



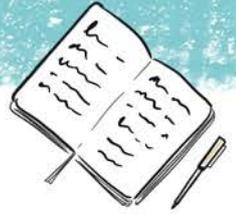
Autofiction

By Sharon Boothroyd & Rebecca Fortnum

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Materials:



What is Autofiction?

Autofiction is a blend of autobiographical writing and fiction and anything in between. Writers such as Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath and Chris Kraus have drawn on autofiction in their work. Autofiction might adopt a 'stream of consciousness' style or be an outrageous version of your own life, or a thinly disguised account of it! From a feminist point of view, autofiction can be inhabited by women to 'regain power over their lives' through text.



Historical context

In the archives of Bethlem Hospital we can find the records of twenty-five year old Elizabeth Dore who suffered from 'various hallucinations' after giving birth in 1895, but later recovered. In Charlotte Perkins-Gilman's novella *The Yellow Wallpaper* from 1892, the mother of a small baby is overcome by powerful delusions after a forced habitation of a strange room.

In the 1950s the poet Sylvia Plath felt the pressures of society's expectations, particularly when she became a mother, but she was a brilliant observer of the world around her both in her diaries and poems.



Exercises

1 Reimagining

Write for **20 minutes** from the perspective of one of the women in the pictures either from the Bethlem archives or the 1950s mother. Imagine what might be running through your mind. How do you feel about the scenario you find yourself in?

2 Mindfulness

Close your eyes and remember a recent scene. It may have been the way the morning sun fell on the washing up or the little sock that didn't make it to the washing machine. Anything at all, notice it. Write for **20 minutes** describing that moment and how it made you feel.

Sharing

Come together if in a group and, if you feel comfortable, read your writings aloud and discuss the various issues they raise, or share online using: [#maternaljournal](https://twitter.com/maternaljrnl)

