

Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem
Bölcsészettudományi Kar
Irodalomtudományi Iskola
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**An Analysis of the Concepts of Confession and Autobiography in the Works of Sylvia
Plath**

(Vallomás és önéletrajziség – fogalmanalízis Sylvia Plath művei alapján)

Abstract

Budapest, 2008

In my dissertation, I analysed the concepts of confession and autobiography in Sylvia Plath's works. In the first chapter, I gave a short summary of the history of autobiography and presented the most dominant approaches of the past three decades. After, I examined Sylvia Plath's *Journals*, *The Bell Jar*, her autobiographical novel, and the poems of the volume *Ariel*. My main goal was to reveal how a (female) subject wants and can talk about the "self" (cf. Foucault's term "the technologies of the self") when different expectations connecting to different genres (journal, novel and poems) appear both from the reader and the subject's sides. In my work, this talk about the self is closely connected to the examination of the possible meanings of the term "confessional".

Reading Sylvia Plath's *Journals*, I tried to reveal the differences between the genre of journal and autobiography. I proved that a strong presence of a subject constructed in the text and the way the different narratives work do not only make it possible to read Plath's *Journals* as an autobiography, but also point towards the structure of a Künstlerroman.

In *The Bell Jar*, I examined how the fictionalising acts (cf. Iser) can be revealed in the novel, and, comparing the text to that of Elisabeth Wurtzel's *The Prozac Nation*, I tried to find the borderline between the genre of autobiographical novel and memoir. Furthermore, I examined how the opposition/difference between the subject and the object (that is, the writer and her character) is abolished at some points of the novel, and how it points forward to the representation of the subject in the postmodern autobiographical novels. As for the concept of the confessional of *The Bell Jar*, I examined the possibilities of the representation of a subject suffering from a mental crisis.

In the last chapter of my dissertation, I investigated Plath's late, so-called *Ariel*-poems as pieces of the *confessional school*. I examined the apostrophic mode of the poems, which is an essential characteristic of the poems belonging to the representatives of the school mentioned above. I showed that Plath, constantly addressing a *lack* of a person, constructed a kind of Orphic poetry in her late poems, though in a negative way; the confessional mode of these works shows itself exactly through this speaking to the lack. I also examined how the genre of dramatic monologue and Plath's masks served the complementation of Plath's Orphic poetry and how it is connected to the apostrophic mode of the poems.

The results of my examination can be summarized as follows: while the subject of Plath's journals, as a consequence of the narratives it is subjected to, can be easily identified and depicted, it becomes problematic at some points in *The Bell Jar*. The poems already show a plastic and heterogeneous construction of a subject. The representation of the self and its manifestations in the language is most distorted in the genres which are subjected to the

working of narratives to a great extent and which are usually considered to be the places of “truth” and “real self”. The lyric genres are able to restrict the dominance of the narratives and allow a deeper look into the characteristics of a speaking subject and his or her language.