



Bernadine Evaristo

Bernardine Anne Mobolaji Evaristo OBE was born 28 May 1959 and is a British author and academic. An author of nine books and numerous other works that span the genres of verse fiction, short fiction, poetry, essays, literary criticism, journalism along with radio and theatre drama. Her writing and projects are based around her interest in the African diaspora. **Evaristo**'s eighth book, the novel, **Girl, Woman Other** won the Booker prize in 2019, making her the first black woman and black British woman to win in the fifty years of the competition's history. The novel won many other auspicious prizes and was a #1 Sunday Times bestseller for 5 weeks, spending 44 weeks in the top 10.

Her tenth book, **Feminism**, is part of **Tate Britain's** "Look Again" series, in which she offers a personal perspective on the art of British women of colour.

Evaristo is a long-standing advocate for the inclusion of writers and artists of colour. Among many of her many successful projects is the Brunel International Poetry Prize and she also initiated **The Complete Works Poetry Mentoring Scheme**. In 1982 **Evaristo** co-founded the **Theatre of Black Women** and organised Britain's first major black theatre conference, **Future Histories**.

She is professor of Creative Writing at Brunel University, London and is one of fewer than 30 black female professors in the UK.

Evaristo was vice-chair of the **Royal Society of Literature** until 2020 when she became a lifetime Vice President. She was appointed a member of the Order of British Empire (MBE) in 2009 and an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2020. Both honours were for her services to literature.

Evaristo was born in Eltham, South East London and raised in Woolwich.



The fourth of eight children born to a mother of English, Irish and Germany heritage, who was a school teacher and a Nigerian father.

Her father migrated to Britain in 1949, becoming a welder and then the first black councillor in Greenwich for the Labour Party.

“My father was unprepared for the widespread racism of 1950s England. He had thought he'd be welcomed with open arms as a Son of the Empire.

Instead, the opposite happened. As a black man he was despised, feared, and bore the brunt of centuries' worth of racist indoctrination about the inferior genetic make-up and cultural defects of Africans.”

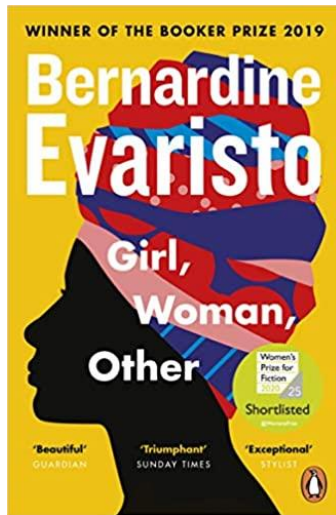
“Other than the rice stew he cooked on a Sunday; he didn’t pass on his culture to his children; nothing that might have given us a sense of the part of us that everyone else saw. He wanted us to assimilate and have a British identity. But as a mixed-race child living in a white neighbourhood in Woolwich, southeast London, I saw nothing around me in the streets, in magazines or on television that represented who I was. We ate British food and absorbed British cultural values, yet we stood out because we looked different.”

Her debut novel, *Lara*, was a powerful semi-autobiographical novel-in-verse based on her own childhood and family history.

Evaristo was educated at Eltham Hill Grammar School for Girls and later at Goldsmiths College, University of London where she received her doctorate in writing in 2013. In 2019 she was appointed Woolwich Laureate returning to writing about the home town that she left at 18.

In the early 80's she identified as a lesbian, going on lesbian feminist marches. **Evaristo** later said she found the feminist movement 'quite exclusionary' as it 'didn't really accommodate black women.'

She met and married author David Shannon in 2006.



“Be a person with knowledge not just opinions”
Bernardine Evaristo, Girl, Woman, Other

“Gender is one of the biggest lies of our civilization”
— Bernardine Evaristo, Girl, Woman, Other

“We should celebrate that many more women are reconfiguring feminism and that grassroots activism is spreading like wildfire and millions of women are waking up to the possibility of taking ownership of our world as fully-entitled human beings. How can we argue with that?”

— Bernardine Evaristo, Girl, Woman, Other

Review

September 29 | October 6, 2019 | Page 57

'What
a time to
be a
(black)
(British)
(womxn)
writer'

—
Booker winner
Bernardine Evaristo on a
revolutionary moment

