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**CONSTRUCTING A WOMAN: GENDER, GENRE, AND SUBJECTIVITY  
IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WORKS OF SIBILLA ALERAMO**

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of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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## ABSTRACT

Both Sibilla Aleramo (1876-1960), one of Italy's most renowned and controversial women writers, and autobiography, as a generic minefield for debates on theories of the subject, have received a good deal of critical attention over the past fifteen years. The uncompromisingly autobiographical nature of Sibilla's work has been, at various times, revered and reviled, be it for what she says, or how she says it. My focus is precisely on the different forms she uses to write her self in four texts - a fictional autobiography, lyrical novel, epistolary novel and a diary - and how these construct, modify and deconstruct her self-representations in a continual process of intertextual reading and revising. Yet her texts resist easy classification. While sometimes confirming boundaries of genre and gender, they also constantly call them into question by exposing their limits, their intersection with fictional norms, and their shifting discursive affiliations.

Because Sibilla was all her life concerned with gender, and the relationship of femininity to her writing, many aspects of her work appear relevant today. I explore how they anticipate feminist theories on the construction of female subjectivity in a combination of theory and autobiographical practice which highlights the interrelationship of the two. Here Sibilla's focus on the maternal is particularly indicative of this tendency, where it is woven into the generic structures of her texts as well as being an important focus of the autobiographical "story". Furthermore, her texts challenge the notion of self defined by male bias, and present opportunities for critical testing of autobiographical theories themselves by offering not one, but several, works for examination.

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