

Fragmented Selves, Collective Voices: Black Feminist Life Writing in Audre Lorde and Toi Derricotte

The tradition of Black women's diary writing in the United States, though noted by Patricia Bell-Scott in 1995, remains relatively underexplored. Within this tradition, Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* (1980) and Toi Derricotte's *The Black Notebooks: An Interior Journey* (1997) stand out for their formal experimentation and undeniable political force. This paper argues that these works function as *political diaries*—texts that strategically mobilise the diary form within hybrid autobiographical frameworks to articulate forms of subjectivity grounded in Black feminist thought. Through deliberate fragmentation, genre-blending, and shifting temporal perspectives, both texts establish a dynamic, continuous relation between personal crisis and broader political reflection. Rather than functioning as private, insular, or merely documentary records, these writings actively position the diary as an essential, public-facing space for self-definition, critical reflection, and collective address.

Bringing *The Cancer Journals* and *The Black Notebooks* into dialogue, the paper explores how their formal strategies enable a conception of the self as fluid, relational, and multiple. At the same time, they insist on the vital political necessity of identity and self-definition in the face of systemic violence, marginalisation, and historical invisibility. By bridging the intimate scale of the daily journal entry with the public scope of the memoir, Lorde and Derricotte transform the private archive into a public tool for survival and solidarity. In doing so, this paper positions these works as key interventions within the broader landscape of Black women's writing, demonstrating how the political diary and hybrid life writing forms operate as crucial sites of political and epistemological resistance.

About the Author

Gabriela Koestinger is a PhD researcher in Critical Theory and Cultural Studies at the University of Nottingham (UK). Her research focuses on literary diaries by women in the U.S., examining how diary writing challenges dominant assumptions about genre, politics, and self-representation. She holds a BA from the National Autonomous University of Mexico and an MA from the University of Sussex, where her work centred on the diary as a literary genre and rhizomatic form, and the journals of Sylvia Plath. She has published scholarly essays on diary and life-writing theory and recently presented related work at the IABA Europe Conference.

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