

CONFESSIONAL POETRY

As its name implies, confessional poetry features the use of private—even shocking—**autobiographical** material. Early confessional poets wrote openly about mental illness, infidelity, dysfunctional families, and alcoholism, ushering in an age of personal revelation. Critics of the movement claim that the confessional style is mere “gut-spilling,” resulting in rants that result only in sensational personal drama, with relatively little aesthetic pay-off. Proponents credit the confessional mode for opening the range of acceptable subject matter in poetry to include not only previously taboo subject matter, but subjects that are particularly helpful in expanding the influence of **the female voice** in a previously male-dominated field. It’s important to remember that even poems based on autobiography employ artifice. Most poets adopt and cultivate a **persona** in their poems. And, just like every artist, the poet’s allegiance is never to mere “facts,” but always, to some extent, about the boundaries of language and culture.

Primary Practitioners: Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Sharon Olds, Anne Sexton, Kim Addonizio, W. D. Snodgrass.

Geographical Locale: Settings for confessional poems tend toward the urban and suburban, with the plight of “domestic life,” being a rich subject.

Years of Prominence: Primarily 1950’s – 1970’s. Although the baby-boomer feminist’s rallying cry “the personal is political” gave this movement its initial momentum, the influence of the confessional school can be widely witnessed throughout contemporary American verse, in the writing of both male and female poets.

For Further Study:

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/brief-guide-confessional-poetry>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confessional_poetry

<http://copof10.umwblogs.org/multimedia-rpt-list/confessional-poetry/>