds of Passion" describes a woman's struggle to devote herself to writing, sharing the difficulties, the triumphs, the pleasure, and the danger. Eloquent and powerful, this book lets us see the ways one woman writer works to find her voice while creating a love relationship based on feminist thinking. With courage and wisdom she reveals intimate details and provocative ideas, offering an illuminating vision of a writer's life.

## Wounds of Passion: A Writing Life Details

Date : Published October 1st 1997 by Henry Holt & Company (first published 1997)

ISBN : 9780805041460

Author : bell hooks

Format : Hardcover 260 pages

Genre : Feminism, Language, Writing, Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Race, Social Movements, Social Justice

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# From Reader Review *Wounds of Passion: A Writing Life* for online ebook

## Gina says

Favorite quotes:

"Living in a world of racial apartheid where custom and conventions invented to separate black and white lasted long past an end to legal racial discrimination, those who are powerless--black folks--must be overly aware of small details as we go about our lives to be sure we do not enter forbidden territory--to be sure we will not be hurt. You learn to notice things. You learn where not to walk, the stores you don't want to go in, the white people you should not look directly in the face. And you learn to turn away from your own pain and memory and even though you have turned away the memory of past injustice lingers--comes into the present and you cannot live the way other people live." -97

"Writing is my passion. Words are the way to know ecstasy. Without them life is barre. The poet insists Language is a body of suffering and when you take a language you take up the suffering too. All my life I have been suffering for words. Words have been the source of the pain and the way to heal." -208

"Pain is the price we pay to speak the truth. Language is a body of suffering and when you take up language you take up the suffering too." -208

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## Ryan says

For a good part of *Wounds of Passion*, I was frustrated by hooks' decisions, which I worried would bring her harm. At times, they did. I was also frustrated by how passive she was, though hooks maintains that she was always in control, even when she listens to a tape recording of herself sounding like a small child. bell prides herself on her insight into the hearts of those around her, even though she does not see that she has entered into a relationship with a man that strongly recalls her father.

Unfortunately, as readers and often as friends, we are powerless to do anything more than disapprove, which is what made reading a memoir that attempts to outline a new model for relationships difficult. For the most part, *Wounds of Passion* does not seem to offer an alternative worth following.

So why did I continue reading?

Well, Dr. Maya Angelou's quote on the back reads "I love this book. Each offering from bell hooks is a major event, as she has so much to give us." That's authority. Yes, it can be irritating to read about the explorations and recommendations of an overly confident 19 year old, but as Paul McCartney once said "who's sensitive at that age? Certainly I wasn't." Good point. Finally, my wife read *Wounds of Passion* when she was studying African American literature in college and remembers it fondly. (I actually read my wife's copy, underlined passages and all).

So I resolved to be patient, and I know the exact point in *Wounds of Passion* when I started to root for her. bell hooks is in a restaurant with Mack and one of his ex-girlfriends, who has invited them out. The ex is

flirting with Mack and ignoring bell. Suddenly, the ex looks at hooks and says that "she can't stand those black people who go on and on talking about being black." hooks knows an insult when she hears one, and her response is priceless:

I tell her loudly so everyone can hear *Look, bitch, I don't play this shit. Don't invite me out to dinner to insult me. I will slap you across that room.* And just as I am raising my hand to do just that she storms out.

Wow. I would never respond to an insult with such confidence. Who yells in a restaurant? I was so impressed that I actually went into the next room to read this scene to my wife.

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### **Monica says**

This was the first book by Bell Hooks that I have read, but I am immediately going to Amazon to find other books by her. This memoir centers on Hooks' life as a writer and how her life shaped her politics. It goes into her childhood struggles, how she tries to carve a place for herself as a writer while struggling to have a romantic relationship with a man. Hooks' work is studded with women's studies, feminist theory, racial theory, and literary reference.

The first two thirds of the book are absolutely amazing, however, it starts to unravel a bit at the end. Hooks' adds stories that don't fit with the flow of the rest of the book, and because her life is not over, it comes to an inconclusive end.

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### **Aubrey says**

*"If you want to read books that focus on black women, you better start writing and keep writing."*

4.5/5

Reading this book is akin to pulling a tooth that needs to be out, and as someone who's had that done eight times, I know a thing about necessary discomfort and healthful dispossession. The purging quality of the writing is tangible, and I can well imagine hooks' sigh of relief once the last edit had been sponged off and the publisher had finally acquiesced to the finished product. Inevitably, this will lead to complaints about "anger" from the usual sort, but considering no one pulls this shit when slurs and threats of genocide are spewed across the table (freedom of speech for the Powers That Be always trump the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness of the Powers That Be Not, don'tcha know), they're full of it. If your definition of anger consists not of deprivation of humanity but of the pointing to truth, your instinct to defend yourself does not make you in the right. It just means you're fragile, sinking your teeth in the last vestiges of your power and dreading, above all the humanity of those you're threatening, to let go.

*[W]hen those girls would talk about the strong free black matriarchs I just saw them longing*

*for a world where they would not have to do anything, or give anything to the struggle to liberate black women.*

*It's always funny for me to imagine what this would look like or even feel like if it was peopled mainly by white men. It's a scary thought. On many levels white men remain a mystery to me.*

The top review of this is a patronizing take on all of hooks' actions, which makes me glad the average rating is as high as it is cause seriously, what the fuck? The amount of shit she went through from childhood on, her admirably ravenous escapade through the written word at a young age, working and thinking and living at Stanford of all places, finally making her way out of the morass of patriarchal academic entitlement and into her rightful writing place, and one person's response to it all is to shake their head, make a flatulent attempt to empathize (unless you've lived the black woman's coming of age in the USA, you have no idea what it's like), and then close off by being entertained at an Angry Black Woman? Good fucking lord bro, if you are indeed a bro. If that's how you're going to respond, stay in White People Land, please. You've done enough damage as is.

*I sit at my desk dreaming of ways to blow up the building and they think I could rise in the company.*

*She can't even see that he supported her writing so much because he never believed anyone other than him would take it seriously.*

While this is a memoir, this is also theory of sorts, as hooks came of age when the theory she needed was scant to the point of ironic nonexistence, ironic due to her simultaneously bumping hips with Lorde and Olsen and Rich and other names populating my more academically inclined shelves. You'd think the last two would have helped with intersectional business on some level, but naaaah. I found it interesting that hooks found white lesbians standing in solidarity with her, considering all that I've heard about queer white people subconsciously feeling ripped off by the fact that their whiteness has been compromised to the point of throwing them in with nonwhite people (Stanton or Anthony, anyone?), but I suppose some people were working hard to unpick their racial privilege even back then. It'd give me hope for the future, but I'll have to save that determination for when I've entered grad school myself.

*How could I have thought that I could speak truth to power and not be punished.*

Some books are candy, some books are watercolors, and some books are as bloody as someone who beats themselves against the status quo in the honest effort of becoming a good person. Some are hit back harder by society because, let's face it, the status quo calls for a certain measure of physical characteristics of the straightened and bleached variety, and there's just no helping what the genetic whirlpool's dished out sometimes. Judging the rating by average and number, there's thankfully enough people who have been helped by this book to tide over the obnoxious travesty that is the top review, but it doesn't help. I just hope the work's future is full of those who have no fragility complexes getting in the way of their emotional resonance, self-critiquing dialectic, or both.

*[T]here is no world where just gender matters.*

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## **Catherine says**

I had an admittedly mixed reaction to this book and it took me awhile to finish it. bell hooks is a thinker who I admire tremendously and whose writings had a big influence on me when I was writing my Master's thesis. I didn't always enjoy the poetic, repetitive and nonlinear style of her writing for this particular book, though I recognize the technique and appreciate the skill it takes to be good at it. That said, this is an unbelievably brave book about bell hooks becoming bell hooks and worth reading on that account alone.

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## **Jo says**

A rare, five star book. Written with so much heart. An examination of the multitude of selves we are in the world and being into relationships some encased by the author others are her observations of her friends and family. Also I love how she emphasizes this is her non-linear, perhaps not entirely non-fictional, autobiography so it is entirely her perspectives and observations. Brilliant.

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## **Angel says**

bell hooks' Wounds of Passion: A Writing Life explores how Gloria Watkins (aka bell hooks, famous feminist theorist) came to find her own voice as a writer. Following her from her humble beginnings as a Black girl growing up in the rural poor South to a prominent feminist theorist who still grappled with male domination in an abusive relationship, hooks lays out her past and her raw emotions truthfully. This emotional, and often heart-wrenching journey that made hooks' the writer she is today is both compelling and inspirational.

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## **J.C. says**

This is one of my required texts for my memoir writing class, and the first one to make me say, "oh! ok, so this is what a real memoir looks like". It is very well written, and is about several things. It's about the struggle between creation and passion, the physical and the emotional, the lines between ownership and freedom in relationships. Hooks wants an open relationship, but like any relationship of that kind, it comes with a certain amount of consequences. But Hooks carries them with her, wrapped on her sleeve with her heart. She lives with passion and courage and fights for what she believes in, even if a whole room full of people disagree with her. I can definitely see this as an empowering book, and it accomplishes that quite well.

I wish she had focused more on her writing, but i think this book provides a fantastic background into who she is as a writer. Which is fine, as i am clearly not a black female, so there's clearly a distance, yet i felt like Hooks provided this picture of her life that I could understand, a glimpse in her shoes. Which i think is the ultimate goal of a memoir.

I plan on reading more of Hooks work in the future, i feel like this book is merely a piece to a larger puzzle, sorta speak.

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### **Julene says**

A good memoir about how she came to writing. When she spoke in Seattle she discussed how difficult it was to get this book published because it was considered experiential at the time and the people who publish didn't want to take a risk! belle is an academic writer, but this book reflects her personal journey. She talks about her early relationship with a writer and their breakup and how it affected her writing, unusual for a black woman to reveal so much personal info. This book is a bold book that is deep and moving. I know it has been popular and am glad she proved the publishers wrong. It is a book I plan to read again and have many post it notes though out.

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### **Kony says**

Like Bone Black, here's an impressionistic collage of remembered moments that speak to and for my heart. bell hooks brings subjective truth, sets it to the music of well chosen words and simple sentences.

As with Bone Black, my connection to bell hooks and her writing comes from a deeply personal place, I think. But maybe it's just that her truths transcend social boundaries and would touch chords in any open heart/mind.

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### **Wei-Wei says**

This was my first full length bell hooks book and it was refreshing. I felt quiet and contemplative every time I picked it up, feeling lucky enough to be privy to such a rich and reflective inner life. There are secrets here, and yes, much passion. There is pain and memory and lessons learned and I am grateful to have learned so much from this short novel. She writes with poeticism and ache which transcend the pages. Thank you bell hooks, for offering so much of yourself to us readers so that we may understand another perspective, an important one. Your themes and repetition of not placing blame, intersectional feminism, finding independence, reflecting on the past and more were needed.

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### **Sadie says**

This is a must read. Beautiful and moving, bell hooks takes the reader insider her personal struggle for growth and love. I was surprised to find deep religious and spiritual insights woven throughout, it can be very raw. Some readers may be put off at times by her blatant racial and sexual conclusions. But she paints a vivid picture of what it was like to be an outspoken Black feminist from the South during the civil rights era.

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### **Seth Johnson says**

I was not planning to read this book. I was looking for "Belonging", but Powell's didn't have it so I luckily selected "Wounds of Passion".

bell hooks ripped herself open and bled this memoir. It was beautiful, and heart-breaking, and thought-provoking. Her writing is a gift, and as relevant today as 20 years ago. I look forward to reading more of her repertoire.

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## **Robert says**

Wounds of Passion is aptly titled. It is a book about injuries to a self that passionately wants to bear witness to its painful truths, which is to say: born on the other side of the tracks in Kentucky, witness to the rage of a father who thought his wife betrayed him, black in a country where the white elites had become post-racial feminists (aren't you over that black thing yet?), wanting to be an academic rather than an a literary writer, not wanting to be drawn to a cold, brilliant, sexy man who could not manage the intricacies of the openness to which he had pledged himself (for me, not for you), and not wanting her religious/poetic sentiment to be confined within the institutions of social faith, as opposed to transcendent faith.

This is a subjective memoir, one-sided as all memoirs are, yet self-critical and fair. hooks's insights into male/female dominance dances are powerful; her representation of what it feels like to be black in America is compelling. The narrowness of her social awareness is something that is both forced on her and born within her, because she is not very social except when she is intimate...and there the wounds and passions are deep. hooks explicitly acknowledges that she is not a person who believes in footnotes; she is a person who believes in what she experiences and how she experiences it.

The subjective is incontrovertible, although we all know it is a kind of prison. Few of us are so attentive to our perceptions, and so articulate, that we can put them on a page. Quite often we therefore ignore or gloss over our own sentence. Not hooks. She convincingly makes the case that she did, in fact, live by a creed of honesty in the first three decades of her life. She doesn't claim to be a saint or perfect, but she does assert a willingness to think through the consequences of how we are, as opposed to how it would be convenient to be, or how we ought to be.

Most of the writing here is strong and vivid. Some of it is overdrawn and perfervid, and not in a good sense.

It always has seemed to me that race, as in racism, is the greatest unresolved American theme (in part because Americans have no chance of ever resolving their historical relations to the original peoples of these lands.) hooks is no racist, but she is deservedly tough on whites. So a white reader will have to endure many unhappy paragraphs in this book.

Curiously, hooks seems, however, to pose race as the dominant problem in her life while focusing more intensely on sexuality and female/male relations, illustrated through her deep analysis of a 10-year involvement with a black male named Mack (probably not his real name, as bell hooks is not bell hooks's real name.)

The issue she focuses on is whether a man and a woman can divvy up elements of their relationship in such a way as to permit each to thrive in equal, if differentiated, measure. With Mack, that proves impossible. But as a literary writer, hooks isn't postulating that the same would be true with any man. She's specific, fascinatingly so. She gives him a lot of credit for supporting her, putting up with her, loving and desiring her,



until she begins to exceed him: her book is published first, she's the one offered a job at Yale.

As a counterpoint to the Mack/hooks's relationship, she offers a wonderful portrait of the relationship between the poet Robert Duncan and his male partner/lover Jess. Duncan was famous and a little bit (or a lot) flagrant in different ways. Jess was not so famous but held his private ground just fine. hooks adored Jess. Duncan seems to have adored Mack. But Duncan and Jess had an equipoise that escaped Mack and hooks.

This book was published in 1997. I pulled it out of a throwaway pile because, as I've said, black and white issues are at the moral center of the American experience. These last 8 years we have had Barack Obama as the American president. When I was a boy, a black president would have been unimaginable. Maybe that is why the Trump revolt is unfolding today--a desire to put America back in the 50s. Sorry, the 2050s are coming, the 1950s are gone.

A final point: throughout the book, hooks takes on the issue of whether human beings of one social category or another can fully understand the experience of human beings of another social category. I think she proves that is roughly possible. A black reader will not read this book exactly as a white reader will read it, but there's a bit of transcendent commonality in both the wounds and the passions. As Flannery O'Connor said, everything that rises must converge.

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### **Aunnalea says**

"This is what it means to be among the colonizers, you do not have to listen to what the colonized say, especially if their ideas come from experience and not from books." p.98

"I was awed by my innocence. How could I have thought that I could speak truth to power and not be punished." p. 134

"She didn't expect everybody to be like her, to want to face things up-front. She understood their differences. Mostly though she was too understanding." p. 185

"That's the point, not that everything in a marriage or partnership be equal but that each person has the right, the power, and the freedom to choose." p.240

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### **Marni Fantyn says**

bell hooks is an inspiration. I've never read any of her other books but I'm inspired to read and learn more about this courageous woman. As an aspiring writer I couldn't have picked a better book to read about the

struggles and tribulations of finding voice in the midst of all the silence. Her dedication to telling the truth, even at times where it could potentially create so much hurt, is not only admirable but beautiful. I look forward to growing and learning more about my own voice using this book as a guiding path through my own choices in my life as a writer and as a lover.

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### **Aubrey Hales-Lewis says**

bell hooks...where have you been all of my life. It has been a long time since I have read a book at exactly the right time and place in my life.

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### **tamarack says**

this book blew me away. i never imagined an autobiography could be so beautiful and poetic. this non-chronological story tells of hooks' life as a writer and lover. she speaks of being a black feminist writer surrounded by deaf white ears, and of a creative spirit punished by patriarchal culture. hooks tells of growing up in kentucky, traumatic loss of love between her parents, her love of her grandmother's house and idealised marriage of 70+ years. moving back and forth between the world of her childhood and her adult life in california where she lives as a student discovering a new world of un-segregated race relations, this book brings together two worlds of experience. i've never read anything like bell hooks - in this book she is the definitive voice on love and writing.

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### **Katherine says**

hooks' emotional fluctuations and unpleasant family relations are difficult for some people to get through when reading this book. However, if you ever have the opportunity and self-discipline to finish *Wounds of Passion*, hooks' gives great insight into the modern movement for the use of birth control and women's rights. Throughout the memoir hooks' uses two voices to tell her story: one is in third person, looking back at the her past and the other narrative explains the events as they are happening. hooks' explains many stereotypes that exist in the south, such as problems with domestic violence, race issues, discrepancies with social class, and the exploration of her sexuality, all of which bring together an empowering novel that works to not necessarily find solutions to these issues, but I believe hooks' wants the reader to acknowledge the homogenous patriarchy that continues to exist in America today. It is an impassioned and truthful read into the mind of a black writer living in the South.

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### **Chezzie says**

Review in progress: It's idiotic to write disdainfully of the decisions or thought processes hooks goes through in this book. She's writing of a period of growth in her life. Of course some of it is going to be "harmful". But she explains her motives behind such decisions in much detail - it's the point of the book, after all.

I also disagree with the reviewer who said the last third of the book wasn't so hot. It's the part I enjoyed the most. Rather, I think at first it was a little hard for me to get into the book. But once I was, phew!

I have never read such a descriptive, whole, well-written work about a relationship.

I don't even know how more to praise this book I'm so floored. I couldn't go to bed, I had to finish reading.

The only criticism I have currently is that she repeats information quite a bit, and that is tiresome. But not even something that makes me want to lower my rating.

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